

Independent Panel on Members' Pay and Allowances

IRP – 09

Response from McGuinness Dr, Patrick

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From: Patrick McGuinness

Sent: 06 December 2008

To: Reading, Chris

Subject: Consultation

Dear Panel,

I watched Dragon's Eye where Roger Jones invited viewers to send in their thoughts on AMs costs and expenses and value for money. So here are mine:

It seems to me that AMs are pretty good value, all told, and at a cost that is 5 times less than MPs, and with workloads that are more substantial, more substantially address Welsh issues, and generally work more for their money than their Westminster equivalents.

I hope the panel will see fit to compare MPs costs and expenses with those of AMs and when it reports back.

I am also concerned about the potential for party-political manipulation of the issue of regional AMs. This is obviously an issue liable to be manipulated by Labour, who are keen to dispense with them and generally to smear them (in newspaper letters and in off-the-cuff comments from MPs) as being 'unelected'. In my experience regional AMs have contributed greatly to Assembly work, to the institution's profile, and to the taking up causes that are important without necessarily translating into 'party' votes. Regional representation is also the norm in Europe, and it seems clear that we need to look beyond our own borders for a way out of the Tribalism that dogs Welsh politics.

I hope the panel will also refer to the Western Mail's useful grading of AMs prior to the last election. All of those who had shockingly low marks (3 out of 10 was one memorable instance) were those in safe first past the post seats. It appears the Assembly is being used by some parties as a parking-place for politicians of little talent and no vision. This does not mean however that the institution itself is at fault, merely the way that it is used by some parties.

I also think the Panel ought to consider the unacceptable case of AMs (mainly Tories) using the Assembly as a way of getting themselves into the London parliament. It does nothing whatsoever for our fledgling democracy when the conservatives (who made such play of opposing it) proceed to get themselves

elected as AMs only to then use their raised profile to launch Westminster careers. It shows contempt for the electorate and for the Assembly, which then becomes little more than a feeder-school for the more 'prestigious' career in London. It's cynical and disrespectful - if the parties don;t take the Assembly seriously enough to put up candidates who believe in staying there, they shouldn't be fielding those candidates.

I hope the Panel will take some of these opinions into account when it reports.

Yours,

Dr Patrick McGuinness