

Marie Goldman



MP for Chelmsford

POINTS OF VIEW

Bill to replace unfair voting system unlikely to see the light of day again

SOMETHING unexpected happened in the House of Commons last week – a Bill was endorsed by the House of Commons by accident. Let me tell you what I think happened.

First of all, this wasn't an ordinary Bill – it was something called a 'Ten Minute Rule Bill' or 10MRB for short. This is a type of Bill that allows any MP to make the case for introducing a Bill on a subject of their choosing by making a speech lasting up to ten minutes (hence the name).

An opposing speech may then be made before the House decides whether or not the Bill should be introduced.

If the House votes in favour, the Bill is said to have had its first reading and, in theory, it can progress to the next stage. In reality, it isn't quite as simple as that, but more on that later.

This 10MRB was introduced by my Lib Dem colleague, Sarah Olney, the MP for Richmond Park, and I'm very proud to be one of the Bill's ten co-sponsors.

And that's because it's a Bill to replace our antiquated and unfair First Past The Post (FPTP) voting system with a form of Proportional Representation (PR).

So, let's get a few things out of the way first. Yes, the UK had a referendum on a different type of voting system in 2011.

That was called Alternative Vote (AV) and the result decided against a change. But that was well over a decade ago and a lot has changed since then.

For a start, the Labour Party overwhelmingly endorsed PR in a vote at its conference in 2022. People are allowed to change their minds. After all, that's why we have elections.

Secondly, we've seen landslide elections where governments have gained huge majorities on small vote shares. As Sarah pointed out in her speech, "In the most recent General Election, the number of MPs elected to this Chamber with more than 50 per cent of the votes cast in their constituency was just 96".

She added: "Ten of our colleagues



From left, Malcolm Turner and his daughter Laura Turner, MP for Chelmsford Marie Goldman and Cllr Linda Mascot at Moulsham Lodge Community Trust's Breakfast with Santa

PHOTOS: MARIE GOLDMAN MP

Marie Goldman MP with Santa

in this Parliament were elected with fewer than 30 per cent of the vote".

Finally (and this has been the case for quite some time), other parts of the United Kingdom already use a form of PR called STV – Single Transferable Vote.

This is the system preferred by my party, the Liberal Democrats, and the system we are arguing for.

But if you think the House of Commons could never adopt a different

voting system then think again. Because it

already uses AV to elect the chairs of the Select Committees. (See here for more details: <https://www.parliament.uk/about/how/committees/select/election-of-hoc-select-committee-chairs/>.)

It seems the House has been caught up in a little game of 'do as I say, not as I do'.

But anyway – back to Sarah's 10MRB. The Conservatives decided to formally oppose the Bill, which meant that instead of the Bill progressing to second reading 'on the

nod' there was a vote on it. Now, usually when an opposing party forces a vote on something, it is for one of two reasons: a) you want to defeat it and you're pretty sure you have enough people on your side of the argument to win the vote; or b) you want to expose how people are thinking by forcing them to show their hand in a vote.

On this occasion, it seems that the Conservatives were genuinely opposing our Bill, but hadn't got their sums right.

At the same time, Labour seemed to have underestimated how many of their party would vote for the Bill. I also hear rumours that there may have been some confusion over whether Labour MPs were being whipped (i.e. told how to vote by their party) or given a free vote.

Regardless of the reason, the result took a lot of people by surprise. The Bill passed by 138 votes to 136!

So, at this point, the Bill is said to have had its first reading.

Sarah was asked to choose her preferred date for the Bill's second reading, for which she offered January 24.

But don't get too excited – there are 12 Private Member's Bills listed

for anuary 24 and Sarah's is the bottom of the list. In reality, there won't be enough time for it to be debated and it's unlikely ever to see the light of day again.

And so we're back on to one of my favourite topics: transparency, or rather the lack of transparency in how the Houses of Parliament conduct their proceedings.

I think it's incredibly misleading to everyone, including MPs, but especially to members of the public, to even remotely suggest that this might have a hope of going anywhere.

So much of what we do in Parliament seems to be clouded in archaic language and arcane procedures. I struggle to believe that is in anyone's best interests, let alone those of the country or my Chelmsford constituents.

That's why I'm keen to push for change through my role on the Modernisation Committee, which is looking at how we might be able to improve the standards, culture and working practices of the House of Commons.

The committee currently has a call for views out, which ANYONE (including you, dear reader) can

respond to by filling out the form on their website here: <https://committees.parliament.uk/call-for-evidence/3442>

But you're running out of time – there are just a few days left to get your views in by December 16. Please do let us know what you would like to see changed.

And finally, one of the best things about this time of year is taking part in festive community activities.

Recently, I joined the volunteer team at Moulsham Lodge Community Trust to help serve up their tenth annual 'Breakfast with Santa'.

This lovely event sees local families have a festive breakfast before visiting Santa is his temporary, custom-made grotto – all to raise money for this much-loved community centre.

It was really wonderful to see how excited the young children were as they waited their turn. Surely, that's one of the best things about this time of year – it certainly left a warm, fuzzy feeling with me.

Hope you've been able to keep wrapped up and safe from the high winds and rain we've seen recently.

Keep well.

Marie

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