

Submission to Constituency Commission
Custom House,
Dublin 2
6/01/2017

Re County Leitrim

A Rúnaí

You are most likely aware of major issues concerning the Sligo/Leitrim Constituency over the past 20 years. Probably the most controversial decision ever taken by a Constituency Commission was the decision to split County Leitrim in 2004 and the astonishing decision in 2007 to persist with that split. Not surprisingly, the disenfranchising of the smallest county in the Twenty-Six counties caused uproar.

In 2007, over 200 submissions were made calling for the unification of Leitrim in a single constituency but, in their wisdom, or entire lack of it, the Commission ignored these submissions.

In 2012, the Commission eventually saw sense and Leitrim was re-united

In the circumstances, I don't think you will need any advice on this matter, but any Constituency Commission has got to be aware; ***“don't even think of splitting Leitrim ever again”***.

Overall, the biggest issue once again is the decimation of counties and the desperate attempts to conform to a set of guidelines that are entirely outdated, unworkable and totally illogical.

The county system is one of the bulwarks of Irish society. If it wasn't there, we would be trying to invent to it. For Dáil Éireann to treat county loyalties so flippantly is disgraceful.

You must make recommendations to have this set-up changed. A constituency Commission must have more freedom to manoeuvre, and especially, to respect county boundaries. This is far more important than trying to have an equality in the ratio of TDs to constituents.

The division of big, populous counties into two, or multiple constituencies is unavoidable, as in the case of Dublin or Cork. Likewise, the combining of two counties is acceptable in order to get a population base equal to a number of seats. There are historic examples such as Sligo/Leitrim, Cavan/Monaghan, etc. However, it is totally unacceptable to carve a piece of another county in order to justify an arbitrary set of nonsensical guidelines. Why can there not be two or six seat

constituencies? Why has there to be an equality, or close to it, in the number of constituents per TD?

What is the problem if a Dublin constituency has only four TDs for a population of 160,000 people while a rural constituency has four TDs for 100,000? That urban population may be contained in an area three miles long by three miles wide. Compare that to the rural constituency that may be spread over an area seventy miles long by fifty miles broad. Think of the difficulty a TD will have in serving that size of an area. Remember too, that the rural TD needs to get far more votes to get elected, due to higher turnout and less candidates in the field. There is much more pressure in terms of area to cover, and more demands on a rural-based TD.

I would ask you to take the brave decision and ask the Oireachtas to undertake the constitutional amendments necessary in order to give future Constituency Commissions power to deal with any changes in a logical county-friendly manner.

This butchering of counties has to stop. Iarraim oraibh deireadh a chur leis agus gan leanúint leis an amadántacht atá ar siúl gach cúig bliana.

Is mise,

Seán Ó Súilleabháin