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25 November 2009

Dear Mr Perkins,

### **A Review of the Rules on Party Political and Referendum Broadcasts**

The Conservative Party wishes to make a submission to the Ofcom consultation.

#### ***Minority parties***

We are very concerned about the suggestion to give more broadcasting time to those other than designated major parties, as outlined in proposed new Rules 13 and 14. The consequence will be to give minority parties more broadcasts and greater prominence in peak-time scheduling.

We note that the ‘majority parties’ are currently Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrats, the SNP in Scotland, Plaid Cymru in Wales, and the DUP, SDLP, SF and UUP in Northern Ireland.

Hence, one of the main beneficiaries of such a move will be to give more airtime to the British National Party to peddle their propaganda. This proposed ‘all shall have prizes’ approach will give an unjustified platform to extremists who simply do not have substantial electoral support.

Minority parties already have some access to Party Political Broadcasts; we cannot see the case for further airtime. Minority parties are, by definition, those which do not have broad-based public backing.

The fact that some minority parties have a foothold due to the Labour Government’s use of proportional representation is not an argument for giving them even greater airtime. The use of proportional representation masks the reality that such minority parties do not have broad support.

For example, the BNP only have 59 councillors out of the 20,735 councillors across Great Britain – equivalent to 0.2 per cent. They only obtained 6.2 per cent of the vote in the 2009 European elections. In the 2008 London Assembly elections, they won just 5.4 per cent of the (London list) vote.

Whilst electoral rules should not be structured to hinder or promote specific political parties or political views, the principle should remain that (above a basic threshold) free airtime should be linked to having a significant degree of political support.

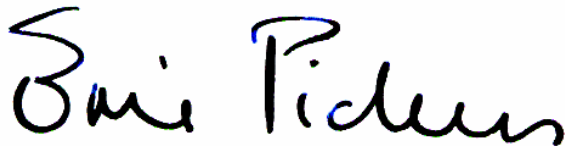
***Broader issues***

Although outside the immediate scope of this consultation, we would ask that Ofcom consider the case for reforms to the current system of PPBs/PEBs, to allow shorter, more frequent broadcasts, with a reduced wrap-around 'health warning'.

If we are serious about re-engaging people in the democratic process, party political broadcasts should be reformed to reflect the changing watching and listening practices in a 'channel hopping' age. The public are able to make up their own minds about the merits or demerits of a political advertisement.

We are happy for this submission to be placed in the public domain.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eric Pickles". The signature is written in a cursive style with a blue ink flourish on the letter 'P'.

**Eric Pickles MP**

*Chairman of the Conservative Party*