



**URGENT  
ACTION  
REQUIRED!**

Dear Supporter,

**PARLIAMENT VOTE ON LORDS REFORM THIS SPRING**

2006 has been a terrible year for the reputation of British democracy. The 'loans for peerages' affair has highlighted all too clearly why there should be no place for patronage in Parliament. Two-thirds of the public supports a predominantly or wholly elected second chamber, yet politicians have fudged this issue for years. The one good thing to come out of the controversy over the past few months has been that Lords Reform has finally been pushed up the political agenda - see Citizen Extra over the page for more information.

Although there are signs that the Government has finally accepted that the second chamber must have some elected members, much more work must be done to ensure that MPs vote for it to be predominantly or wholly elected. *We urgently need your support to make this happen.*

**There is a clear consensus on Lords reform, even if a small minority of vested interests may disagree. We must not allow reactionary elements to abuse Parliament's medieval procedures in order to derail the reform process, as happened in 2003.**

That's why I'm writing to ask you to do three things:

- **Write to your MP right now**, asking for their position and urging them to support democratic reform of the House of Lords;
- **Ask everyone you know to do the same**;
- **Contribute to the Unlock Democracy Campaign Fund.**

We vitally need funds to continue lobbying MPs and building up support for the campaign.

With seasonal best wishes,

Peter Facey (Director, Unlock Democracy)

**PS** The amount of pressure we can put on MPs on this issue over the next few weeks will be **absolutely crucial** in determining how democratic our second chamber of Parliament will be.

**Address:** 6 Cynthia Street, London N1 9JF **Phone:** 020 7278 4443 **Fax:** 020 7278 4425  
**Email:** [info@unlockdemocracy.org.uk](mailto:info@unlockdemocracy.org.uk) **Web:** [www.unlockdemocracy.org.uk](http://www.unlockdemocracy.org.uk)

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## Decision time for Lords Reform

**The Government is due to publish its White Paper on House of Lords reform in the New Year. This will be closely followed by a free vote on composition. Democratic reform is within our grasp, but nothing can be taken for granted.**

There are signs that the Government has accepted that a significant proportion of the second chamber must be directly elected. Recently leaked papers suggest that the Leader of the House of Commons Jack Straw is currently arguing for 50% of the second chamber to be elected by a system of proportional representation.

One of our main concerns is that, despite promises of a 'free' vote, many MPs will be pressured to accept the Government's "compromise" of a 50% elected House, despite

their own preference for it to be predominantly or wholly elected. Having only half of the second chamber elected will severely affect its legitimacy and ensure that questions about its composition will drag on for years to come.

We are also concerned at how the vote in the House of Commons will be conducted. In 2003, both Houses of Parliament were asked to consider 7 separate proposals. In the event, all the options - including the one supporting the status quo - were rejected, although the 80%

elected option fell by just three votes. There are reports that Jack Straw may introduce a system of preferential voting to ensure that a consensus can be reached, but Robin Cook's attempts to do the same in 2003 were blocked. "The technical development of a pencil and a piece of paper ... was far too big a step for our Parliament and its medieval procedures," he later said.

**The amount of pressure you put on your MP over the next few weeks will be absolutely crucial!**

**Parliament first committed itself to replacing the House of Lords with a second chamber comprised on a "popular basis" in 1911!**

### Public backs election

A new poll suggests that two-thirds of the public support a majority or wholly-elected second chamber. The Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust Ltd/ICM State of the Nation 2006 poll found that 22% of the public supported a wholly elected second chamber, while a further 43% supported "a mixture of elected and appointed, with more than half of them elected". This is consistent with an Electoral Reform Society/ICM poll in September 2005 that found 62% of the public support an 80% elected second chamber.

### Conventions Report Published

The Government established the Joint Committee on Conventions committee earlier in the year to look at existing conventions affecting the relationship between the two House of Parliament and to specifically explore the possibility of codifying them in advance of the composition of the second chamber being reformed. The need to better define the powers of second chamber has frequently been cited as a reason for delaying reform.

However, the Committee, which published its report in October, concluded that this would be impossible. It found that Parliamentary conventions evolve over time and would need to be renegotiated once the composition of the second chamber had been changed. It further determined that any attempt to codify conventions would be counter-productive.

Commenting on the report, Unlock Democracy Director Peter Facey said: "This vindicates our position. Attempting to pre-empt the second chamber's powers before its composition has even been agreed was putting the cart before the horse.

"However Parliamentary conventions may evolve, the second chamber will still be subject to the 1911 and 1949 Parliament Acts and thus will not be allowed to block most forms of legislation for more than a year."

**TAKE ACTION!**

# 3 Things we need you to do right now:

## 1) Write to your MP

Every letter each MP receives from a constituent between now and the free vote will be crucial. The address for all MPs is: *House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA*. If you aren't sure who your MP is, you can look it up on [www.theyworkforyou.com](http://www.theyworkforyou.com) or call the House of Commons Information line on 020 7219 4272.

You should make the following points:

- Ask them what their preferred model for Lords reform is.
- Specifically, what proportion of elected members in the second chamber do they support?
- Point out that the Joint Committee on Conventions has now reported, meaning that the question about powers has now been resolved.
- Point out that opinion polls consistently show that two thirds of the public support a majority or wholly elected second chamber.

**IMPORTANT: Please send us copies of any replies you get - this helps us keep track of where MPs stand.**

For more information, see [www.ElectTheLords.org.uk](http://www.ElectTheLords.org.uk).

## 2) Get everyone you know to do the same

Over the next few weeks, we need to get as many people to lobby their MPs as possible. Please ask your friends, family and work colleagues to write to their MP, as above.

To make it easy for you, we have set up a special eCard on our website to help promote the campaign. To send people a copy, simply go to [www.unlockdemocracy.org.uk/xmas06](http://www.unlockdemocracy.org.uk/xmas06).

## 3) Send us a contribution

In order to keep up the pressure on MPs, we need funds to provide briefing papers, canvass their opinion and publicise the campaign to the general public. The money you pledge now will determine what we can afford to do in the New Year.



*Charter 88 and the New Politics Network - the two organisations which founded the Elect the Lords campaign - have further deepened their relationship with the launch of Unlock Democracy. This joint campaign, which calls for root-and-branch democratic reform, will continue to co-ordinate the activities of Elect the Lords. This will be a priority campaign over the next few months.*

*They have launched the Unlock Democracy Campaign Fund (see form below). Individuals who choose to donate in this way will be entitled to membership of both organisations (which, following a decision at their AGMs are now undergoing the process of merging), and so have a say on how this money should be spent.*

**I want to help Unlock Democracy.**  
I will make the following donation to the Unlock Democracy Campaign Fund:

- £20 a month
- £10 a month
- £5 a month - recommended**
- £2 a month - minimum
- Other amount £ \_\_\_\_\_

**We won't take money from your account until February 2007.**

To be entitled to combined membership of Charter 88 and the New Politics Network, you must pay a minimum annual subscription of £24. Tick here if you do NOT wish to be made a member of Charter 88 and the New Politics Network:

You may join Charter 88 and the New Politics Network separately. For more details, please refer to their respective websites.

Charter88		Instruction to your Bank or Building Society to pay by Direct Debit			
Please complete the form and send to: Charter88, FREEPOST, 6 Cynthia Street, London N1 9BR					
Name and full postal address of your Bank or Building Society			Originator's Identification Number		
To: The Manager Bank/Building Society			7 0 7 1 8 9		
Address			Reference		
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Name(s) of Account Holder(s)			Instruction to your Bank or Building Society		
			Please pay Charter88 Direct Debits from the account detailed in this Instruction subject to the safeguards assured by the Direct Debit Guarantee. I understand that this Instruction may remain with Charter88 and, if so, details will be passed electronically to my Bank/Building Society.		
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Banks and Building Societies may not accept Direct Debit Instructions for some types of account.					
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# Myths about Lords Reform



The opponents of democratic reform of the House of Lords are getting desperate, and the more desperate they get, the more outrageous the scare-stories they have been telling. This is your cut-out-and-keep guide to the more outrageous “well known facts” about the dangers of Lords Reform...

## Patronage makes the Lords “independent”

Many opponents of democratic reform claim that the House of Lords is more independent than the House of Commons because its members are not subject to election and thus dependent on their party to keep their seat.

There is no evidence for this. 12 out of 646 MPs rebel against their whip more than 10% of the time, compared to just 4 out of 487 working peers. And while crossbenchers are obviously independent, they typically have extremely low records of attendance: the average crossbencher shows up for just one-in-ten votes in the Lords.

The main reason why the House of Lords has voted down so much Government legislation in recent years has nothing to do with being “independent” - it is because, unlike in the Commons, no single party has a majority in the House. This would also be true of a second chamber predominantly elected by a proportional voting system.

## Elections give party leaders too much control

This is an absurd argument that ignores the fact that party leaders can currently appoint anyone they like to the House of Lords.

It is true that where proportional voting systems using “closed lists” are used, some political parties allow their party leaderships to decide who should go at the top of the list, but not all. Most supporters of Lords reform have called for a voting system using open lists or preferential voting. Even the government now supports the use of “partially open lists”.

## There is no consensus on Lords reform

That depends on how you define consensus. The vast majority of the public want a majority or wholly-elected second chamber, as does the Liberal Democrat Party, the Conservative Party and most Labour supporters. There is more “consensus” on Lords reform than on most issues.

Should a hardcore minority who refuse to accept the consensus be allowed to hold up reform any longer?



## A democratic second chamber would challenge the “primacy” of the House of Commons

The right of the House of Commons to get its way eventually is enforced by the 1911 and 1949 Parliament Acts - there are no plans to abolish these Acts and scrapping them would require the consent of the Commons in any case.

That said, there is no denying that a predominantly elected second chamber would be more assertive in its scrutiny. Primacy of the Commons does not mean the Government should always get its own way.

Name and address:

Please add/amend as appropriate.

If you would like to be added to our eCitizen email list, include your email address here:

## Contributions by cheque/postal orders:

I will make the following donation to the Unlock Democracy Campaign Fund:

- £60       £36       £24
- Other amount £\_\_\_\_\_

Please make all cheques/postal orders payable to “Charter 88”.

To be entitled to combined membership of Charter 88 and the New Politics Network, you must pay a minimum annual subscription of £24. Tick here if you do NOT wish to be made a member of Charter 88 and the New Politics Network:

You may join Charter 88 and the New Politics Network separately. For more details, please refer to their respective websites.

Please return to: **Unlock Democracy Campaign Fund (Lords), 6 Cynthia Street, London N1 9JF.**

Thanks!