



New Submission to Inquiry into the use of social media in the Assembly and Members reflecting on the Office of the Speaker

Bridget Noonan to: Bridget Noonan

20/02/2012 11:49 AM

Inquiry Name: Inquiry into the use of social media in the Assembly and Members reflecting on the Office of the Speaker

Mr Hugh Rundle

ABBOTSFORD

SUBMISSION CONTENT:

--

The reasonably recent proliferation of online social media tools has been a great boon for democracy both in Australia and overseas.

Social media tools, notably Facebook and Twitter, have enabled more Victorians than ever before to converse directly with their local Member of Parliament, to be informed about the day to day operations of Parliament, and to engage more fully in their State's democracy.

Without Twitter, I would have very little idea of the day to day activity of Victoria's Parliament, and little understanding of what happens in Federal Parliament. Tools like Twitter and Facebook allow Victorians to hear what is happening *while it is happening*. Instead of relying on an occasional two-minute synopsis in the evening news, or a heavily edited newspaper article the next day, Victorians can learn about it at the time. Social media has opened up our democracy.

During the recent happenings after the resignation of Harry Jenkins as Speaker of the Federal Parliament, I learned of what had happened that morning, why. what it meant, what the standing orders said and what was happening as a result (the election of Peter Slipper to the Speakership) on Twitter as I ate lunch in a cafe. This would not have been possible without journalists in the Parliamentary galleries tweeting the action and supporting information. Whilst this is an example from Federal Parliament, it shows the power of tools like Twitter to allow citizens to engage with and understand Parliamentary processes as their representatives go about Parliamentary business.

Tools like Facebook and particularly Twitter enable Members and their constituents to converse directly. In the last two years I have had two-way Twitter conversations with several Victorian journalists and Federal and State MPs. Occasionally this was during sitting times. The ability for me to do this with people I have never met in person, regarding events I could not attend in person (since I am employed full time) is part of the 'magic' of these technologies. The idea that our Parliament would try to restrict the ability for Members and journalists to converse directly with constituents on Parliamentary business seems to me to be a kind of madness. Finally we have the tools that allow us to directly reach those who represent us in our Parliament, and those who observe them on our behalf. To restrict my

ability as a citizen to not just be informed in real time, but be able to indirectly participate, would be a direct attack on modern democracy.

In relation to part three of the terms of reference, I would say this:

Social media is unwieldy, uncontrolled and sometimes discourteous. It is a riotous cacophony. It can be tedious and inane, or profound and moving. In all these things, it is no different to politics and the work of Parliament itself. Parliament can not control Twitter, Facebook, text messaging or any other form of communication. It should not attempt to do so. Open and free communication is the lifeblood of democracy. Members of Parliament participating in true conversations with their constituents is a good thing. Twitter is the best thing that has happened to Australian politics in decades. Parliament should not seek to control it, only to use it more effectively and fully.

If members of Parliament feel uncomfortable that their actions and words in Parliament are being recorded, or disinclined to converse with their constituents using modern communication tools, they should deal with this by retiring at the end of this Parliamentary term, rather than creating new unnecessary and anti-democratic standing orders.

--

File1:

File2:

File3: