

Social Media and the Victorian Parliament.

Submission to
the Standing Orders Committee
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Social Media provides tools for the Parliament to engage with an increasingly disinterested and disillusioned community. Like any tool it can be misused. The Parliament needs to ensure it does not allow Social media restrictions to be able to be used to avoid scrutiny and accountability by the Executive and Government. It is up to this Committee to ensure the high road of creative engagement and prevent low road of grubby censorship.

1: Introduction:

This submission is lodged in my capacity as the Member for Albert Park District in the Victorian Parliament. It should not be seen as reflecting either an Opposition or ALP view. It reflects my views. This inquiry arose, in part, from the particular circumstances that saw the Speaker suspend me from the Legislative Assembly – a ruling that continues to perplex me - in response to concerns regarding a Tweet I issued. I believe that this obliges me to set the record straight in regards to the circumstances of that tweet. I take the opportunity also of commenting on the Committees broader terms of reference.

The submission does not seek to be all encompassing. It is based on reflections from my experience and materials others have brought to my attention in the context of the important debate about modernising the operations of the parliament and the opportunities lent to that by Social Media. We have heard much about e-democracy and the value of web 2.0 tools (See the former Brumby governments Web 2.0 strategy still largely untouched since by the Baillieu Government in the past 15 months <http://www.egov.vic.gov.au> and the Rudd Governments taskforce report (see: <http://gov2.net.au>) Web 2.0). It falls to this committee to lay the foundation to apply these well understood principals into the operation of the Parliament and its relationship to Victorians.

This inquiry is an opportunity for both the parliament to play catch up on policy settings for Social Media use whilst setting the framework for more innovative approaches to recast our communication with the people of Victoria. To fail to grab this opportunity and to instead allow the dead hand of notions of control and media management of the technology is to lock the Parliament into the low road of growing digital and social media irrelevance.

With evidence of disengagement and disillusionment with representative politics generally and parliamentary politics mounting this inquiry is an opportunity to look to innovative ways in which the Parliament and MPs can use Social Media as a tool to combat this trend. Like all tools the quality of the end product will depend on the raw material and skills of the persons using it. Social Media's use by MPs needs to be built first and foremost on quality public policy debates. With State Politics increasingly being about service delivery in fields such as health, education, public transport, community safety and working cities the opportunities are many to achieve this quality public debate. Social Media being but one part of a much broader strategy the Parliament should adopt to encourage a two way exchange with the people of Victoria on the public policy and processes we wrestle with.

The boom in the use of such media and the decline in traditional "Old Media" outlets show there is an appetite with the public that looks to new media for a direct engagement not filtered by the spin class of media flacks now littered throughout the Governments departmental and political offices. Is it any wonder such a

trend is growing when the mainstream media is intent - indeed demands - on filling its 24 hour news cycle with increasing low rent gossip and “gotcha politics” rather than dealing with accurate reporting, meaningful analysis or rigorous holding Governments and political parties to account?

Whilst there may be individual outlets and journalists committed to the more noble traditions of their calling the quality, amount and type of reporting on important State public policy issues now owes more to the Sideshow focus that the former Member for Melbourne The Hon. Lindsay Tanner MP (<http://www.penguin.com.au/products/9781921844065/sideshow-dumbing-down-democracy>) pointed out in his 2011 book of the same name. As Mr Tanner comments we in the Parliament are as much at fault for feeding this dumbing down focus as the political and news cycles grow ever shorter, more media and less policy and program focussed in the name of political gain.

Against this background there seems to be a growing desire for political and policy interested people (for they are two sides of the one coin) to look beyond traditional media to social media as a form of information and engagement that has strong elements of immediacy, relevance and accuracy that old media lacks. Tweets, Facebook, Blogs, micro messaging, Web 2.0 options all provide greater diversity for media offerings and choices for the community members interested in particular policy areas. Whilst it might be engagement confined to the click of a mouse it is a level of engagement that is immediate and it is increasingly involving a wider number of citizens. The opportunities offered by Social Media to the Parliament should be seen as a perfectly acceptable form of communication and engagement with citizens in their own cyber world. Set against the steadily declining Old Media worlds of print, radio and TV the conditions are there for Parliament to be part of a broader, new engagement with Victorians interested in its works. Indeed if Members of Parliament are looking to possible opportunities to communicate directly with their community social media offers the prospect of that relationship being unfiltered by the media.

Whether Social media and Web 2.0 is used as a high end opportunity to enlarge the public debate on issue of importance to the people of Victoria or whether it is populated with the same low rent babble that passes for debate, commentary and analysis at the current time is in part in the hands of how this Parliament responds to the challenges the Standing Orders Committee puts to it. We can choose the high road of engagement and meaningful exchange by the creative use of the tools of the technology or the low road of command and control heading us into more of the same kind of media and public cynicism we have all collectively encouraged by our behaviours and which despite their contrived outrage the media encourages.

Social Media by its nature is a more direct and difficult to “manage” and freewheeling media to message “control”. It will resist being used as the “low road” of command and control. For the Parliament to seek to do so will be counterproductive, if not futile. But it would fuel cynicism. Should the Executive arm of Government seek to use this inquiry as such an opportunity it will be a waste of the parliament's time. This would only further fuel the disengagement and disillusion many commentators refer to around State political processes. On top of not doing much, what the Parliament and the Executive arm of Government would be seen to be doing would be counterproductive to the future of democratic debate and public policy development.

When added to this Government's failure to meet its Freedom of Information commitments, its pale and incomplete "anti-corruption" measures which fail to meet its pre-election promise then we see evidence of a continued pattern of the government seeking in reality seeking to protect its Ministers, MPs and their staff from scrutiny. Knowing as we do that this Government has form on seeking to avoid scrutiny; the Committee should resist attempts to make Social Media a part of that approach extended to gagging the Parliament as such a forum.

On the specifics of narrow matters before the Committee regarding the rule and procedures of the Parliament I would maintain the Parliament should avoid the temptation of bringing "old media" notions of control and rules to the Social Media Field.

The Parliament should not seek to regulate Social Media use in any prescriptive manner – beyond ensuring that in its use there is no direct interference with the running of the Parliament. Existing standing orders and rules of debate have proved flexible and practical enough to manage the issues associated with a changing media environment. There is no need for the Parliament to enact special measures to regulate Social Media use either by MP's, journalists or members of the Community beyond the normal rules of appropriate and reasonable behaviour, privilege and compliance with the existing Standing Orders. Any attempt to seek to regulate these areas through this Committee in a prohibitive manner would run the risk of rightly being seen as undemocratic and smacking of censorship.

This is not to say that the parliament should ignore the issues that social media creates for it. Social Media raises day to day operational issue for the Parliament that need to be addressed like any other media form. It is just that this attention should be proportionate to ensuring Social Media use does not detract from the normal operations of the parliament. In similar way to how the Courts and other parliaments have approached the issue it is one of monitoring and guidance so as to ensure that the forms and procedures of the Parliament are not overly impinged on by use of social media. Given the direction of hand held digital devices and their increasing multifunctional nature even this impediment grows less and less as each new product is introduced into the ICT and social media worlds.

In regards the issue of "Reflections on the Chair" and Social Media (item 4 – ToR) the Parliament should not mistake the message for the medium. The rules of debate provide well enough for dealing with the issue of the role and performance of the Speaker. The Office of Speaker is built on the rock of respect resting on the pillars of impartiality and authority in the House. One cannot exist without the other. Perceptions of impartiality will undermine authority. Lack of authority makes the Parliament unworkable as a democratic forum. Vigorous debates, including when appropriate the issue of the relationship of the Parliament to the Speaker – are a hallmark of our Victorian version of the Westminster Parliamentary system. There is no need to protect the Speaker behind a shield of social media free armour, as seems to be contemplated. The existing principals of reflection on the chair and the process of engaging and debating the role and impartiality of the chair should continue.

The Speaker should be perfectly capable of defending himself against questions on his performance through the normal rules of the House. The House will judge him by his observance and appreciation of the pillars of impartiality and his use of his special powers. Let his performance be the guiding factor – not any artificial management or ban on Social media. It is then up to Members to ensure their approach to the Chair is respectful and does not unfairly reflect on the Chair – whether in Hansard or in Cyberspace. But given the particular circumstances that this Parliament faces perhaps it is time to consider more dramatic measures to ensure the impartiality and authority of the Speaker.

2: Background.

On the 11th November 2011 the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly opened proceedings with the following comments:

"I have received a copy of a tweet by the member for Albert Park. I found the tweet to be very offensive to me and the position of the Speaker, and I seek an apology."

The subsequent debate in the House and my refusal to apologise for something that was not said in the House, that the Speaker failed to bring to my attention in the subsequent debate or which was recorded on Hansard caused me to be suspended from the service of the House for a short time.

Following discussions in the Speakers Chambers the next day and with the guidance of the Clerk of the Assembly the Speaker read the following into the record of Hansard.

"Yesterday I raised an issue in the house concerning the contents of a tweet posted by the member for Albert Park. Today the member for Albert Park met with me in chambers to discuss the issue. During those discussions the member for Albert Park offered an apology for his tweet being seen as reflecting on the office of Speaker. I have accepted this, and I confirm my commitment made to the house yesterday that the use of social media and how it relates to the procedures of the house will be referred to the Standing Orders Committee for investigation."

The tweet followed the Government's refusal to support a motion by the Opposition seeking to establish an inquiry into the Office of Police Integrity Report on the behaviour of a senior adviser in the Office of the Deputy Premier and Minister for Police in undermining the position of then Chief Commissioner of Police Simon Overland.

I stand by the intent of the tweet's message that this was an opportunity missed by the Parliament to debate and understand the issues that went to the heart of how an office of a Minister of the Crown responsible for Policing operated as the headquarters for undermining the Chief of Police in Victoria. This continues to be an unprecedented example an issue of either misconduct or monumental incompetence that goes to the heart of public confidence in policing, government and their relationships. That the Parliament and the Speaker missed the opportunity to allow the debate to proceed was a great disappointment as the truth of the matter – especially in light of the Governments new incomplete IBAC regime – might never be known publicly.

So against this background I found the response of the Speaker to be disappointing and reflecting a series of – at best – misjudgements by him as to how his role can be best used to ensure the Parliament operates in the manner it is envisaged under the standing orders and the Westminster system of holding

governments and their activities to account. I meant then and still offer these comments with respect and without reflecting on the Speaker or its important Office in our parliamentary system of democracy.

3: Terms of Reference:

The Committees first terms of reference reads: *“ Should any restrictions , or guidelines, apply to members use of hand held electronic devices in the Chamber and committees, including accessing social media to comment on proceedings.”*

In short – No, with the condition that such use should not impinge directly on proceedings and operations of the House or the Committee.

In their 2010 work Grant. J, Moon and Grant W. (*Digital Dialogue? Australian Politicians Use of the Social Network Tool Twitter-* Australian Journal of Political science Vol. 45 No. 4 Dec 2010 pp. 579- 604) comment:

“Twitter may indeed be used only a small section of Australian society. Yet because of its very nature – because it rapidly connects the politically engaged – its influence extends far beyond this readership. Put simply Twitter is becoming ever more the political space in Australia in which ideas, issues and policies are first announced, discussed, debated and framed.”

Even in the 2 years since this 2010 work the numbers of twitter uses has continued its exponential growth. Facebook and Twitter have between them some 10.73 Million and 1. 9 Million Australian accounts and growing in 2011 – and with the continued decline of traditional media its relative importance grows. (For statistics on use see www.socialbaker.com.)The fact that the majority of these social media users are under 35 suggests that the emerging political debate in the community will be held increasingly in cyberspace. It is in the interests of the parliament and of representative democracy more generally to engage constructively and on the terms of that media with this generation of Victorians.

Restrictions on the operation of this rapidly growing form of social media will rightly be seen as an attempt to seek to shape and frame – that is control – that political space and debate. As the Government has the numbers on the Floor of the Parliament and on this Committee any such effort will be seen as an attempt by the Government to shape the political debate to its advantage.

In this context hand held digital devices – be they tablet, or one or the growing number of hand held multi-functional devices – should be seen as an intrinsic part of the tool kit of many MP's and members of the Community, including journalists. They are used to store and retrieve information, communicate and update with staff, offices and the wider world. The future uses to which they may be deployed are perhaps limited only by our innovation and imagination. They are now part of the standard tools for engaging in the trade of ideas. Attempts to reduce, control and limit their use are in reality attempts to limit debate and ideas. That they have been rejected in other comparable parliaments where this matter has been seriously investigated suggests that those jurisdictions serious about engagement and participation do not seek to constrain their use.

In this regard I refer the Committee to the following extract from the United Kingdom's Parliament report by Commons Procedure Committee in 2011: 'Use of hand-held electronic devices in the Chamber and committees, Third Report of Session 2010–11'

(<http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmselect/cmproc/889/889.pdf>)

"The Procedures Committee of the Commons recommended that: (following an initial Ban earlier that year that meet with widespread opposition)

"That hand-held electronic devices (not laptops) may be used in the Chamber, provided that they are silent, and used in a way that does not impair decorum; that Members making speeches in the Chamber or in committee may refer to electronic devices in place of paper speaking notes; and that electronic devices, including laptops, may be used silently in committee meetings, including select committees. "

The Full committee report provides a useful guide for this Committee on matters ranging from activities in comparable jurisdictions handling of the issues through to the security issues of sensitive data and information.

The report notes the gradual direction of easing of restrictions on the use of digital communication devices in many jurisdictions over the years as emerging forms of ICT, digital communications and the processing of information and communications left the paper based forms of many Parliaments behind. The common thread that accompanied the easing of restrictions was one that sought to ensure that the use of the devices did not cause disorder or distraction to the operation of the Chamber or the Members on the floor. A common feature of such measures was ensuring that the devices were not audible or did not provide a visual impairment to the decorum of the Chamber. These seem about the reasonable limits to which "restrictions" should go.

Increasingly as the devices gained the capacity to provide access to the internet and the provision of background information, sources and real time communication the issue of such devices being seen as an aide memoire of the work of Politicians (just as they are to numerous other fields of work) has also been accepted. This appears to be particularly the case in the Committee process where the experience of the Victorian Parliament over a number of years is that laptops, hand held devices and digital communications have assisted the operation of the Committee system for both committee members and participants. This would appear to confirm the international experience.

Helpfully the report also considered the issue of Tweeting from the Chamber – and although it should be noted that my particular tweet was not actually sent from the Chamber the issue is well summarised in this report (remembering that Twitter was only developed in 2006).

I quote as follow from the Report:

“Tweeting from the Chamber or committee.

24. As an example of a practice which could not have been predicted by the Modernisation Committee in 2007, tweeting could hardly be bettered. The use of Twitter by Members is very popular and its use in the Chamber or Westminster Hall has caused comment from Members themselves and from the public. Many different views have been expressed, from those who believe that it is a threat to the dignity of parliamentary proceedings to those who argue that it brings Parliament to a whole new audience.

25. Tweeting about proceedings from the galleries is in our view no different in degree from presenters commenting on live broadcasts of proceedings or indeed from tweeting or blogging about proceedings when watched from outside the Chamber. Whilst tweeting from inside the Chamber is clearly a more sensitive matter, we consider that it would be inconsistent to ban this one practice whilst advocating the approach based on decorum rather than activity which we advocate in this report. We also recognise that it would be impossible for the Chair to police tweeting by Members and that the Chair should not be expected to rule on allegations that inappropriate tweeting is taking or has taken place. Instead, we urge all Members to use their good sense and behave with courtesy, particularly in not tweeting messages which would be disorderly if said in the House.

26. We feel that the same rules should apply to tweeting in committee meetings that are held in public as we recommend should apply in the House. However, tweeting in select committee meetings may raise sensitive matters should Members wish to comment on ongoing proceedings. We would deprecate as discourteous and a breach of the decorum rule any comments on the evidence being taken by a committee whilst the session was in progress. Disclosing private proceedings of a committee by tweeting would of course be a breach of privilege in the same way as disclosure by any other means and should not take place at all when a committee is sitting in private.”

I recommend this approach to the Committee.

“Should any restrictions, or guidelines, apply to the public and media using social media from the galleries to comment on proceedings or committee hearings?”

In line with the comments referred to in regards to the first terms of reference, the Parliament should avoid the temptation of seeking to use this process of review to essentially censor the media reporting or public comment on the parliament and its activities.

As referred to above what is the difference between a live cross on radio or TV to a live tweet or digital communication by a hand held device – such as a tweet? What is the difference between a Blog produced by someone watching the Web stream of the Parliament and the same thing delivered by a tablet in the gallery? It is an issue of decorum rather than activity. The medium might be different but the form and goals of a media and public using its available tools as a mechanism for commenting and reporting and holding the Government and Parliament to account in the timeliest manner. That it is fast, can catch political players unaware and is challenging to those more comfortable with old forms of electronic and printed media should be no grounds for seeking to restrict – indeed censor – its use.

To the best of my knowledge or recollection there has been no example of the media having used digital media in reporting or commenting on the proceedings of the House or committees in any way that could be considered inappropriate or disruptive to the operations of the House. Whilst we might disagree with the particular take of individual members of the media and the community on a matter and indeed the tendency of the technology to contribute to a form of hash- tag group think amongst journalists, this is simply taking the current problems with media political reporting into cyberspace. It is no grounds to seek to ban or constrain its use.

The same can be said for the members of the Public, be they stakeholder groups, visitors or school groups in the Parliament.

The Committee should avoid the urgings of the Executive and not apply any restrictions on media or public use of social media subject to the smooth running of the House or the Committees set out in similar terms to that of the House of Commons report on MPs use of such technology.

Any alternative approach would rightly be seen as a move to censor and restrict the operation of a free media which operates as a pillar of our democratic system of ensuring that representative parliaments are scrutinised and held to account for their performance and activity.

Let a thousand flowers of digital democracy bloom in the Victorian parliament in the interests of civic engagement and good policy outcomes.

Do the Assembly’s procedures and rules need modernising to reflect opportunities and challenges provided by social media?”

The Assemblies procedures and rules covering the general issues of media use (social, digital or otherwise) for its members, the media and the visitors to the Parliament are set out in the standing orders and procedures and the chairs rulings. They have emerged gradually, upon considered reflection. They are based on the Westminster model that our Parliament derived from and then applied to local circumstance.

Whilst the development of Social Media and digital devices make the issues of how these are applied in a new era they have by their general nature show themselves to be remarkably adaptive to evolving media platforms.

For the reasons I have sought to refer to in the first two terms of reference social media use should not be subject to any different or specific procedures or rules. If the rules need modernising or changing it is to ensure that the parliament engages with these forms of media more – not less. It needs to look to the opportunities of how the departments of the parliament and its officers and members can get information out to help encourage public debate to a wide as possible audience. It is, in one sense, about providing an on line version of the parliamentary process with real links back to Spring Street. It is almost an opportunity to reinvent in the digital age, the Hellenic golden age of models for citizens engagement. Our aim should be how the committee can look to participation from an informed citizenry acting in a collective forum in the broader selfless community interest.

The use of blogs, YouTube, video pieces, tweets, Facebook and a range of interactive web 2.0 forums – including on line or e- parliaments should be considered in more detail by the parliament and its officers. I understand some initial work in the last Parliament was undertaken in this area. I also understand it is a field of great interest to the Clerk and his staff as they look to ensure best practice models of engagement is development in the Victorian parliament. I urge the committee to expand this work as to the options that Social media brings to the Parliament.

The committee and the parliament should consider seeking a reference to a suitable all party committee that would allow the issue of web 2.0 technologies and parliaments operations to be explored in more detailed beyond the narrow terms of reference of this Committee.

“Is the current rule preventing any reflections on the Office of the Speaker, other than in formal motion, still appropriate? If so, should the rule still apply to reflections made outside the House and to reflections made on social media?”

This is perhaps the most important of the terms of reference before the committee if considered in the context of how the House operates in a digital environment in this particular Parliament with the particular Speaker the House has elected. The issue goes to the heart of the relationship of the House to the Speaker, to the performance of the Speaker and the protections the rules and procedures of the Parliament offer that Office. These rules presuppose the fair and impartial conduct of the holder of that Office. They do not now and have never been in place to shield the Speaker from legitimate and robust criticism – especially in circumstances where the Speaker has abandoned the finest traditions of not only being independent but being seen to be independent as the basis for their authority. The rules provide and the history of the House is evidenced by such robust criticism through substantive resolution or legitimate opportunities for debate (points of order and similar measures.) and other measures being used to resolve differences of view over Speakers down the years.

In this regard I cite Erskine May (24th edition) on the role of the Office of the Speaker in the House of Commons:

“The Speaker as the presiding Officer of the House of Commons.

*The Chief characteristics attaching to the Office of Speaker in the House of Commons are **authority and impartiality...**”*

“Reflections upon the character or actions of the Speaker may be criticised as breaches of privilege. His actions cannot be criticised incidentally in debate or upon any form of proceeding except a substantive motion. His authority in the Chair is fortified by many special powers which are referred to below. Confidence in the impartiality of the Speaker is an indispensable condition of the successful working of procedure and many conventions exist which have as their objective not only to ensure the impartiality of the Speaker but also that his impartiality is generally recognized. He takes no part in the debate either in the House or in the committee. He votes only when the voices are equal and then in accordance with rules which exclude an expression of opinion upon the merits of a question.”

These approaches apply as much to comments, behaviour and demeanour of the Speaker in the House as they do to matters outside the House.

The Australian Parliament's House of Representatives Practice – 5th Editions – deals with these issues in an Australian context when it looks to reflections on the character or actions of the Speaker inside or outside the House – including the use of Penal powers of the House. This journal for example refers to

events from 1913 where comments made by the Member for Ballarat outside the House reflected on the then Speaker. The Prime Minister of the day then moved the member concerned be suspended until such time as he apologised.

The journal then goes on to cite a number of other Australian examples on rulings on the Speakers across the times and across differing media platforms.

This has led to a range of possible punishment of Members ranging from an apology, suspension and even expulsion.

In this regard these substantial powers have shown themselves to be suitably flexible and useful to manage changing mediums and developing media. At the same time the principal of protecting the Office of the Speaker and reinforcing the notions of impartiality and authority were protected.

The history of these matters shows that the rules and procedure of the House are sufficient to meet the changing environments of media and the rare occasions of disorderly reflections on the Speaker.

The powers as they exist in the Parliament are sufficient to protect the issue of reflections on the Speaker.

But these powers, as Erskin May points out, are based equally on the issues of the authority **AND** the impartiality of the Speaker. When the Speaker departs from those traditions of impartiality then the Speaker brings the authority of the Office into doubt. The Speaker then makes their own performance open to legitimate criticism from the members of the House – and indeed the wider community. He becomes the issue rather than the impartial chair.

The Speaker in such circumstances is not entitled to use the Authority of the Office to avoid legitimate criticism and comments in debate and in considered comments both inside and outside the Chamber. The Parliament should not seek to protect him from emerging and difficult to control media platforms when they are used to highlight such circumstances.

The current holder of the Speakers office has shown in the past 15 months that he is at risk of abandoning these fine traditions.

The rules and procedures of the House rightly depend on an independent and impartial chair. That such a person almost has always come from the governing party has not been an impediment to the operation of this role. Nor have the rules of the Assembly prevented the Speaker when they stray from these traditions being the subject of legitimate criticism and scrutiny.

Yet circumstances and individual performance change over the years. In light of the changed circumstances perhaps it is time for the Parliament to consider a more substantive expression of this impartiality and authority in the role of the Speaker.

There are existing protections for the Speaker in the rules and conventions of the House and its similar jurisdictions just as there are existing opportunities for the reasoned criticisms of the Speakers behaviour when justified.

So when the Speaker strays from that impartiality they lend themselves to criticism. In this Parliament I believe the Speaker has on a number of occasions put the Office of the Speaker in a position where the issue of his impartiality has been the subject of legitimate comment. The clearest cut of these was his comments regarding the position of the former Member for Niddrie and deputy leader of the Opposition and the Speakers unwarranted commentary on his continued presence in the Parliament. His at times mechanical defence of Government Members and Ministers – especially in the robust forum of Question time – has raised concerns amongst many members as to perceptions of his impartiality. As a case in point take his clear pattern of protection of the Premier as he wheeled out his new tactical position of “action man: in abusing the Opposition in Question Time in the first question times of 2012. Such a position is clearly beyond the Standing orders as it has no relationship to Government Business. Yet in a happy coincidence that aligned with the Premiers new Poll driven tactical response the Speaker deemed it be so. The perception was far from useful to the notion of impartiality.

There can be no doubt that the position of Speaker is a tough one. It must have the protections of the House and its procedures to operate properly. Yet it must be conducted in a manner that is impartial and is seen to be impartial. In the circumstance where that is not the case then measured and fair criticism is legitimate. So too are calls for what can be done to” fix the problem.”

In this regard it is time for stern measures, The Committee should recommend to the Parliament that the Office of Speaker continue to be impartial and supported by special powers and rules. The Committee should recommend that the Speaker also be seen to be impartial. The Speaker should take the initiative and with the support of the Parliament resign from the Liberal Party whilst he holds that office. This would take him beyond the frame of the battle of the chamber and elevate his Office to a higher level above the fray. The Speaker should, even without a recommendation of this committee, take the initiative and resign from the Liberal Party and be seen to an independent, impartial and well supported chair.

So in conclusion the issue of the reflections on the Chair made anywhere – including on social media - are sufficient as they exist. The real issue is the impartiality of the Speaker as the foundation of the authority of the Office of Speaker. Establish that in practice and all other issues regarding the Speakers performance and commentary on it will melt away.