

McGowan, Andrew (REPS)

From: cam riley [cam.riley@gmail.com]
Sent: Thursday, 31 March 2005 3:10 AM
To: Committee, EM (REPS)
Subject: Submission for Inquiry into the Conduct of the 2004 Federal Election and Matters Related Thereto

Dear Committee Members;

1. The Internet And Political Speech

I would like to comment on the role of political speech in relation to the internet and the conduct of elections.

The freedom encompassed by the ability of individuals, and groups, to speak freely and outside of regulation is a wonderful positive for political debate and the market of ideas.

In particular I have been impressed with the emergence of "flash-advocacy" groups. The cost of publishing on the internet is so low that these websites pop-up for a single issue and present information that is readily available for any voter searching for it. Either through a link from another site, such as a blog, or from a query in a search engine.

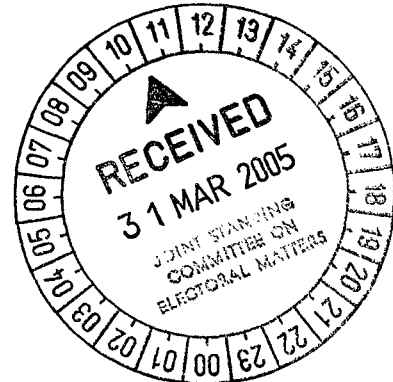
I see these sites as adding to the political debate. In addition, for each flash advocacy group that appears, there is another that appears in opposition. For every johnhowardlies.com there will be a johnhowardtruths.com; now a voter has a greater wealth of information to draw an opinion from. This is a major positive.

Another aspect of the internet is the emergence of flash-research groups. These flock around a meme, disseminating and dissecting it. Acting like a single issue journalist organization. Any information that does not survive these flash-researchers is widely discredited. A good example of this is Rathergate where a TV News Anchor in the United States was discredited by a flash-research group.

The Special Minister of State, Eric Abetz, has suggested that internet websites, such as flash-advocacy groups and bloggers, acted in contravention of the Electoral Act during the 2004 Commonwealth Election. I presume he means Section 328 when speaking of this.

The policing of speech on the internet is impossible. Currently five percent of the Australian population resides outside of Australia - while remaining politically active. They are beyond the reach of electoral laws. In addition bandwidth and servers are cheaper overseas than in Australia too. This makes the websites and people running them impossible to police.

In conclusion, I believe that regulating internet political speech is an impossible task; that will become arbitrary and punish those that wish to partake in the public political debate. I believe the



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laissez-faire approach to the internet in relation to elections will increase public and political debate.

2. Request For Publishing Of Fiscal Transactions Between Party and Individual

In addition I would like to request the committee look toward Parties publishing a list on the internet which contains the individuals and websites that have received political money from them. This would need to be done in a timely manner, in the same day as the transaction taking place.

I believe this will give individuals the information to make rational decisions if a website, or individual publishing to a website, has a biased view due to their fiscal relationship with a political party.

This requirement should also extend to government departments during the electoral cycle as well.

3. Other Issues For The Committee

I would also like the Committee to look into the use of tax-payer money and public service resource for the use of advertising, pamphleteering and mailing by the major parties during the election.

Another issue I would like addressed is Sections 94 and 95 which dis-enfranchise Australians who are currently working and living outside of Australia. The Australian Diaspora is unfairly discriminated against in those sections. I would like to see Section 94.1c removed from the Electoral Act.

In a long term view, the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters should inquire to the possibility of establishing a Commonwealth Electoral Roll for Australians currently living outside of Australia as part of Senate representation for the Australian Diaspora.

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