

AUSTRALIANS LAUNCH WORLD'S FIRST ONLINE POLITICAL PARTY



TELECOMMUNICATIONS

The internet, which has succeeded in democratizing so many other parts of life, has now set its sights on one of society's most stalwart professions: democratic lawmakers. A recently launched Australian political party called **Senator On-Line** promises to let its members vote on every bill that comes before the nation's parliament. The party's representative then votes in accordance with the majority. Talk about direct democracy! Anyone enraged by the power of special interest groups, back-room deal making and partisan bickering will be struck by the compelling alternative Senator On-Line presents. The party has no political agenda or platform, remains independent of lobbying groups and vows to help its members decide how to vote on issues with impartial online information detailing the pros and cons of any particular stance. Some might argue that such an extreme form of direct democracy could easily take on a dark side. What's to prevent party members from voting against needed taxes, for example? Similarly, could they vote to strip away the rights of minority groups? An FAQ on the party's website attempts to answer these questions. To prevent a malevolent majority from taking over the country, Senator On-Line will only field candidates in Australia's Senate (upper house), whose powers are limited to approving and rejecting bills. Under Australia's parliamentary system, it's the lower house, the House of Representatives, that proposes and debates bills. Still, web-based democracy is an untested idea. And like all social communities or networks, Senator On-Line and its imitators will likely evolve in unexpected ways. Special interest groups might shift their efforts from lobbying legislators to reaching out directly to grass roots party members, who—for good or ill—may be more susceptible to their message. Candidates and their parties have traditionally provided a check when their rivals make false statements. With a web-based democracy, that role would likely fall more urgently on the press and on watchdog groups. On the other hand, the gridlock that exists in many of the world's legislative bodies remains in dire need of new thinking. And as the web continues to grow in importance, political parties are bound to rely on it more and more. No direct business opportunities connected to this concept (for now), but the model should be of interest to anyone tracking the workings of online crowds and communities. And anyone who'd like to start their online party 😊

21st November 2007

Website: www.senatoronline.org.au

Contact: www.senatoronline.org.au/contact