HOUSE OF COMMONS

ORAL EVIDENCE

TAKEN BEFORE THE

SPEAKER'S COMMISSION ON DIGITAL DEMOCRACY

WITH WITNESSES: DAVID BABBS, BRIE ROGERS LOWERY, JOHN COVENTRY and EAMONN CAREY

BRIAN LOADER, DOUGLAS CARSWELL MP and LORD KNIGHT OF WEYMOUTH

Evidence heard in Public   Questions 43 – 98

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Oral Evidence

Taken before the Speaker's Commission on Digital Democracy

on Tuesday 15 July 2014

Commission Members present:

John Bercow (Chair), Speaker of the House of Commons
Robert Halfon MP
Meg Hillier MP
Paul Kane
Dr Cristina Leston-Bandeira
Helen Milner
Emma Mulqueeny
Femi Oyeniran

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: **David Babbs**, Executive Director, 38 Degrees, **Brie Rogers Lowery**, Country Director, change.org, **John Coventry,** Communications Director, change.org, and **Eamonn Carey**, Head of Digital at MHP Communications, gave evidence.

Q43 Chair: Welcome to members of the public. This is our second session at which members of the public have been invited to the House of Commons, so thank you for coming. There may be votes, so MPs may have to vanish in a puff of smoke and Paul, one of the digital democracy commissioners, will then chair the meeting. Two more commissioners will arrive a bit later, and I understand that Mr Speaker will arrive for our second session.

We have some interesting witnesses to give evidence today. David Babbs is executive director of 38 Degrees, an organisation that interacts heavily with MPs in Parliament, with a mass e-mail database on a huge range of issues—the latest being the internet Bill going through Parliament today. As his CV states, David has been obsessed with people power since the Iraq war in 2003, so I am looking forward to hearing his evidence.

We also have Brie Rogers Lowery from change.org. She set up the online campaigning organisation. She has a great CV, but the best part of it is, as it says here, "Born to Australian parents in London, with a twanged English accent and odd name, she considers herself a proud Australian-Londoner with a penchant for maps." Both 38 Degrees and change.org are the way the public are going in terms of digital democracy.

Brian Loader, director of the School of Social and Political Sciences at the university of York is also with us as one of those giving evidence today, as is Douglas Carswell, an MP who has written a lot about the internet and democracy, and Lord Knight of Weymouth.

We will start in order with 38 Degrees and David Babbs. If you would like to make a presentation, we will follow it up with questions.

David Babbs: First, thanks for inviting 38 Degrees to participate today. It is a good sign that such a commission exists and is doing its work and that we have been invited. You gave a

very brief introduction to 38 Degrees and I would like to add a little colour before I go into our evidence.

The organisation 38 Degrees was launched just over five years ago, with three assumptions behind the launch. The first was that talk of the apathy of the British public was exaggerated. If you talk to people, a lot of them care deeply about the future of the country and things that we might call politics. The reasons why they were not getting involved in the traditional ways were often good reasons and were sometimes bad reasons, but were not to do with not caring.

The second assumption was that democracy is better if more people get involved. It was a problem that people were not getting involved. The third assumption was that the internet could help in some way and that there was a need for new kinds of institution and new kinds of mechanisms, whereby the public—voters—could participate in the democratic process. Traditional institutions left a gap that 38 Degrees sought to partially fill.

Over the past five years, we have grown to have more than 2.5 million members, which indicates that the premise that there was some kind of gap and an appetite has been proved right. We use the internet as a tool to enable us to make decisions quickly on what we wish to work on and to co-ordinate our activities and pool our resources, whether that be our influence through signing petitions or contacting decision makers, whether that is an MP or the chief executive of a company. We also pool our financial resources to chip in to fund a legal challenge or something like that and pool our resources in terms of time, using the internet to organise face-to-face events in the real world, of which hundreds now take place each year for 38 Degrees. I think that 38 Degrees members—

Q44 Chair: May I interrupt you? As we have got a lot of witnesses, there are five minutes each.

David Babbs: I thought that was useful content, because I wanted to tell you a bit about who 38 Degrees members are. The evidence that I was going to give to you, which I can give in more detail in writing, was from a survey of 38 Degrees members.

One of the things that is different about 38 Degrees is that we do not seek to speak for our members; we seek to give our members means of speaking for themselves, which is obviously a tricky thing to reconcile with this kind of traditional mechanism. Through a bit of trial and error over a few events such as this, we have found that the way that can work quite well is to survey our members with some of the questions that we anticipate being asked about in advance. We did that last week, and about 72,000 members responded. We got a lot of qualitative feedback, and I will try to pick out the highlights in response to questions.

The key findings are that there is a hugely mixed picture in how our members experience online democracy and engagement with their decision makers. More than half our members told us that they have at least some positive experiences of online engagement with a Member of Parliament. Some 66% said that they had at least one good experience and 62% said that their MP always responds respectfully to them. That leaves a significant minority who have had somewhat negative through to really shocking experiences in how their MP has engaged with them. We have had stories of MPs being plain rude and abusive, frankly, and in some cases quite sweary with our Members. Some MPs do not respond at all. Some MPs have gone so far as to block their e-mail addresses to stop people from getting in touch with them.

When we have tried to look into whether a pattern emerges, we can definitely say that there is no clear party correlation; there are examples of MPs that give people a good experience or a poor experience from all the major parties. There seems to be some correlation with safe seats. MPs with very safe seats are less likely to give people a good

experience, but there are some notable exceptions to that as well. There seems to be some correlation, perhaps, with age. MPs who joined Parliament more recently are doing a better job of engaging digitally with their voters, but again with notable exceptions.

Where the interaction works well, we have found that that can be of benefit to everyone. A third of 38 Degrees members say that their understanding of Parliament and how the parliamentary process works has improved thanks to being in contact with their MP. Their understanding of the democratic process has improved. Another thing that I think is important to emphasise is that our members told us that having a good experience does not mean that their MP always agrees with them. There are lots of cases where members talked about an interaction with an MP in which the MP disagreed but explained why and gave an indication that they were engaging with the other point of view and had thought about it. That was considered positive.

Out of all those qualitative data and those headline stats, we have tried to draw out a few top-line recommendations. The first is that our members support MPs being given the resources, training and technology they need to engage properly with voters online. Some 76% of 38 Degrees members say that they are in favour of Parliament spending money on that; they see it as a good investment in democracy.

The second recommendation would be to treat online engagement—as I think you should probably treat any form of engagement—as a conversation and an opportunity to learn and understand, as well as an opportunity to explain your own point of view. Where MPs responded promptly but still got low scores from our members was where there was a sense that they were just giving the party line back.

Building on that, MPs actually saying what they think and how they feel about an issue seems to be important to our members. If 150 people contact an MP about the same issue, I think our members think that it is perfectly reasonable that the MP replies saying more or less the same thing to all of them; you are not going to have 150 different opinions on the same subject. But what our members would like is for that common message to say what the MP thinks and for it to engage with the points that have been made, not for it to be simply a kind of policy document from head office that is being forwarded on. That doesn't feel like a meaningful transaction to people.

The key things that our members highlighted as things that they felt negatively about, and made them feel negative about democracy, were, first, where they contacted an MP as part of a campaign and were dismissed because they had contacted them as part of a campaign. Our members said loud and clear that contacting an MP as part of a campaign is still a one-on-one interaction. They are contacting them because they have chosen to as part of that campaign. When an MP brushes that off and says, "This is just a clone e-mail. You clearly haven't thought about it properly", that feels patronising and hostile.

Secondly, there are really negative views about those MPs who try to block communication. That sends an incredibly bad message. So, the MPs who have got rid of their e-mail address or attempted to use technical blocks to stop people mailing them—that is seen very negatively.

Thirdly, any healthy democracy has a plurality of voices, a plurality of means of getting in touch with decision makers, and a plurality of places in which conversations take place. A healthy democracy is probably a slightly chaotic place, in lots of ways. The internet is no different from that. There is not going to be one channel or approach that suits everyone. There are organisations that exist outside the formal political process but give people a way of contributing. That is something that lots of the public see as an important way of engaging, and something MPs should see the internet as a positive feature of.

Q45 Chair: Thank you. I forgot to mention Eamonn; I beg your pardon. I know that MHP Communications is a great agency. Not so long ago, I was asked to speak at a breakfast seminar. It is an impressive organisation, so thank you for coming. I am looking to hear your evidence.

Brie and John are both from change.org. John is the senior communications director of change.org. I should say that they are running a petition. They are probably going to tell us about it. It is about PMQs at the moment—*[Interruption.]* No, for Mumsnet.

Brie Rogers Lowery: Fantastic. Thank you for having us here today. Let me just put this slideshow on. I am Brie Rogers Lowery, the UK director of change.org. My colleague is John Coventry, our communications director.

David has already given a great overview of online campaigning and how the public are embracing it. We are going to talk a bit about closing the gap between voters and MPs.

Change.org is the world's biggest petition platform, with more than 70 million users worldwide and staff in 18 countries. When we started change.org in the UK just over two years ago, we had just 100,000 users. We are now over 5 million, fast approaching 6 million. When we are at that point, one in 10 people in the UK will have signed a petition on change.org.

We are not an advocacy or campaigning organisation but an open platform, similar to Facebook or Twitter. We provide the tools for people to run their own campaigns. Our mission is to empower people everywhere to create the change they want to see in the world. On average, seven petitions win each week in the UK, using change.org, from local community issues to company issues to national issues.

John Coventry: Here are three campaigns that we highlight because of the interesting nature of how the engagement, both online and offline, worked with the decision-making process. Caroline Criado-Perez is at the top with a now world-famous campaign to get a woman on a British banknote. That is interesting, and we will talk about it in a minute, because it was not just about going after an MP.

Almost all the petitions on the site start with, "David Cameron must do X," which is a problem. The brilliant thing with this campaign was that it targeted the Bank of England, so Caroline could build a cross-party consensus, driven online, to use MPs as advocates, rather than as decision makers, which is a fascinating way of taking MPs with you on a campaigning journey.

The second picture is of Lee Lawrence, who waited 30 years for justice for his mum, Cherry Groce, whose shooting started the Brixton riots. They campaigned for legal aid for four years, but within six weeks of starting a petition on change.org, their local MP, Chuka Umunna, had engaged, the decision was reversed and they got legal aid. The turbo-charged nature and the swift movement-building ability of online are important.

This is Fahma Mohamed. There was an incredible digital partnership between us and a small charity called Integrate Bristol, of which she is a member, and *The Guardian* newspaper. The web has opened up campaigning to everyone in a way that is incredibly exciting and extremely disruptive. It is really exciting for MPs to get on board, too. The way that Fahma took MPs on that journey was excellent.

There are three key ways in which politicians and all kinds of decision makers can engage. They can start their own petition. Nicola Blackwood started a petition on the horrific grooming cases in her Oxfordshire constituency, and she got a genuine policy change—that is a Conservative MP lobbying her own Prime Minister for changes through innovative use of the tool. MPs can advocate for a campaign, as we have talked about, and they can use the new

tool that we are rolling out this quarter, which is the ability to respond to petitions through our Decision Makers programme.

Brie Rogers Lowery: As John mentioned, one of the main ways in which MPs are engaging with our site is by responding to petitions. Along with the extraordinary success of petitions through change.org and other sites, there have been increased expectations of decision makers. People have new tools to demand transparency and accountability from political leaders, and decision makers are expected to engage in dialogue. As we have grown and the number of petitions and signatures has risen, an increasing number of decision makers have been asking us how they can respond, either to correct information, to say whom to target or to say that, yes, they agree and that they'll do their best—or, yes, they'll do what the petition says. Previously, they could only respond directly and privately to the person who started the petition. It was then up to that person to publicise it and update supporters.

Our product team in San Francisco has spent significant time developing the Decision Makers tool, which opens up the dialogue between petition starters, the public and decision makers to help them engage publicly and directly. We have built the tool because, until now, one of the big criticisms of online campaigning was that petition sites and campaigning platforms had not made it very easy for decision makers to engage, sometimes with more noise being generated than signal.

The internet has created the biggest citizen megaphones ever, but it has not created headphones to help elected leaders to listen and engage effectively. We often hear how the inboxes of MPs are bombarded every day with petitions in the form of e-mails, phone calls or faxes that are most often unverifiable and disorganised. There is virtually no way to listen effectively and respond to all the petitions, so change.org's Decision Makers tool changes that equation by aggregating all the petitions to decision makers in one place, by making the whole thing public and by bringing transparency to both sides of the coin, rather than only elected officials. The tool makes it much easier for people's communications to get directly to those who care about the issue.

Briefly, this is how the tool works. Currently, a change.org user starts a petition and people sign. With the free tool, the verified decision maker can now respond publicly, with an excerpt of that response being e-mailed directly to all those who signed the petition. The e-mail notification leads people back to the site, where they can comment, discuss and share the response. We also aggregate all our petitions to a particular decision maker, including elected officials, public officers and companies, in one place. This is a unique opportunity to engage with people on the issues in which they are interested in a much more targeted way than Facebook, Twitter or traditional media. Decision makers will be speaking directly to people on the issues they care about.

We have already launched in the US and Spain, and we are rolling out in the UK. One of the most successful examples is the mayor of Barcelona—in fact, all the political parties in Spain have signed up to Decision Makers. The mayor of Barcelona has responded to over 40 petitions, and he has reached about 140,000 people, which is over 10% of the city's voters. Earlier this month, Matthew Hancock MP signed up as a verified Decision Maker, responding to a petition listing just 34 supporters on saving further education in Northumberland. Of course, there are challenges and opportunities with this.

John Coventry: I guess we have tried to set out in this session the risks and real opportunities in getting involved with this kind of product. I guess it stretches online engagement from the MPs' side in general. It is an opportunity to step away from the febrile nature of the news agenda and to say to constituents or voters, "This is what I really think. You can judge it on your own terms." Genuine transparency demonstrates accountability. The

big problem—the existential risk or issue—for Westminster at the moment is that people just do not think MPs are accountable at all, and this tool facilitates that accountability.

The tone of voice also encourages authenticity. Another thing people talk about a lot in terms of engagement with politics is authenticity and how people sound. Getting used to this call-and-response mechanism and rolling it into regular democratic engagement is important for beating the problems on this.

The challenge is that these things are, by their nature, less centralised, which is a problem for modern politics. I think people have to be able to go and do things that respond specifically to one small group. That rolls into the fact that the internet is, by its nature, unpredictable, so you have to be flexible and responsive. There is no central control, so you have to respond to someone else's agenda, which is quite difficult.

Authenticity, finally, is an incredibly vague concept; it is one of those things people talk about, like "building a narrative" or whatever. No one really knows what it means; it is just something people say a lot. I guess one person's authentic is another person's embarrassing uncle. As digital engagement continues and improves, authenticity will become better, and, hopefully, that will make that two-way relationship much stronger.

Brie Rogers Lowery: We think that is the future of digital democracy—that facilitation of two-way engagement and dialogue between the public and decision makers in a really transparent way.

Chair: Thank you very much. That was really fascinating. Can we please go to Eamonn? *[Interruption.]* Sorry, may I just welcome two of the commissioners who have arrived—Emma and Femi?

Eamonn Carey: Thank you very much for having me here today. My name is Eamonn Carey. I am the head of digital at a company called MHP Communications. We are a PR and communications company. I work with a whole range of clients across everything from big consumer brands to financial brands to people who are trying to reach stakeholders in different ways every day. My job is to advise them on how best they can do that using digital platforms. I work with a lot of start-ups, including tech starts here in London, advising them on how they can reach different audiences as they start, and try to grow their business and become a big company.

One thing I want to talk about today is some of the challenges out there in terms of engaging with the stakeholder audience, and some of the solutions we have come up with. The difficulty with engagement is that a lot of places want our attention. I have here a wheel that a guy called Brian Solis produces every year showing all the different channels that are coming on stream and looking for more and more of our time and more and more of our eyeballs. The reality of life is that time is a unit of scarcity. We don't have an infinite amount of time to spend on Tumblr, Facebook, Twitter or Yahoo!. We have jobs to do and relationships to have in the real world—myriad things take up our time. We cannot just spend time on our phone playing Angry Birds or engaging on WhatsApp.

The reality also is that it has become cheaper and cheaper to launch a new platform. Where, 10 years ago, if you wanted to start a social networking business, it would cost you the best part of £1 million and maybe a year's-worth of development time, now you can work with someone to get something built for £5,000 in about a month and launch it. The propensity for something to get to 50 million users very quickly is far greater than it ever was before.

The difficulty is that lots and lots of places are going to continue to come on stream, taking up more and more of our time and calling out for more and more of our attention. While we have Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr and various public outlets, the reality is that

mobile channels are taking more and more of people's time. The amount of time people are spending on their mobile phones—on their smartphones—is increasing exponentially year on year, month on month. You can see this trend going up and up over time. On the websites we manage for clients, we see up to 40% of the traffic coming from mobile devices, but still only about 20% of big corporate websites in this country are mobile-enabled, so we see more and more people spending more time on mobiles and using tools—specifically messaging tools—to engage with one another that are mobile-exclusive and do not necessarily have a public-facing element. That makes it very difficult to engage with people. People check their phones about 160 times a day—it is probably double or treble that, if you are going to answer that question honestly. The majority of that is spent looking at messages—SMS messages, WhatsApp messages, Snapchat, Twitter direct messages, Facebook, e-mail and so on. We are spending less and less time on calls and more and more time engaged in textual conversations with one another.

There is a huge shift on the way as a result. In terms of my job and my day-to-day, we talk a lot with clients about mass engagement—platforms such as Facebook or Twitter, where you can have a million followers, or 10 million followers, or hundreds of thousands of fans. The reality is that in the shift that is happening at the moment people are moving towards communication with smaller numbers of people, so it is going back to a one-to-one, or one-to-small-group, on platforms such as WhatsApp, Snapchat and WeChat. The trend line is going up and to the right in terms of those platforms.

The big challenge now—for politicians, for brands, for everyone—is that you have all these mass platforms where you may be reaching 1% of your audience if you have a big community on Facebook, and maybe 8% or 10% of your audience if it is on Twitter; but now you have a platform where you reach everyone but then everyone expects a reply, because if I send a message on WhatsApp and don't get a reply I think that is really rude and I take it personally, whereas if I send a message on Twitter or Facebook and don't get a reply I kind of figure that person is busy because they have a million other people messaging them.

The challenge at the moment is how you start to communicate with more and more people and deliver information in a very concise way, and how you communicate with people in what they now call single-use apps. You go to one place to send messages on WhatsApp to one group of people. You will communicate with people on Snapchat in a different way, and with people on Twitter in a different way. Single-use apps become really important, consolidating data becomes important and engaging with information becomes important.

I will finish with this. This is a slightly embarrassing remark to make in here, but when I moved here first, I did not know what constituency I was in. There was no tool that allowed me to put in my postcode and easily figure out what had happened in the last European election, the last set of council elections or the last general election—or, indeed, even to find out who was my public representative across all those different places.

We had been having these conversations internally at MHP for quite a while, and we came up with this tool called the MHP GECO—general election campaign outlook. It allows you to go in and search using exactly those things. Looking up your postcode is coming soon. At the moment, you can look up your constituency or your region and search by candidate name, and you can start to dig into all that information, so it becomes a single-use platform where you can go to pull out a whole bunch of really useful information: how the polls went the last time around, who the candidates are this time around, how you find out whether they are on Twitter, what their e-mail address is, how you get in touch with them and what their website is, if one exists.

We wanted to empower people with data. It started out as an internal tool that we were going to share with clients and allow them to use, but actually it has now become something

much bigger than that. We will launch it publicly next week. The address is mhpc.com/election2015. You will be able to go in and search by a whole bunch of different things. You'll be able to see polls, and we will have social media data coming in through there as well. Ultimately, it is a single-use app. It is your one-stop shop if you want to find out who represents you, what is happening in your constituency, what your representative is saying or what potential representatives are saying.

Making things simple for people and making their lives slightly easier is the joy of the internet. Hailo, Just Eat, change.org, 38 Degrees and all these other different platforms each individually make people's lives probably 1% better every day. Cumulatively that is incredibly powerful. The easier you can make it for people to engage with you or to engage with information, the more they will do it. The more difficult you make it for people to engage with information, the less likely they are to do so.

Q46 Chair: Thank you. We look forward to seeing that. I don't know whether we have time, but could you show us it working now, briefly?

Eamonn Carey: There is a line in the tech start-up business about doing live demos. The website is thinking about it. This is it. Effectively, you can go in and search by candidate, constituency, marginality and so on.

Q47 Chair: Look up Harlow, if you don't mind—my constituency. We can do Meg next. You can have voting records, and things like that—things like They Work For You?

Meg Hillier: Do Harlow.

Eamonn Carey: This is all pulling in open API data from a whole bunch of different places, so we can see voting records, we can see other candidates as they start to declare, we can see results from the last election, vote share, and so on.

Q48 Chair: How will this differ from going on to the Commons website and They Work For You?

Eamonn Carey: We want to try to centralise more information, effectively to allow you to go in and see who the other candidates standing are, and who the other people in this place are, and also to try to make those data slightly easier to find. I could go, "I live in N16, XYZ" and put that in, and it will allow me to see it that way. It is just about making it slightly easier to access and also trying to pull in as much open API data as we can.

Q49 Chair: Would that have the MP's Twitter feed on it?

Eamonn Carey: Yes, and it will allow you to link out and see what they are saying.

Chair: Thank you. I think we are now going to have a conversation around the table. It is very informal, but we need to finish this session by 10 past 3, so we have just under half an hour. We will start with you, Femi, as I think you have a question for the Commission members.

Q50 Femi Oyeniran: I think what your company is doing is amazing, but what I find difficult with all these websites and different places you can go for this type of information is: how do young people hear about it? A lot of young people would perhaps benefit from this sort of site, and being part of the Commission, I have heard a lot more about these sites that everyone else on the Commission knows about but I don't. I vote; a lot of young people may or may not, but they don't know about these things that can help them to come to a decision

about whether to do so. What are your plans? Because I can tell you now that no young person will go on this website.

Eamonn Carey: Awareness is a big problem. It is about trying to figure out who the audience is for the website and then the channels through which you reach that audience. If we were promoting this to our clients, it would obviously be through LinkedIn, Twitter, different ads, direct mails and mail-outs. If we were looking at a younger audience, it would be through Twitter, and we would be looking at ways that we could use Instagram.

The other thing that is overlooked a lot of the time, although we are talking about digital here, is the benefit of just going out and telling people that this is available—going to places such as Hackney city farm, doing a little bit of a demo and talking to people who are engaged, or going to different Twitter accounts that have an engaged follower base.

Ultimately, we are not necessarily going to sell this or pitch it as a tool that everyone is going to use; we need to go out and find communities of people who are already active and engaged and figure out ways to get it in front of them, whether that is through engaging or partnering up with other organisations that have that follower base or fan base and trying to get them to share this information, or trying to create some sort of mutually beneficial relationship through which everyone wins. I think that is the best way to do it.

Q51 Femi Oyeniran: So the aim is not to engage the disengaged but to target the already engaged?

Eamonn Carey: In some respects it is both. Ultimately, as a communications agency, we are engaging with people who are already engaged. If we were going for a different audience, it would probably look slightly different and the way that we would push it out would be slightly different, but ultimately this is for people who actively go out and look for information about their politicians, or actively go out to find out what their constituency is and who their local representative is.

Q52 Chair: I want to ask 38 Degrees something. I know that we have discussed this in other forums, but although I welcome the e-mail database that you have very kindly helped me to create—many people have e-mailed me—some people suggest that you have a machine gun approach: you machine gun hundreds of e-mails to MPs. You say that MPs should respond to that properly, and fair enough if they have the same response, but if the MP is getting 150 e-mails from you, 150 from the RSPCA, and 150 from every other organisation under the sun, which they do, how are they supposed to be able to deal with that? You could have 20 staff helping in the office but you still could not deal with that, because it is ever growing. It is not going away; it is increasing. At one time, you were the only organisation doing this kind of thing. That is one issue.

The second issue is that you say that people who click the box to send the 38 Degrees e-mail realise what they are doing, but they don't necessarily. Some of them do, but I have had e-mails from some people—not from your organisation—saying "I demand that you support Robert Halfon's campaign to do x," because they have clicked a box on the equivalent of 38 Degrees, put their address in and got the automated e-mail. There is an issue of quantity over quality.

The second thing is that although you ask your members to choose the issues, you do self-select a number of issues that you guys are interested in to ask them to vote on. Will you respond to that? One question for change.org: I use your service, which I think is brilliant, but how do you fund it?

David Babbs: First, you and other MPs get hundreds of e-mails not from me or another member of staff at 38 Degrees, but from local constituents who contact them about an issue. That is a really important distinction. Yes, there is a degree of co-ordination and organisation of those contacts which is mediated through an networked organisation called 38 Degrees—

Q53 Chair: But the constituent doesn't write the e-mail; they click a box, put their postcode in and you send out the e-mail from your system.

Meg Hillier : They arrive at the same time.

Chair: And, as I said, when I have been doing my own campaigns on these kinds of things, some say, "I demand that you support Robert Halfon's campaign." So they are not even looking at the thing, because it is so easy just to click the box.

David Babbs: Some of our members certainly use the pre-filled text, but you have to remember that a lot of people did not even know who their MP was before they joined 38 Degrees. The idea of writing to their MP is a quite alien—and in some cases intimidating—thing. It is not something that you do on an everyday basis, and being offered some template text that you can use is often the difference between you feeling like that is something that you can do and something that you cannot. I think that if someone takes the trouble to complete their details and do that, they are entitled to a respectful response. You should not have to earn that right by writing with a quill and posting that letter off or whatever.

A lot of MPs bring that assumption that "All they have done is click a box" in a way that can be really harmful. One of our members, Rachel from South Ribble, gave us this example: "Once I e-mailed concerns I was having with the NHS being privatised because my father had leukaemia and I was worried about whether it would impact his blood transfusions. In the reply there was no mention of my dad or 'I am sorry to see that' or 'I wish you luck'. It was a standardised letter that described me as having sent a standard e-mail to him."

Most 38 Degrees members personalise their e-mails to some extent. With the action being taken today around the privacy Bill, we have not given people standard text but asked them to create their own text as an experiment to see if that is a way to improve things. But the starting point has to be that if someone goes to the trouble of sending a communication, whatever technical aids they are given, that is a legitimate thing that deserves respect. What was your second point? I noted down three and four, but I missed two.

Q54 Chair: It was quantity over quality.

David Babbs: It is certainly the case that MPs are getting more contact online than they were when 38 Degrees started, and there are reasons to think that that might continue to increase. I think that my initial evidence demonstrated that some MPs right now are doing quite a good job with the resources that they have got and others, with access to similar resources, are doing a really bad job. I think even within the current resource envelope it is possible to engage, and some MPs have proved that very well. Seventy-six percent of 38 Degrees members said that they supported the idea that this is something that is funded properly. I do not think that we are talking about vast sums of money or huge banks of staff.

One of the things I learned from engaging with MPs more directly on this—in the first few years of 38 Degrees we did not really do any of that; it was all our members—is that MPs operate like small businesses, and often they are run by people who do not really like or want to run a small business or know what they are doing particularly well. They are trying to run what essentially needs to be a sophisticated contacts centre where large numbers of people are going to get in touch with them—legitimately, because they are elected representatives—but

they are trying to deal with that in Outlook with insecure systems that they have pulled together.

That is problematic not just from a giving voters a decent experience point of view, but from a data protection point of view and things like that. That is stuff that really needs tackling.

Chair: The one thing I would take issue with—as I said, I love online campaigning and so on, and I am involved in it myself—is that 99% of e-mails I get from your organisation and others are exactly the same. Exactly the same template comes through, so I do not accept that they are personalised; very few of them are.

Q55 Meg Hillier: I have a couple of quick questions. I am interested in the question about change.org and funding. I have recently set up a change.org petition, and I did not know how to respond to anybody who had written to me. Now I know how to do that, but one of the questions to all of you is how you can get across to people like us. That wheel was very worrying. If you showed that to any of our colleagues, either you would see a flurry of resignations or you would have people saying, "We cannot do it, because it's just impossible." There is a management of expectations, which we have talked about and other witnesses have talked about as well. I wanted to say to 38 Degrees that one of the things we are looking at is that we have influence as a Commission over what Parliament does, but as you were saying, there are 650 MPs, all rather like separate small businesses. To all of you, the simple, but potentially complex, question is: individual MPs will make their own decisions and have their own relationship with their constituents, but what do you think Parliament could do? For example, open data—supporting or advocating for intermediary bodies like yourselves, inducting MPs so that they know what the options are, and resourcing, which you have touched on, Mr Babbs. What do you think Parliament can do? Although we may make other recommendations, that is where we can actually get the fastest traction.

Brie Rogers Lowery: I think there is almost a need for a tool guide for MPs on everything from how to set up a filter to how to respond to petitions. I think that would be an interesting resource for us to look into. In terms of funding, our business model is based on cause-based advertising. We are a company and not a charity—it is called a B corporation in the US, and it is similar to a social enterprise—so we match organisations, often NGOs and charities, with potential supporters. Because everything we do is about decentralising and giving individuals the same power as organisations through tools like change.org, we also offer the ability for users to chip in to promote their own campaigns. If they are really passionate about signing a petition and they want to promote that to other users in the form of an advert, they can also do that. So there are two main streams.

Q56 Meg Hillier: Can you talk us through one of the ones that has happened? Can you explain how, say, Caroline Criado-Perez's one got funded?

Brie Rogers Lowery: That does not get funded directly.

John Coventry: Caroline actually crowdfunded through the site for her petition using a separate app, and managed to raise enough to get a legal challenge to the Bank of England. It was quite an incredible response.

Q57 Meg Hillier: So that was crowdfunded through one of the crowdfunding sites?

John Coventry: Yes. That was an indiegogo thing, or whatever.

Q58 Meg Hillier: Can you talk through an example of one where you have matched the funder to the funding body and then had success on a petition?

Brie Rogers Lowery: Yes. We have a business development team who work with our clients. Clients like Shelter, for example, have engaged supporters from our user base and then they have gone on to become regular donors to Shelter. They have tested various examples of what works on the site and the adverts that they see and then taken that to apply to a more national and offline advertising model. I think we have got 30,000 organisations who use both our paid services and our free services. Organisations can also come and use our platform for free.

John Coventry: I would like to make a point about the No. 10 e-petition site and how maybe one of the big things that Parliament could do as part of this Commission would be to consider taking that, which is considered the main access point to democracy and Parliament, into the parliamentary process rather than just from No. 10 or the Cabinet Office and actually look at implementing a range of tools that maybe exist already.

If you speak to lots and lots of people, the perceived wisdom is that if I start a petition on this No. 10 petition site and I get 100,000 signatures, we get a debate in Parliament. That site seems to be, from the perspective of many users' experience, set up actively to stop people signing petitions, whereas 38 Degrees, change.org and SumOfUs are actively set up to get people to sign petitions. Getting 100,000 signatures through that system is incredibly difficult, so it is quite destructive for people. There are many causes that not very many people care about but are really important. What we say is that campaigning is not about numbers on a petition, e-mail drops or even demos; good movements for change are about doing things in a joined-up campaigning fashion and engaging right across the mix, using digital as the hub. That is something that is really important. The No. 10 site is the worst kind of clicktivism and it is actually destructive to helping people engage online with politicians. One of the biggest things would be to look at how that is formed and how you could do that better, either implementing a choice of other sites, depending on what people cared about and what they wanted to do, or just doing that in a much better way that is much more productive.

Q59 Meg Hillier: So a sort of free market in there—

John Coventry: Possibly. Or you could just use us: we can have the monopoly. Whichever.

Ultimately, that is a huge step, because currently lots and lots of people think they are being told a story and that turns out not to be true.

Q60 Helen Milner: I want, mainly, to go back to what Meg asked. I am a 38 Degrees member and I think getting 72,000 responses in less than a week is amazing; 72,000 people have told us what they think, and I am sure you are going to send us the whole survey.

I think, though, that what you do with 38 Degrees—I am more familiar with 38 Degrees than the other sites we have looked at today—is that you give us an opportunity to engage. Meg and Robert are also expressing a real frustration: they want to respond appropriately and they just do not have time. I do not think it is about giving them more time or more staff; technology can be cleverer and I would really love to know if you have any answers for that.

My other question is this. We had evidence from YouGov, which told us that, other than voting, only 9% of the adult population engage with the work of Parliament. Have you any evidence that you are helping people who were not in that 9% before to get engaged? I would really like the Commission to dramatically increase the engagement and participation of the

British public, through the use of digital, but more people sending these guys e-mails is not going to make that happen. So how do we square that circle?

David Babbs: About two thirds of 38 Degrees members tell us that they were not doing politically active stuff before they joined, either because they had never done such things or they once did, a long time ago, but stopped because they decided it was not for them. Obviously, there are also people within the 38 Degrees membership who have been active members of Amnesty for years, but a huge number of people within our membership have got involved through 38 Degrees. That is often because of being part of a campaign that is successful. We received messages after we persuaded the Government to change its mind about selling off the forests, along the lines of, "I signed this petition with a real sense of doubt about whether it was worth it, but then it worked. So sign me up." That sense of it having an effect is really important. That is where it is going to be quite hard for you as a Commission to think about online engagement in isolation from all the other problems that exist with the way our democracy functions.

The last time I was in here talking about these issues was with Graham Allen's Select Committee on Political and Constitutional Reform, and thinking about it from the perspective of voter engagement. Our members said lots of the same things in response to both surveys, because the medium and the message and the structure—a lot of this is about power, isn't it?

Some reasons why 38 Degrees is irritating to MPs are about technology and the frictions involved in engaging with lots of people, but some of it is about accountability and challenges to positions that MPs are taking. It is tricky to make those distinctions, but one thing that this Commission could try to do is identify which bits of what is so irritating about online engagement are pointless, needless administrative irritations and which bits are the kind of irritation that I think, actually, it is the job of organisations like 38 Degrees to do. We should be challenging to politicians, because you need a civil society that holds politicians to account and challenges their power.

Q61 Meg Hillier: Can I ask one technical question? Sorry to interrupt you. I know you are not quite finished. Do you have a system where, when the button is pressed, they save up and send all at the same time? Sometimes that has frozen systems here, which is counter-effectual. Obviously, I still answer the letters, but in the meantime nothing else gets through, including important, serious casework. I am not in the office most of the time at that point, dealing with the difficulty: it just pisses off a lot of staff who are trying to deal with some serious personal crises from constituents, who might think their e-mail has got through, although it has not. Do you do that? Have you thought about the consequences of that?

David Babbs: No, we don't. The e-mails are sent by 38 Degrees members to their MP at the point when a member chooses to send them. There is the reality of how people think about things. I think this is a general phenomenon, but it may be accentuated online. People respond to what is urgent, so you are more likely to get correspondence about a vote that is happening in a few days' time. Also, obviously, the way in which parliamentary procedure is timetabled means that you know that a vote is going to happen only a few days beforehand or, in the case of the surveillance Bill, which is going through today, nobody saw that before—

Chair: We have 15 minutes, so can we speed up the questions? We'll go to Paul and then Cristina.

Q62 Paul Kane: First, thank you very much for your evidence—that is to all three groups. My question is of a more generic nature. I'm a technologist, not a politician, I'm delighted to say, but you are bombarding MPs with your users' comments and concerns. You

are effectively trying to set up petitions for users. Is there a forum or are you thinking about forums where you can have a learned debate, where your user groups can get together, either for an argument or against an argument, and you can then in effect collectively send your learned opinions in to the MPs, so that they can see that "50,000 people would like you to vote in favour of this for the following reasons and 50,000 people want you to vote against for the following reasons," and then the MP can have an internal discussion and you can use open tools to make that publicly available. Are you going down that path, and if not, why not?

David Babbs: What we do a lot, and are keen to do more, is set up forums where decision makers and 38 Degrees members can come face to face and discuss issues. For example, last Thursday, we had an event at which 38 Degrees members with concerns about zero-hours contracts, who are part of our campaign on that, came face to face with Vince Cable and spent an hour discussing the issue, sharing their concerns and sharing, in many cases, their personal stories about—

Q63 Meg Hillier: Mr Babbs, I have to interrupt you on that, because it happened to me, but it wasn't a genuine meeting. People in my area were saying, "Oh, it's great we're meeting you for two hours on Monday morning." That was on Friday evening. We discovered that 38 Degrees had advertised to people to come and meet me at my surgery, which is for constituents. I will happily meet constituents if they come, but to have 20 people or whatever come to a surgery where I only have people coming to see about individual cases was not honest. If I had been contacted by individual constituents to meet me, of course I would have met them—that wouldn't be a problem—but you were putting yourself up as an intermediary on a false premise in that case. You then lose good will. I think what you do is very good—a lot of it—but that sort of thing just causes annoyance and gets in the way of dialogue between me or Robert and our constituents directly. We do that anyway; I am always meeting constituents—

David Babbs: I am sorry: I don't quite understand what you are describing.

Q64 Meg Hillier: A meeting was advertised: "We have secured a meeting with Meg Hillier." You had not told me about the meeting. What you had done was advertised to your members to turn up en masse to a surgery to which individual constituents turn up with their individual cases as though that was a meeting that you had agreed for two hours, which was actually the whole of my surgery time. My surgery is advertised on my website anyway, and anyone can turn up to it without 38 Degrees being an intermediary.

David Babbs: It sounds like what probably happened was this. A local member would have rung up your office, and there was a misunderstanding about what—

Q65 Meg Hillier: No, they didn't ring up my office. That is the whole point: I did not even know about it. I am not the only one that has happened to—

David Babbs: In the case of Vince Cable last week, there were 200 people in a room, to which he was invited. Several thousand more were watching it and interacting with it online.

Q66 Meg Hillier: If he has agreed to that in advance, that's fine. But to do it and not let the MP know in advance is the craziest thing. That is not proper dialogue. It is just hijacking the normal, proper engagement tools that I use effectively all the time; I always meet constituents. That was hijacking it. That sort of thing—you talk about having these meetings—just breaks the good things that you do, because people can use that sort of

negative as an excuse to say, "Oh well, it's just 38 Degrees." That is unfortunate because, as you have rightly highlighted, some of the things that you do about engagement are very good.

David Babbs: I would love to follow up with you after this exactly what happened in that case, because—

Meg Hillier: We did that and we got no apology at all. Never mind: I don't want to take over or hijack the meeting of the Commission. Sorry, Paul, I interrupted the answer.

Q67 Paul Kane: Yes, I would welcome an answer from all three of you, really. Do you have learned papers so that your constituents, your people, your users can decide which camp they wish to go for—those in favour of a particular approach or those against? I ask because a petition per se—people can participate in a petition without knowing in detail what they are voting for. It is a knee-jerk reaction, rather than a learned reaction.

John Coventry: A quick point on that: from a change.org perspective, we run a completely open and neutral platform. People come and make arguments on the site all the time, and they generally do that through petitions and counter-petitions. My job is to talk to journalists about these people-powered stories. We had the famous petition started by Lucy-Anne Holmes to get *The Sun* to drop page 3, which was a huge campaign. We also had one started by a page 3 photographer to keep page 3. We had both those arguments happening. I would never claim for these things to be taking place in a learned fashion, to be honest, but they take place in an exciting, accessible and dynamic fashion. We are happy to see that kind of debate. It is not always easy to deal with and you do not necessarily agree with the petitions, but it makes for fantastic, philosophical discussions on issues that can be fighting against each other.

Q68 Dr Cristina Leston-Bandeira: In some ways, I want to come back to Meg's point earlier about the role of Parliament, but before I do that, as a point of information—you might already be aware of this—there is an inquiry into the e-petitions site, acknowledging the criticisms of it, into how to do it well in practice. I encourage you to look for that inquiry and to send in your thoughts on how to do it well in practice.

On Meg's question, what do you think the role of Parliament is in this? Obviously you are all doing fantastic things and have your own tools that you can use to adapt and change things here and there very quickly, and Parliament cannot do that as effectively or with the flexibility that you have. To what extent do you think Parliament should have the platforms you have or to what extent do you think Parliament should not be doing these things and that you should? Where do you see Parliament in all this?

Brie Rogers Lowery: I think they should be doing those things and they should be speaking to organisations such as ours and 38 Degrees on how to better improve those processes, either using platforms like ours or revisiting the e-petitions website to make it more open and accessible. There are two things: how can you engage better and more openly with the public and how can you encourage MPs and Lords to do that and to facilitate that engagement? The Commission is a fantastic first step in that and I look forward to seeing what your recommendations are.

There is huge potential to come together and work with organisations such as ours to see what that would look like in reality. It definitely should be more open. It should not be about saying, "This is how you must engage with us as the public. Here is our very narrow set of rules on how you must do it." It should be about speaking to them about the issues out in the areas where they speak, whether that is mobile or Twitter, or beyond Twitter to WhatsApp and Snapchat and all these things that young people are using. It is about how you can engage

with people where they are interacting and having those discussions, which is highly unlikely to be in the halls of Westminster. How can you go out to those places and engage with them on those issues that they care about?

The centre of this is how we can get people to better engage with politics. That goes back to your question, Helen. I was never interested in politics or political ideologies; I was interested in issues that affect people. That is why I am working at change.org, because that is the core of what we are doing.

A fantastic example, which I love, just last week was with one of our petition creators, Lucy Herd. She started a petition last year after she sadly lost her two-year-old son. She started a petition, because she found that there was no legislation around bereavement leave for parents, that now has more than 100,000 signatures. She has been working to write the guidance. Last week, she said to me, "I was never interested in politics. Never interested at all. Now I want to be a councillor and I want to be an MP, because I can see that you can change things." Just from that very small entry point, on an issue that she was so closely affected by, she has now gone on this incredible journey. That is what I am proud to be part of. There is huge potential. If you are engaging people on the issues they care about, rather than political ideologies or the format that they must respond to you in, you can have a great impact.

Brian Loader: Just a quick question. These are great projects. Two things struck me. One is that you have done a survey—I do not know whether the others have—of your users. On those traditional notions of gender, race or class, do you have an understanding of the make-ups? Typically, we know that certain groups of people are excluded from the political process and always have been. Are you reaching out to them?

Secondly, I have always had a view that the improvement of democracy, which digital democracy is a part of, is a two-way process. I hear a lot from your projects aimed at Parliaments and MPs and that side of the process—I guess this relates to an earlier point on how we are working with citizens and educating them—but your notion that it is just issue-based sounds like a consumerist model of politics. I wonder whether democracy requires a bit of duty as well. Related to that, do you allow or is it possible for MPs, trade unions, church groups or other civil society groups to use your mechanisms to campaign? Can an MP say, "Right, I'm going to use 38 Degrees and start up a campaign because I'm getting nowhere here"?

Q69 Chair: Could you try to answer this really quickly, because we have about six minutes for members of the public to ask less-than-one-minute questions? It would be great if you could give one-sentence answers.

Brie Rogers Lowery: In our case, MPs start petitions on the site all the time. That is the quick answer, and that's great. Do you have one?

Q70 Chair: I have done mainly local issues, like saving lollipop ladies. It's a brilliant thing that you do.

David Babbs: 38 Degrees is strictly independent of political parties. We let anyone start a petition on our site and anyone can be part of it, but we wouldn't allow them to use that to promote their political party. I can share some demographic data about 38 Degrees members in a written submission. The headline is that we are definitely more diverse than most traditional forms of political institution, but we are not perfect. Obviously the internet and internet accessibility is an issue in itself, and that interacts with our membership.

Eamonn Carey: If you have data, we will take them; that is the way I would look at it.

Q71 Chair: Could I ask members of the public to introduce yourselves very briefly and to ask quick-fire questions?

Ed Dowding: My name is Ed Dowding from Highbury. I have a question and a point of information. Do you have an open API and are you planning on having one? On the point of information, there are two start-ups coming along. One is called "Should we?" It is about learned debate and yes/noes, which is quite interesting. Another one of mine is social opinion polling with a quick and easy interface: "What do you think about this?" It asks not just "Do you strongly agree with us about your MP?" but "Do you disagree?" The intensity of agreement then presents that information demographically and geographically broken down, and it shows its relevance relative to the census data, so you know the statistical significance. It is a sort of dashboard for MPs.

Q72 Chair: Before you answer that, we will take a few more questions from the audience. Would anyone else like to raise anything?

Kate Willoughby: My name is Kate Willoughby. I am from #Emilymatters. I was thinking about last time, and something that came up and has just been touched on about asking the right kind of questions. People still do not feel that they relate to politicians and politics, but they are politically engaged, as you were just saying from change.org. I suppose it is trying to find a different mindset and that is obviously what you are about here today, which is great, but I would just like to find out where you are at with that.

David Babbs: We are not a platform. We are a campaigning movement, so we don't do open APIs in that sense. We are very transparent in how we use data. For example, the survey results will be up on our website and people can see that our members work together. It is just not a platform.

Brie Rogers Lowery: We have an API that you can use to plug into your site for a petition. I can send examples to you.

John Coventry: I am a big fan. An excellent idea. Good stuff.

Eamonn Carey: We don't have them yet. We pull in from much of our APIs, but eventually, as we start adding our own data, we will probably will.

Chair: Thank you very much for that fascinating stuff. I am grateful to you all. We look forward to the new GECO coming out. As I think Meg said, TheyWorkForYou is very good, but it has a lot of algorithm problems.

Meg Hillier: Just for the record, they do try to correct them, but it is a constant game of catch-up.

Chair: I tend to look at it more than *Hansard* because it is easier to find my speeches on there than on *Hansard*, with apologies to the House of Commons Clerks who are present.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: **Brian Loader**, Director, School of Social and Political Sciences, University of York, **Douglas Carswell MP** and **Lord Knight of Weymouth** gave evidence.

Q73 Chair: We now come to the second session. If the witnesses who have just spoken want to stay in their seats, they are very welcome to do so. The first is Brian Loader who, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, is director of the School of Social and Political Sciences at the university of York. Brian was born in Zimbabwe and grew up in Surrey. He studied

politics and sociology and joined the department of sociology at York university as a senior lecturer to pursue academic interests in new media such as—this is a grand word—socio-political diffusion. I will be interested to find out what that means when you speak.

Douglas Carswell is over there, on the right at the end of the table. He is a big advocate of direct democracy. He has written a book on that and on the role of the internet in politics, which is a must-read. It is one of those rare books that is readable and possible to understand as well. He is probably the biggest advocate in Parliament of direct engagement, and he was thinking these things long before many.

Then, of course, we have Lord Knight. I don't know if I am allowed to call you by your first name, Jim.

Lord Knight: You certainly are.

Chair: Thank you. He is the former MP for South Dorset, which he represented between 2001 and 2010. He has been a Minister of State—there are too many things to mention here—and you are spokesperson, Jim, on environment, food and rural affairs.

Lord Knight: I was, but not any more.

Chair: You were, but you are now managing director of online learning at TSL Education, the largest network of teachers in the world. Could I ask you to start off, Jim? You have just over five minutes.

Lord Knight: I start by saying how delighted I am to be asked to give evidence to you. I think the work of the Commission is vital. Why? Because it feels like the public's engagement with politicians and Parliament is at an all-time low, although not necessarily their engagement with political issues. Some of the reasons for that are related to digital technology. The expenses scandal would not have happened without the ability to leak records digitally, and the hacking scandal would not have happened without intercepts of digital technology, but it is also true that digital technology is the most powerful communication and engagement set of tools ever invented. The opportunity exists to mitigate some of the disengagement by using the power of interactive communications technology, and ultimately, it also needs bigger political reform, of course. David mentioned that, but that is not for today.

In thinking about how Parliament might do that, I want to avoid the usual mistake of starting with the technology. Instead, I think we need to think about the three main functions of Parliament: the formation and scrutiny of the Executive, of Government; making law, so, the legislative function; and being the voice of those who elected the MPs, so, the representative function. I believe that digital tools can help with all three.

I start with the representative function, which is something I now observe rather than participate in. Parliament spends a fortune on free post for parliamentarians to assist communication with constituents and the public. The building, especially the Palace, is littered with landlines for the same purpose. Neither of these are means of communication that either of my twenty-something children want to use. If, however, I want to use reasonable video conferencing to visit a school classroom remotely, or a business or whatever, I cannot book anything here. If I want a template and some help in easily creating a YouTube video to communicate with constituents—when I was an MP—Parliament is silent. These are all easily fixable and could be funded by reducing the reliance on paper-based communication with the outside world.

There is also the obvious problem that too many parliamentarians view social media, like Twitter and YouTube, as an additional broadcast medium. They are not; they are means of interaction and exchange. Parliamentarians, as we have heard, are inundated with e-mails from the likes of 38 Degrees, but few know how to manage interaction and meaningful

feedback with people who correspond with them beyond just employing more staff. That needs thought and training in using tools like Storify, which I have been able to use successfully since I have been in the Lords, but there are others that we can use to help with that.

I think we need to offer people the option of voting using the same mobile technology they use for secure online banking. That is not within your remit, but it would certainly be more secure than postal voting. If we were to follow Estonia down that road, we could also offer that same technology to elected representatives to assist their communication with registered voters.

Then, thinking about the legislative function, I think the Lords is a good place to experiment. It would not interfere with the legitimacy of the representative Chamber and plays to the Lords' strength as the House where legislation is improved. Experimentation should be around a fourth House of Parliament, after the Queen, the Commons and the Lords—the House of the public. We should experiment with wiki legislation to inform the Lords prior to the Committee stage of Bills. We do not take public evidence prior to the Committee stage as the Commons does; that could replace it. A wiki stage could also be summarised and interpreted in a report by a citizens' jury, if we wanted to use that mechanism, taking evidence from experts, as MPs do at the beginning of a Committee stage in the Commons.

Some thoughts on scrutiny of the Executive: when I was a Minister, the scrutiny I feared most was from the Select Committee. These, however, mirror the vertical silos of Whitehall, rather than the horizontal lives that people lead. We should consider digitally enabling, for example, a children's commission, a commission of elderly citizens, perhaps another of disabled people, and a commission of parents. Parliament could, through citizens' juries or another longer-term arrangement, form select commissions of the public, like this one, to question Ministers. If I was in the Government, that would focus my mind more than anything else.

Finally, I would just mention the additional challenge of how technology is changing our relationship with news—the traditional means by which Westminster communicates with the public. Many of us now get a personal news feed and watch the national news far less. This amplifies the views of people we follow, whom we normally agree with and are interested in. We are essentially amplifying our own noise and filtering out the things we don't want to hear. That reaffirms the importance of parliamentarians, who try to understand issues in the wider context of the connectedness of things, but it is also a huge challenge in how parliamentarians get heard. That, in turn, reaffirms the need to assist parliamentarians in engaging with their constituencies and their communities and not just to rely on traditional communication.

Q74 Chair: I hope we were taking the minutes of that, because I thought it was outstanding. I have long believed in, as you call it, a fourth Chamber, where the public will be given a pin number and will be able to advise and vote on legislation. That was a really exciting way of describing it. In fact, we were discussing it this morning with the MPs. I think we will go to you next, Brian, and then you, Douglas, if you are happy to be at the end.

Brian Loader: Thanks a lot for inviting me. It has been very enjoyable and stimulating so far. I have a long-standing interest in digital democracy that goes back some 20-odd years. I have written a lot about it in books and papers, and I have been involved in action research projects around the country and elsewhere. I have also written more traditional sorts of research. We have a big project at the moment around young citizens, and that is what I want to confine my few comments to today—to young people between 16 and 29. They are an

important generation, and not just because they have grown up with this technology. Some even describe them as "the digital generation". I think that is a bit of a misnomer because it hides the fact that there is diversity in terms of their abilities to use the media and what they use the media for, and it is important to bear that in mind, but they are confronted with significant global challenges, precarious employment opportunities and a whole range of other factors that there seem to be reports on daily. They are, of course, absolutely disillusioned and fed up with traditional mainstream politics, and you know that all the data that say that are true.

The concern with digital democracy, in some senses over the last 20 years that I have been looking at it, is that it has often seemed to be used as a technological fix—that is to say, there is never any kind of suggestion that Parliament or mainstream politics should have to change; it is "How can we use this technology to change citizens?" It seems to me that that is why they often fail, and there are dozens and dozens of examples of failure. It is somewhat ironic that over the last 30 years or so, politicians in this country and elsewhere have said that public services should be much more responsive to a dramatically changing public and citizenship, but that never seems to apply to Parliament. It seems to me that it does offer potential.

There are four things, in terms of young citizens at least, that we need to look at in this debate. One is the notion, as I have suggested, that communication is one-way—that somehow citizens should listen to politicians and Parliament. Those days are gone. Young people do not use social media to connect to institutions; they use it to connect to each other far more—it is a way of circumventing those institutions. No matter what wonderful websites we put up, they do not tend to connect to them.

Young citizens, equally, should no longer be regarded as dutiful citizens. That notion of a prescribed set of things—rules, behaviour, deferentialism—is, again, simply old hat. There is no point in educating citizens to be different; rather we have to recognise the quite significant changes in contemporary youth culture that have occurred in this country and elsewhere. Nor should we regard young citizens as an homogenous group. They are not an homogenous group; they are divided by class, gender, race, sexuality and all those other things, just as older cohorts are, and it is important that we bear that in mind. Finally, there is another issue, particularly in terms of trust and politicians, and that is surveillance. Increasingly, people using social media are becoming concerned about how it is being used for surveillance, and that may have a detrimental effect.

I guess I would suggest that, before we attempt to build new technological models that are just like the old ones, we should ask, first and foremost, do we actually know what young people think about politicians using new media, and particularly social media? I know enough about politics to know that you don't ask a question if you don't have an answer. Well, we do know a little, because we have done some survey work and focus groups recently with the help of Ipsos MORI, whom we paid to use some of their panels. We have some data, and I will just share one or two things I think may be of interest to you.

We did an online survey using Ipsos MORI panel data from 1,228 UK panel respondents—we had others in other countries as well, but I am just talking about the UK here. Do they use social media? Of course they do. In our case, 93% of respondents said they have a Facebook page. We should bear in mind that they will use it in different ways, but 93% have a Facebook page and feel they could not live without it. They are not always very positive about it, but they simply cannot exist socially in their world without accessing Facebook. They tend to be slightly more in the younger age range—16 to 19—where the figure is 95%, as opposed to 91.2% for 25 to 29-year-olds.

What we are interested in is whether these young people get political information from each other using Facebook. Of our respondents, 46% said they did get information via Facebook over the last year or so. If we then subdivide that and ask them about their interest in politics, the figure for those who are most interested in politics—the people who are much more likely to go on your platforms—and who use Facebook for politics was 64.3%, which is what you would expect.

Of those who said they were somewhat interested in politics—in some ways, this is more interesting—54%, or over half, said they were interested in what their peers had to say about political issues, and they were interested in sharing that information. Even among those who said they had no interest whatever in politics, 35% still said they had accessed political information from their peers and shared it using Facebook.

As you would expect, fewer people use Twitter, but in the UK, usage is still pretty high, compared with other countries. From this sample, 59.3% had a Twitter account—again, quite high numbers of users. The age range is slightly different, with those in the younger age range using it a little more. We asked them whether they followed politicians or Government officials, and 29.2% said they did, which is quite surprising really—quite encouraging perhaps. Again, when we subdivided that, those who said they were very interested in politics were, as you would expect, more likely to follow politicians, with 54.4% doing so. Even among those with somewhat of an interest, 31.2% still followed politicians.

We are almost there. Then we did some focus groups. We took a smaller sample of the survey sample and we did more in-depth focus groups, although they are online, so they still have limitations. We asked them what they thought about politicians using Facebook and Twitter. Again, you might be encouraged to know that the feelings were quite mixed. They were certainly not all hostile to it, but they gave some pretty sophisticated examples of what they did not like, as you would expect, because they know how to use this stuff. Here are a couple of quotes from people. One said: "It can be good because it gets younger people involved in politics, which means that they can have a say in how the country is run and have a better idea of what is happening with our youth." Another said: "I think it is a very good idea. It makes them"—that is, politicians—"far more accessible to the public, especially the younger generation. I think it would get people more interested in politics and debating."

As I said, there were also negative examples. Some of the concerns, interestingly enough, were that they were worried that it made politicians seem silly. They seemed to like their politicians to be serious about what they are doing. They do not like it when they appear to be just matey and friendly online. The style that they wanted, interestingly, was quite conservative. They expect them to be serious people, who know what they are doing and care about what they are doing. On the negative side, people said, "I think that it is usually more of a PR stunt than any genuine offer to engage with the public." Another said, "I don't know if anyone would take notice. Politicians make a lot of promises that they don't keep, so I don't think I would really take note, but that is just me." Lastly, someone said: "I think politicians using social media sites in order to appear trendy or approachable only seems to go against them in the current social climate." Of course, there are masses more; I have just selected a few. Overall, it suggests to me that, subject to some sensitive thought about working with young citizens, rather than talking down to them, placing expectations or even blaming them for not voting and taking an interest in politics, social media might be a useful place to do that. However, it needs to be used carefully.

Finally, just out of curiosity and for this wonderful Commission itself, we wanted to get an idea from our sample of how clued in they were on politics, so we asked them general knowledge questions. One of the questions—guess what it was—was, "What job or political

office is held by John Bercow?" Does anyone want to guess the percentage of our sample that knew the answer to that?

Paul Kane: 93%.

Brian Loader: Well, it is quite encouraging. The answer is 27%. That is a pretty tough question to ask the general public. Mind you, 62% said that they did not know.

Q75 Chair: What was the age group?

Brian Loader: It was 16 to 29-year-olds. We subdivided that group again, but we wanted to take a longer view of that particular age range. Often this stuff tends to be much, much younger, with kids.

Mr Carswell: I think this inquiry is excellent, very timely and very welcome. It is fantastic that you are asking these questions, which need to be asked. Everything that the internet touches, it changes quite profoundly, from the way you buy and sell books to the way you do banking. It is about to start changing the way we do politics, too. It does several things. It cuts out the middleman, and if you stop and think about it, a politician is the ultimate middleman. It removes the barriers to entry, and if you stop and think about it, there are huge barriers to entry. I would describe it as a two and a half party racket, from which the customer feels increasingly excluded. The internet is redefining roles in politics and the role of a Back Bencher. If you stop and think about it more broadly, is an organisation such as the TaxPayers Alliance a think-tank or a campaign group? I suggest that the internet is redefining all sorts of conventional roles in politics in all sorts of weird and wonderful ways.

In cutting out the middleman, there is no shortage of organisations springing up, trying to be the new intermediaries, but as I hope to make clear, the beauty is that we do not need intermediaries in quite the way we think we do. At a very high level, politics is fundamentally about asking who should decide things for us. The wonderful thing about the digital revolution is that it makes that question redundant in many areas. Instead of having people elected to decide things for us, in all sorts of ways we are going to decide things for ourselves. We are not going to need to have things decided for us. I will give a couple of brief examples. Instead of having a national curriculum, I think in a few years' time we will have a personalised curriculum for every child in the country, and teachers and parents will have far more scope to personalise learning. Self-selection—those of us who grew up with Paul Gambaccini deciding what music we should listen to are perhaps used to the idea of someone deciding things for us, but a generation that grows up with self-selection in terms of fairly trivial things such as music is going to be far more culturally accepting of a world in which self-selection is a cultural norm.

I think that politics will itself change, but the question really is what will change. You are still going to need a legislature, and you are still going to need a Parliament. It will still have a role. How will politics change? How will it be changed by the internet? It is quite useful to bear in mind that the House of Commons is basically a creation of a world where the fastest thing in the country was probably a horse, and you needed to elect people to go away and sit in a palace by the River Thames to make collective choices for you. Edmund Burke in 1774 famously gave a speech to the Bristol electorate—you often hear a certain kind of bovine MP invoke him as a great defender of deferential democracy—in which he basically said to the good people of Bristol, "Leave it to me, guys. I know better than you." What they forget is that shortly afterwards, he was thrown out of office by the good people of Bristol, so the argument for deferential democracy, even in his age, did not really work. He famously said that decisions could not be left to people who were 300 miles distant from those who hear the arguments. Of course, in his age they did not have radio, daily newspapers or the internet. It is possible for people in Bristol to hear arguments that are debated and discussed

here, and I think the idea that we have to defer to a priesthood of politicians to make choices for us and let them get on with it every five years is redundant.

[MR SPEAKER *took the Chair*]

What are the things that I think we need to do in terms of changing the House of Commons and politics more generally? I am a great believer in more direct democracy. This does not specifically relate to the functioning of the House of Commons, but I would like us to have an annual referendum. Perhaps we could have it on May day every year. We could allow people to determine a public policy decision once a year. I would like the House of Commons to allow a popular initiative, perhaps using an online platform, so that maybe two or three days a month MPs would not just debate private Members' business or Government business but vote on business that was determined by the general public with the right of popular initiative.

I would like to see the crowdsourcing of legislation, in line with what Lord Jim said. I actually did an experiment with that. You may remember that in the last election, two parties proposed a great reform Bill. I think the Liberal Democrats changed it to call it the freedom Bill. I am not sure what happened to it; the last I heard, it was planning on banning something or other. I created a stub on Wikiversity and said, "Imagine you had a great repeal Bill. What regulation would you repeal?" There are now hundreds of pages of things that different people have suggested need to be repealed. Some of the things that people have suggested I would not vote to repeal. Some of the rules and regulations I think are good. But it shows that you can crowdsource online in order to get a much broader perspective when drafting legislation.

One thing I would love the House of Commons to change is that, at the moment, if you want to make a little video clip to show voters a question you asked, or if you want to cut up and splice discussions that took place in the Chamber, it is incredibly difficult to get hold of the video. Every time I have done it, I think I have probably breached all sorts of rules and regulations that are designed to stop you doing that. I think it should be possible for people to access the video content of debates on the Floor of the House of Commons and use it however they want to use it. If you want to use it to show yourself in a good light, great. If you want to use it to show people that you have discussed Clacton hospital, great. It should be instantly accessible and you should not be restricted from using it as you wish.

I think, fundamentally, the digital revolution creates—I do not know whether any of you have read Chris Anderson's book "The Long Tail". It is ostensibly about how the internet is changing retail. The internet allows endless choice in retail and it means that you can have choices that are niche, distinctive, particular and local, and I think that is a pretty good description of the way politics is going. You will get a long tail in politics, so that instead of having two and a half brands at election time you will have endless choice; you will have lots of niche, distinctive, particular and local brands.

For political parties, I think the internet presents an existential threat. You needed political parties to aggregate votes and opinion before the internet; the internet comes along and you can suddenly aggregate votes and opinion without political parties. I think some political parties may haemorrhage market share and ultimately go under if they don't adapt. Others will adapt and will start to use things like open primary candidate selection so that they do some of the changes that the Five Star Movement in Italy is doing.

I think it is absolutely essential and a given that we need a proper right of recall. I think citizen-consumer expectations will change so much and the internet will facilitate people having a proper right of recall. I think that is essential.

However, I don't think we should worry too much about the tools that MPs use; I don't think we should fret too much about whether MPs are good at adapting to the new

technology; and I don't think we should really care whether MPs understand Twitter. We are soon going to find out the MPs who can adapt to the new technology and the MPs who do not. I suspect that in May next year there will be a strong correlation between MPs who can use the new technology to communicate with the electorate and those who don't. MPs who take the trouble to build up a good e-mail list and to use it appropriately will be much more likely to survive.

One thing I'm slightly suspicious of is digital corporatism. I would hate us to use digital technology as an excuse to create panels of experts and citizens' juries. The wonderful thing about the internet is that it frees us from that. We can have a jury of 80,000 people in a constituency and we can have a jury of millions of voters. We can crowdsource things; we don't need to pretend that we should be hostage to the opinion of so-called experts.

Finally, I don't think we should worry too much about designing a response to the internet. I mean, if you're a party chairman, I would be slightly concerned; I would be looking at open primary candidate selection and other tools. But I think as a Parliament, we shouldn't worry too much. There will be MPs in relatively safe seats who lose because they don't adapt to the new technology, and those who survive will learn to adapt pretty quickly.

Chair: Well, Douglas, thank you very much. I have much appreciated it. I am sorry, obviously, that I missed the first part of your remarks and if I may, in a mildly reproving sense, I will just express my anxiety and concern, and say that I hope that the day will come when you will tell us what you really think. *[Laughter.]*

Now, we wanted Douglas to be a witness and indeed Brian Loader, whom I don't know personally but of whom I have heard, and Jim Knight, because we knew that they were repositories of knowledge and fresh thinking, and would be prepared to share that with us. So thank you very much indeed for your input.

We now have an opportunity for questioning and I am advised by Justine that Brian put a question to an earlier set of witnesses, and if there is a pursuit of quid pro quo, so to speak, or if people feel similarly minded to question Brian on the back of his evidence, which I hope I will have the chance later inwardly to digest, they should please feel free to do so.

I think we have got approximately 45 minutes from now.

Q76 Emma Mulqueeny: I have a question; it is a sort of multiple question, actually. In the research that you did where you were looking at young people aged 16 to 29, was there a difference that you saw with the young people who are used to using social media—so, probably the 16, 17 and 18-year-olds—because they have grown up with it, as opposed to the 20 to 29-year-olds who are just used to using computers to do their work and homework and stuff?

Brian Loader: Not a hugely significant difference. I mean, there were differences. The younger cohort were much more likely to be higher users, but they're all fine.

Q77 Emma Mulqueeny: I am seeing a big difference in my community of young people between them, which is interesting. I will talk to you afterwards, I think, a little about the research that you're doing, because it would be interesting to incorporate some of the stuff that we're seeing. But then I think Douglas and Jim absolutely loved everything that you say, and hope that you've written it down somewhere and you're going to publish it.

Douglas, with that in mind and with the young people—probably, it's the first time we've actually heard people say something like, "No, don't do this", and don't look at

citizens' juries. What do you think about our doing nothing? These young people are eventually going to be in politics. They are not that far away. They are not really kids any more. When they come in, are they going to make the difference anyway? Are they going to make these changes? If they are, is our role as a Commission—in your opinion—to cede this to them and let them make the change? That is what I think I am hearing, so I just want to clarify that. Or do you think we need to actively make the changes now so that when they come into this, they are seeing something that they recognise and that they can work with?

Mr Carswell: I think change is inevitable. The status quo is bust. The current way that politics operates is going to change. When HMV started to haemorrhage market share, it did not really matter what marketing strategy they used to try to get people to buy music through CDs. Selling it through CDs was the problem. I think politics is going to change. You can set up all the citizens' juries you like, but the ability of people to aggregate votes in a way that is free from the control of a small self-serving clique in London means that people are going to demand a different kind of representative where they live. We can facilitate that, where possible, by allowing people to exercise choice. Choice will happen.

MPs are already much more hyper-accountable than they were in 2005. When I first got in, MPs I knew would routinely deceive the voters. They would sign things called EDMs—early-day motions. When there was an issue and they had to vote with their side, but they did not want to, they would sign a meaningless early-day motion and fax a press release back to their newspaper to imply that they were on one side of the debate, but quietly, at 10 o'clock at night, vote the other way. That happened routinely. You simply could not do that now, not because there are 80,000 people watching your every move on the internet, but because there are sufficient numbers of people in your constituency who will spot the inconsistency between what you say in your constituency and what you do here. So it has already made some pretty big changes in the way MPs behave.

I am not sure that young people's disaffection with the political status quo is a problem that can be solved by setting up citizens' juries. If they are disaffected, it is not their fault. It is because they have perceptively clocked that the status quo is an HMV way of doing politics in the age of Spotify.

Lord Knight: May I just say something in favour of citizens' juries? I agree with Douglas on a lot of these things, which is always surprising, but I am not quite the same populist laissez-faire sort of person when it comes to some of this. In the end, it may be that I am just of an age where I struggle with decision making by online referendum, which is where you could potentially go with forms of direct digital democracy. I worry about ensuring that we have representatives and systems in place for people to connect seemingly disconnected things and make decisions in the round in that way. So the notion of trying to ensure as far as possible that people have examined the evidence and heard from expertise and applied experience is important, but I think it is important to open that up to the public. That is why I think that having citizens' juries as part of the mix is worth consideration.

A selection of the public, randomly selected through the jury service process, can hear that evidence in the same way that they do in court and can make a recommendation accordingly to the primary Chamber. They can also hear what the public say through direct digital democracy, and that would be a key part of the evidence that they would hear. But there might be times when they decide that that is the wrong answer, because they have heard expertise and experience from elsewhere that says there is a connection here that is not immediately obvious, particularly, given what I said earlier, with the personalisation of news and the trend that makes it harder for us to hear the rounded picture.

Mr Carswell: I am deeply suspicious of citizens' juries. I believe that the reason this country has been systematically badly run under Governments of all three parties is that

public policy has been prone to the faddish obsessions of the elite—the experts. Over the past 20 years, it is the elite who told us that cheap credit could make us rich, and look at the problems that generated. It is the elite who told us that banks needed the sorts of model of regulation that tanked the banks. I am deeply suspicious of the idea of citizens' juries, precisely because it allows people to give a stamp of bogus popular legitimacy to the opinions of the sort of people who congregate in Davos. It is no way to run a country.

Emma Mulqueeny: The citizens' jury example that we have sitting in our base camp is one in Canada, where it is polled out to everyone in the community; it is not drawn from the loudest voices.

Chair: I would like to hear from Helen and from Meg.

Q78 Helen Milner: I would like to offer a middle ground between Jim and Douglas. In the round tables that I have been part of in the last month, it came through very strongly that Parliament is something that you do, and not a place that you go. Why the citizens' jury is interesting or not interesting is that we need a blend of human interaction, possibly face to face. People in Chesterfield said to me, "We want to see people from Parliament in Chesterfield." Why are they in Chesterfield when we have the internet? Surely they could take part in that debate online, by video conferencing, but be in Chesterfield more often. Why are we slightly obsessed with bringing people's views into Parliament via the internet and sending people's views out of Parliament via the internet? Can parliamentarians not be out in the community, having face-to-face dialogue with citizens and using technology to then interact back with Parliament?

This is about people wanting proper dialogue, and most people—not the exclusive elite who know how to use these tools and who are articulate, intelligent, motivated and engaged—want to have a conversation with the people making these decisions about how the country is run. I love wikis and I have one at the moment, but the focus on saying, "We're going to have a wiki" will not get to all of the people all the time. What we are struggling with is trying to create 2010 solutions for a 2020 problem. I would like to hear from the witnesses what you think the world will be like, and how you think Parliament should change, using digital tools to help that change happen, rather than digital being the change.

Brian Loader: That is a very good point. It is interesting, certainly in the sort of work we have done over the years, that politicians are much more active in using this, or have been in the past, during particular campaigns—in other words, when they need to get elected. They then go into their constituencies; they talk about the debates, have the discussions, and listen to what the electorate have to say. Then the election occurs and nothing happens after that. They never see them; they might hear from them. There are surgeries, but that is different; it is more for personal problems.

The other interesting thing that this technology offers is that you can use different types of media to get around the problem of the public sphere dominated by the white male traditional middle-class voice—a bit like this, really—which was the primary means of deliberation. In some of the work we have done in disadvantaged areas, people have been much happier if you go out with them and create a video, for example, about crime or whichever issue is bothering them, and then invite the political representatives in to discuss it. These people would never stand up and talk to those representatives face to face. They do not have the confidence to do so. However, they were happy to spend hours creating a video—a rather depressing one, if I am honest—and it had a big impact because the representatives could then go back to their chambers and, having had that kind of intelligent conversation, be clear what the issue was. You can use these technologies, although I do not think it is just an

online thing. We make the mistake of thinking this is just about online, but it is how you get a fusion of the two.

Q79 Meg Hillier: I shall whip through some quick questions and then ask a big one. What are your views on open data and what Parliament should do on that? That leads into the issue about what platforms should then be used: should it be via Parliament, or should there just be a free market? Transport for London is the great model for that.

When should people influence things? Often, we get letters from some of the platforms—people start writing when they read about it in the paper—but by the day before a vote, or the day of a vote, most MPs will have decided what they are going to do. So when? Is it before the legislation is even written? That would fit in, I guess, with where Douglas is coming from, and a bit with where Jim is coming from.

The bigger question is about intermediaries versus neighbours. In that last exchange there were assumptions about how MPs work. Actually, Douglas, you said MPs are the ultimate middle man or woman, but we are also enablers, because we will go out and talk to people and then take that up in Parliament. We also have that role of being an intermediary, explaining how Parliament works to our constituents, when they need guidance, whether it be an organisation or individuals.

Some of the platforms that are used parade themselves as enablers but are actually intermediaries, and some actually freeze enablement, because they say, "We will find privileged access to your MP", whereas an MP does not need an intermediary to be accessed. There are a lot of issues in that. Of the platforms, which ones do you think work best, and are they intermediaries or enablers?

Lord Knight: I'll start, and then Douglas will follow, if that is all right. Incidentally, in terms of Helen's question, there is something interesting about the culture of presence in work, generally. There is a guy called Dave Colpin, the chief envisioning officer for Microsoft UK, who has done a great talk that RSA has animated, about the culture of presence. I am a fan, in the end, of people coming together in the Chamber, but I am a massive fan of Select Committees being out on the road, using technology to take evidence and to just be more imaginative about where they need to be.

In terms of open data and Parliament, Douglas is completely right about the parliamentary TV output: that should be much more accessible to people, as should the Annunciator. I would love an app that makes my whole screen go red when there is a vote in the Lords—if the API was published.

There is a whole load of data that Parliament collects and should openly publish and be really relaxed about. There will be one or two things that are legitimately private and remain private, and that will be debated by parliamentarians. That should be open-market. The notion of Parliament predicting and providing is obviously absurd, really.

When should people influence things? All through the process, kind of obviously, but that goes to a core question that is slightly beyond the remit, probably. My view is that one of the keys to improving political engagement with Parliament is to reduce the power of the Executive—of Government—within Parliament, and the extent to which the Executive dominates time. There is an extent to which the whipping system is becoming an anachronism, for some of the reasons that Douglas has identified, in terms of the extent to which the party political system is weakening. What if you can reduce the power of the Executive in Parliament, particularly in the Commons, where it is formed, and enhance the role of the representative, so that representatives become more meaningful?

When you vote on that meaningless—well, that very important—Thursday once every five years, with a cross on a piece of paper in a place you don't normally go to, what you want to do is vote for who will run the country; you don't really want to be voting for your local representative. Perhaps we will fix that, but if we do not, at least make sure that the person you do vote for is given the time and the space in Parliament to do something effective, so that you can have the Hillier Bill on this and the Halfon Bill on that, and so that we know that our representative is able to do something—and we do not have that. That is beyond your remit, but that is at the heart of how I would want to answer the question on when to influence things.

At the heart of it, whether they are intermediaries, informers, educators, enablers or whatever, constituency MPs have a really important role. Indeed, those of us who are parliamentarians without constituencies have that role around educating people, informing them and, to some extent, enabling them. I have been working really closely with Lucy Hurd, whom Brie talked about, on her campaign on parental bereavement leave, and have been enabling her with technology to get significant movement on that issue. That is something we all do when we are doing our job well.

Mr Carswell: I am very strongly in favour of open data. It is something practical that the House of Commons authorities could do right away. I hate to say it, but the European Parliament is better at this than we are. A friend of mine made a short three-minute video of him berating the then Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, and stuck it up online 20 minutes after he had said it, and 3.5 million people watched the video. In terms of engagement with politics, I cannot think of a single speech anyone has ever made in the House of Commons that has engaged so many people. If I were to try to do the same—not that I have the power to be quite as articulate as my friend—I would probably take seven working days to get the video, and if I cut and edited it the way he did, I would probably fall foul of all sorts of rules and regulations. Open source video content, please.

You asked at what point people have influence. I think an online stage when ideas and proposals could be crowdsourced would be great. If you think about it, there is something a little bit ridiculous about the process of private Members' Bills. You put your name in a book, they put your name in, I think, a hat and literally pull it out, and if you are lucky, you have the right to introduce a piece of legislation which, if you have discussed it with your Whips beforehand, might actually find its way on to the statute books. Thus are we governed. Why not have a right of popular initiative, so that every month there would be two or three days of public business? By all means, the Government could whip against a public-initiated proposal, but at least we could see where our representatives stood on issues.

In terms of influence, the real area of influence needed is in the selection of people to stand for Parliament. In seven out of 10 seats, there is no choice or competition in who gets to be the Member of Parliament. People become MPs by working in the offices of MPs. We may broaden the spectrum of representatives in terms of gender and background, but we narrow it in terms of outlook. There is no real quality control mechanism, and it shows.

People often say that we need more free votes and that we need to weaken the power of Whips. The reason why Whips have power is that people are beholden to them individually. I think we need to introduce a right of recall and right of open primary candidate selection, so that people are beholden to the voters. Then every vote becomes a free vote.

Q80 Chair: Thank you. I am keen to hear from Brian, and then I have a round of further questions.

Brian Loader: The only reflection I would make in terms of trying to move representatives closer to the citizen is that one needs to look a bit more at the localities and

what is in place there that can be used, such as certain stakeholders and institutions including schools, local government and a whole array of civic organisations. If they can be encouraged to use technology—not just online; a mixture of online and offline—a set of initiatives could engage citizens.

I think e-democracy or digital democracy works best when politicians feel that they have to access a site. Those are often the best kinds of example of this. There was a classic example many years ago in Canada, where they had a community forum and they were discussing issues. Somebody put up the question, "What are we going to do about these squirrels who keep making a mess of my car?" This started an entire debate among the local community about squirrels, and whether people could shoot them and how appalling that was. Then people came in with all kinds of legislation. It ended up being a really informed debate. One of the local press guys got hold of this and said to the mayor, "What are you going to do about the squirrel problem?" and the mayor said, "What the hell are you talking about? What's the matter with you? What squirrel problem?" He said, "Don't you go online to see what people are talking about in your own constituency?" It is that kind of thing. It seems to me that that is a kind of mark.

The question then becomes not just about Parliament and institutions but about the civic society. In what way can we have a more intelligent debate between both sides of those equations? Can we build the kind of trust relationships that have broken down? What role do technologies play in that? They are not a simple panacea for more deep-rooted problems.

Q81 Robert Halfon: Jim, how would the fourth Chamber idea work? What would you do?

Lord Knight: The notion is a fourth House of Parliament as the house of the public. I am most interested in the notion of commissions, to some extent like this one, but directly populated by children or the elderly—different sections of the population—so that they can start to scrutinise Ministers and Parliament on the basis of their complicated lives, their horizontal existence, and move beyond the siloed nature of scrutiny, which is where problems arise: the individual Government Department might be trying to do the right thing for its own brief, but there are unintended consequences for everyone else.

Data allow us to understand people's lives a lot better, but there would be no substitute for commissions that can scrutinise. In practical terms, we would have to digitally enable them to get over the problem of dragging everyone to London all the time. There would be times when we might want to drag people to different places, and occasionally they might want to come to Parliament itself, which would be important to validate them. To get a properly representative sample—a large group of people who are consistently engaged in scrutinising Ministers, who have to appear before them to answer for their policies—seems an interesting way of starting to engage the public in Parliament and improving the actions of the Executive.

As I said, you might also want to think about the possibility of catching people's expertise and experience as legislation goes through. I am advocating experimenting during the Lords stages of legislation because I would be more reluctant to experiment with the primary Chamber. Given that the secondary Chamber does not have that much validity because it is not elected, it is a good place to experiment. Frankly, why would asking the public be any worse than what we have?

Q82 Robert Halfon: The way I've always imagined a fourth Chamber is that every voter would get a PIN and big issues of the day would be put up on the web. Either by

telephone, text or the internet, people would be able to vote with their PIN on what they thought about the legislation of the day. It would only be advisory, but the MPs would be able to see what the public generally thought about, for example, this thing that is going on now in the Chamber.

Lord Knight: You could do. My view is that yeah, fine, it would be great to have an advisory vote on the principle, but for me it would be more interesting to ask some of the more interesting, difficult, detailed questions that are embedded in it. This week is a really interesting one for me to come and have this debate with you because it is a really interesting week in Parliament. We would want lots of public engagement around whether or not the Bill being debated now in the Chamber is a good Bill that is infringing on people's privacy, and around whether, on Friday, when the Lords debates assisted dying, we are ready to make that significant change, morally, in how we deal with terminal illness.

Those are two massively important debates going on in Parliament this week. I have had no correspondence from the public on the Bill being discussed in the Chamber, but then I guess it has been a bit of a hurry. I have had loads of correspondence on assisted dying, but most of it by letter, which I find completely bizarre. We need to find the way through, have the debate and open up the notion of a fourth House, which is fundamentally what you are debating in this commission.

Chair: Cristina, Paul and Femi, I am keen to get you all in, but we do not have very long.

Q83 Dr Cristina Leston-Bandeira: My questions are a bit disparate, for which I apologise. Douglas, you were saying that if MPs cannot use the technology, they won't be here for very long, and that is fair enough, but to what extent should Parliament do something about that as an institution? You mentioned open data, which is something that Parliament as an institution can do, but what else can Parliament do to support the 650 different businesses that are running here to communicate more effectively? What sort of support could there be?

My other question is very different. It is about what you said just now, but also about your new role, in terms of education. Parliament already does a lot with schools. How can Parliament work even more effectively with schools to promote engagement?

Mr Carswell: There is only one point of contention that I have with the way in which the House of Commons inhibits me from communicating with voters and that is access to video stream when I want it. That is the only issue.

I will let you into a secret. I actually quite like it that other MPs are a bit slow at using this stuff. I would rather you didn't encourage them. I think I sent the first tweet from the Chamber of the House of Commons and, shortly afterwards, a group of MPs seriously suggested that iPads and Twitter should be banned from the House of Commons. If that is their attitude, great—let's see what happens in May next year.

Lord Knight: On schools, the expansion of the Education Service has been a really good thing here, and it is great to see so many school kids being able not only to see how democracy works, but to see the history that is here. For security reasons, as I understand it, there are issues attached to having a richer virtual tour experience. I would like to see a way of fixing that. Then—what I said earlier—I would love to see the very simple thing of some high-quality video-conferencing facilities here, so that I can speak into classrooms on a booked, regular basis, along with the 1,500 or so other parliamentarians here.

Q84 Robert Halfon: We have worked out a way around that. Two or three hours after speaking, you can actually get the video. Download the software and you can get it on the web. It doesn't work brilliantly, but it does get it up.

Lord Knight: Obviously that is something else you shouldn't tell anyone else.

Mr Carswell: Can I have a secret conversation with you afterwards?

Q85 Paul Kane: Thank you all very much for the evidence for the second session of the afternoon. Just picking up on the last point, getting young people engaged is vital, and I am delighted that a colleague from Bath, William Wells, has come up—he is a student in Bath, studying politics. We have somehow to get young people engaged, not forgetting that there is the other end of the spectrum, the older people, who have been around and have a wealth of knowledge. The fourth Chamber that you are referring to is an interesting concept—

Lord Knight: Technically, it is a third Chamber, but a fourth House—the Queen is not a Chamber.

Q86 Paul Kane: Okay. On just using technology, last night I had the pleasure of having a discussion, a pre-discussion, and a colleague, who during this session through live streaming is in effect remotely participating, has a question. How would members of the fourth Chamber be chosen?

Lord Knight: As I was cycling over here, I thought that someone might ask me that difficult question. The best that I could come up with on my Barclays bike—as I suppose I should officially call it—is that you could use civil society. We could incentivise people to engage—if they were active in Help the Aged and similar organisations for that demographic. If you wanted to do it that way, you could do that. Or we could have a more formal arrangement with the UK Youth Parliament, if you thought that that was a valid way of getting representation from young people. Or you could do it with the random jury service mechanism. In the end, weirdly, we might have to consult the public about what would work best.

Mr Carswell: Could you try and have something called elections, where everyone on the electoral roll would have a say, but just allow them to do so more often?

Brian Loader: This seems to be reverting back to an old model again. Is it not possible to think of a different kind of model? These people are not necessarily representatives, are they, and they don't have—

Lord Knight: The commission notion—to serve for a period of time and discuss some different things—has some validity, according to different demographics. The citizens' jury notion around legislation and so on is more about serving in order to look at a specific thing. If it was the piece of legislation being debated this week, you would only serve for a day or so, because it is being done in such a hurry, so you would be on a bit of a winner if you were not that keen on doing it; but with some other things you would do it for a slightly more extended period. But it is a simple task—finished thing—which is why it is different from election.

Brian Loader: But is not there an opportunity to also produce a space, as it were, for deliberation?

Lord Knight: Possibly. What do you mean?

Brian Loader: Well, those kinds of models of civic commons, as it were, you used to get batted around: Stephen Coleman and Jay Blumler, some years ago, were wondering

whether it is possible to use the media to create forums that would enable anybody to participate in those debates and discussions.

Lord Knight: So that is where I am interested in wikilegislation—the notion that anybody, and it is completely transparent as to who they are, can propose, table, amendments and in general conceive how popular and how loved they are by members of the public; and then they can advise parliamentarians, who in the end, move them and decide what they want to do.

Brian Loader: While I would not want to undermine other platforms, why could not Parliament think about producing its own platform, which would be a space for members of the public to come in and put down whatever they want to debate and discuss; and then politicians have to respond to that?

Lord Knight: It could do; or you could argue we have already got that and they are doing a reasonable job. Maybe Meg would disagree.

Q87 Chair: In talking about—if I understood you correctly; I could only just hear you, Brian—the public choosing what would be debated and parliamentarians and Ministers having to respond, were you thinking of some sort of threshold or trigger in the form of numbers of people who could precipitate a debate? We have an e-petition system, as it is, although that is limited and relatively new.

Brian Loader: It is more the issue of deliberation. I suppose it comes back to an earlier discussion, that a lot of the examples used were campaigning examples, that were all issue-driven; and there was no real deliberation that would enable a rich debate and discussion, but not just with representatives, that might be able to include members of the public. In Parliament we can do that through an expert panel; the question is, is it possible to use these media to broaden that out. I do not have an answer. I am an academic.

Q88 Paul Kane: If one were thinking of allocating PINs to citizens who are interested in engaging in the process, would it not be possible to extend that effectively, so that anyone who has a PIN has a voice in the Chamber—in the fourth Chamber, effectively. So then you could find you have commonality of view and you have very dynamic—I am going to say parties—but very dynamic opinions that form consensus, and therefore you have a more informed debate.

Lord Knight: Although that is interesting, my one health warning attached to that is when you look at the comments section on most blogs; and those people who volunteer and get obsessively interested in that would be what in the traditional world you might call the green ink brigade. There is something attractive about the randomness of jury service, for example, which gets over that. That health warning is not a reason not to do that, but it is something that you would have to consider carefully, as to how you ensure that those who just choose to do it because they are interested have the right breadth and the right diversity and everything else, and are not just the slightly obsessive, which occasionally populate some of these things.

Douglas Carswell: Surely the people who choose to do it because they are obsessively interested in it—it is a pretty good definition of people who become Members of Parliament.

Lord Knight: I rest my case.

Q89 Femi Oyeniran: Brian, did any of your young people recommend ways in which MPs can engage via social media; and if they did can you make some suggestions to us of what they might have been? Also, a lot has been said about MPs going out and connecting to the different social media that exist. However, would it be beneficial to MPs to have one space, one portal, that then connects to lots of different social media? So, for instance, I have got Instagram. If I put a picture of this room on Instagram, I can put that on my Facebook, my Twitter or my Tumblr. That image and a caption goes out to every single social media platform. I rarely use Facebook, for instance, because I used it at uni so long ago, but it looks like I use Facebook every day because I put posts up on Instagram every single day. Do you think it would be beneficial for MPs to have a method of publishing information through one medium that then goes out to all those different things like a wheel of death with 1 million social media platforms?

Brian Loader: I will leave it to Jim and Douglas to answer the question about the digital literacy of MPs. On the specific question about younger people, I think it is fair to say that, generally speaking, they were clearer about what they don't like to see. It is quite a rich database, so I am just selecting odd bits that I can remember off the top of my head, but they were sometimes concerned about the security of MPs and what they might or might not say— it could be used against them, as it were. A key thing was that quite a lot of them were concerned that MPs behave in a serious, clear way and do not try to be friendly. There were a lot of data and responses on that, particularly from those who are enthusiastic and think it is a good thing that stuff could be moved around virally and that, if an MP, a party or Parliament says something interesting, it could be shared around and discussed among their peers.

Lord Knight: If you are asking whether we should have a single platform for MPs and hope that people will come to them, I disagree. MPs need to go where people are online, rather than people coming to them. You and I use services that mean that a single post goes to lots of platforms, which is fine until you want to interact. The key thing is how we help politicians and representatives to have meaningful interactions with the people who want to interact with them. Unfortunately I don't have an easy answer to that, but the sites that allow you to aggregate all those social media feeds in a single place, such as Storify, are very helpful in starting to answer that question.

Douglas Carswell: I wouldn't be prescriptive, because I use different social media for different things. If I have a particularly strong view on something that the Government are doing wrong, I will tend to use Twitter to communicate that. I have a number of followers, but in terms of constituency traction it is not anything like as effective as streetlife.com or, best of all, e-mail. Every two months, I have an open meeting in my constituency, and I have never not sold out. We pack the meeting full of people, which we never advertise conventionally; it is all done through e-mail, Facebook and Twitter. You need different social media platforms for the audience in question. I suspect that the really big thing in politics is going to be streetlife.com, but it is evolving. A hall in Clacton can be packed using one form of social media today, but it will probably be something completely different in two or three years' time.

Q90 Chair: I thought at one point that Eamonn was trying to come in. Am I wrong?

Eamonn Carey: On the point about aggregating all the content, Douglas is right that you talk to people in different ways on different channels. The way that you would talk to an audience on LinkedIn is different from the way you will talk to someone on Twitter; the way you post remarks on Instagram will be very different from the way you might talk on Facebook, Snapchat, WhatsApp or any other platform. We may need something that aggregates that. Part of what we are trying to do with Gecko is aggregate that content into one

place. Your point is well made. There is a reason why it is called social media, and ultimately it has to be about engagement and giving people an opportunity to engage by talking to people and replying to messages so that they can make their point and get their voice across.

On the open data question, we are sitting within 10 miles of some of the brightest people in the country, who are working on some of the biggest problems at Silicon roundabout, Kentish Town and all the different tech clusters. It is about giving people access to that. Through TfL, they have created Citymapper, which will go on to be a hugely successful business. By giving people access to parliamentary API data, we will see umpteen different tools and useful implementations. Ultimately, loads of them will fail, and some of them will iteratively improve and maybe become tools that this non-engaged portion of the population will start to use to get engaged. We may have a tool that will be the Annunciator. There is a thing called Yo that you can get now, which you can plug into an API, and it will "Yo" you every time there is a vote. They are using it for missile alerts in Israel at the moment. So there are all these little applications that you can create. The Yo Annunciator tool would take me an hour and a half to make, and it would make your life 1% better probably.

Q91 Chair: May I draw in the two people at the back? If there are others, so be it—we will do our best to accommodate them. But there are two colleagues at the back who wanted to come in, so please do.

Ben Metz: I don't know where to start. My name is Ben Metz. I am running a new project called A Bigger Boat for Open Government. We are doing a large-scale qualitative survey of individuals who are at the cutting edge of engaging in ways to create increased public participation in governance and the public realm.

I am fascinated by this conversation, because it feels like the same mistake is being made in this room as out there, and this has been touched on. People engaged with this are thinking technology is going to save us, and people are confusing that with actually figuring out what the real need is. There is a conflated conversation in the room. It feels like we are thinking about cause and effect or inputs and outputs.

With that in mind, we had, for instance, the idea of a citizens' chamber mixed with Wikipedia. The average number of contributors to a Wikipedia page is eight, and the average number of editors is two—it is an experts' forum. There is a very clear role in policy formation; that is not the same as a citizens' jury or a fourth Chamber.

So, thinking about the conflation of inputs and outputs—and trying to turn my assertion into a question—what would the three of you guys think in terms of the next stages of this process? I realise it is going to continue, but what would you like to see, going forward, from this Commission?

Lord Knight: To an extent, I want to be provocative. I want to provoke thought by saying some things that are, to some extent, the musings of a Boris biker. What I completely know from all the evidence in education, for example—Brian touched on this earlier—is that this is not about the technology, but about how we change our practice in response to the technology. We fundamentally need to change the practice.

As far as this commission is concerned, there is a limit to what it can recommend. If it starts to advocate a directly elected Executive, that might be interpreted as being slightly beyond the remit of Mr Speaker, and I am sure he would not want to do that.

You are right to say that it would be false to say that all the answer lies with technological solutions; in part, it lies with wider political reform. But if this Commission can start to open up the space, create more of an appetite and a debate, and find some simple

things that Parliament can do to make things easier—using technology so that representatives can interact with the people who send them here—that would be a good thing.

Douglas Carswell: I think a key is to make information available and not to worry too much about what people do with it. People will come along and provide the solution.

One thing that needs to change above all else in terms of how the House of Commons operates is that the monopoly—the Executive—has to propose change and needs to be challenged. If you could have some sort of right of popular initiative, many of the other things we are worrying about will mould around that to solve many of these problems.

Brian Loader: Obviously, I'd like to recommend shed loads of research moneys, if I am expected to research this, but aside from that, it might be quite nice to see a recommendation for a number of funded experiments around the country. It might be an invitation for people, but the key thing would be that MPs were involved and would be required to sponsor them so that there was a requirement that they were locked into not only the development, but the evaluation. I would also suggest that you get some academics or evaluators from the outset. Too often, we get invited in later, having not been there at the beginning, which is daft. That would be my recommendation.

Ed Dowding: There are two questions. Do we find ourselves with a set of structures and organisations that are nearer the problem or nearer the solution? Are we able to evolve the Houses of Parliament, the Lords and so on that we have at the moment into the thing that we need in the future, and that civic society will accept in the future? Or, if a well trusted start-up came along and asked more people more questions more often, at what point would Parliament cede power and say, "You know what? We blew it. Let's hand it over."

Lord Knight: The notion that a start-up ends up taking over from Parliament is beyond what I can recognise as something that is likely to happen, partly because it is a fairly powerful vested interest. I guess the only context where that starts to become interesting is around the challenge of global governance. One of the things that technological change has led to is how much more complicated governing is, because of globalisation. Many of the things that we care most about are beyond the power of a single nation state and a single Parliament fully to influence, even if it is just down to the terms and conditions of using Apple's iCloud. That latter is more interesting in terms of global governance and how a bigger technological platform can start to influence Parliaments from a global perspective.

I think that Parliament can evolve. A lot of my thought around wikis being an expert forum, in the end, is about my solution to the problem of the House of Lords. I think that the House of Lords does a pretty job of improving legislation, despite the flawed nature of how it is composed. Ultimately, I think the answer is to replace it with the public and use an expert forum from the public to replace an expert forum of people who have been.

Douglas Carswell: After I published the book *The End of Politics and the Birth of iDemocracy*, I had several people come to me saying that they had developed, or were in the process of developing, a super duper new website, and that if only all the politicians and MPs would populate it and people would tune in to it, it would allow us to make decisions that Parliament makes. The problem is not a technological platform, however; we have got the platform. It is here, and it has been here for a long time. It worked surprisingly well until a few generations ago. The question is how to use the new technology to get the legislature to do what it is supposed to do, which is to hold those with power to account and to do so in the interests of the voter.

A hundred years ago, if there was a reshuffle like there is today, every single person promoted to the Government would have had to resign from Parliament, go back to their constituency and go through a confirmation hearing in their constituency. They would have had to ask all the voters where they lived whether they could remain in politics. It was the

ultimate confirmation hearing, but we stopped doing that. Until the 1930s, an MP like me could amend the Budget. Since then, we have only been able to rubber-stamp it. I would argue that Government has grown bigger and more bloated ever since. MPs used to have a right to initiate legislation, so I could say to the good people of Clacton, "Vote for me, and I will introduce a Bill to do x, y and z." I cannot do that now. Is it surprising that the people are disaffected? Until relatively recently, there was not an A-list—a clique of preferred people who are parachuted into safe seats.

I think what we need to do is to recognise that although more people now have the vote than ever before, our democracy has been slowly eroded by subtle changes and what we need to try to do is to use technology to ensure that MPs go back to being what they are supposed to be: tribunes of the people against the powerful, to side with the people against the powerful, and to disperse and diffuse power and control. We have actually got a pretty good system; it has just been messed up in the past two or three generations.

Q92 Chair: Perhaps I could say with reference to the question we have just heard that we had a Twitter question pretty much along the same lines, and I want that to be acknowledged. Specifically, it asked: "If more people engage more often via a direct democracy tool, at what point does Parliament lose its mandate to operate?"

Ed Dowding: That was me—I tweeted that.

Chair: You tweeted that? We didn't think so; we thought that you had come up with a very similar question yourself. Well, that is why it is very similar to your question. Okay; it is a perfectly natural question to occur to people.

For what it's worth, my response is similar to Douglas's. I think that, a little like people's attitudes to Prime Minister's questions, or at any rate the media prism through which opinion about it—including media opinion—is expressed, it appears that in order for an opinion to be legitimate, it has to be all one thing or all another. That is very much a media practice, as you can imagine—to see the world in terms of right and wrong, black and white, good or bad.

Personally, I have a rather more nuanced view. I think it is a good thing that the Prime Minister has to come and answer questions weekly—that is an unashamedly good thing. I have lost count of the number of people I have met around the world—Speakers, parliamentarians and so on—in democracies as well as non-democracies, who have said to me, "We wish our Prime Minister had to come weekly to answer questions." So that seems to me to be a good thing, but when it is conducted at a decibel level that would put to shame Deep Purple, as the loudest band in the world in the 1970s, and make them seem sotto voce by comparison, we are spray-painting our shop window, which is a bad thing for politics and Parliament.

In terms of direct democracy, it seems to me to be a very good thing to extend the range of opportunities for people to say what they think and for them to have a hand in shaping opinion, and perhaps in shaping immediate, medium-term or long-term policy. However, it does not seem to me that, simply because you have a means by which people can immediately express their views, some sort of logical corollary should follow from that such that one should dispense with a fairly well-established and on the whole quite well-functioning system for passing law, communicating decisions and engaging in debate—not when you consider that the people in Parliament doing that have actually been elected to do so. Perhaps they have been elected not by as large a share of the electorate as we would like and without as much enthusiasm as was once the case, and perhaps not in a situation in which, once elected, they can exercise the autonomy or the degree of independence and even scope for potential power that was the case in generations past, but it is not a bad structure.

I don't know whether Douglas would put it like this, but I suppose what I am saying is that I am rather sceptical of what I call abstract rationalism. I am rather sceptical of the notion that just because things aren't quite working, that is a good argument for ripping the whole thing asunder and starting altogether from scratch. You can call me a pathetic incrementalist if you like—perhaps you will—but I feel that there is actually quite a lot about our Parliament that is good, and quite a lot that has been getting better in recent times.

For example, you will often hear people saying, "Oh, well the trouble with politicians these days is that they just all vote for the party line and have no independence of spirit," and they conjure up an image of a golden age in which all these independent-minded souls ventured forth to Parliament in conscientious fulfilment of their obligations and with no regard to their own interest. The trouble with that argument is that, first, people didn't come conscientiously to Parliament to fulfil the public interest; in previous centuries they were busy tending to their estates, practising at the Bar or checking their share portfolio, and they didn't come to Parliament from one year to the next.

Secondly, the evidence shows that over the past 10 years or so—possibly even 20—and certainly over the past five years, Back Benchers have been more independent-minded and assertive than for a long time. If you look at the research conducted by Philip Cowley of the University of Nottingham, you will see that that is the evidence: there is a very large cadre of very assertive, independent-minded people. It may be that they came to Parliament intending to be like that; it may be that they were influenced in the way they voted by 38 Degrees pressure or the smallness of their majority; or, in this Parliament, it may be that they were influenced to behave more independent-mindedly because they thought, "Stuff it, there is a coalition Government, the numbers on our side are constrained and I am not going to be made a Minister anyway, so I may as well do my own thing." It may be for any number of reasons, but they are actually very assertive. I suppose what I am saying is there is quite a lot about the way MPs are operating now that is good. If, however, we widened our horizons a bit more—and that is part of the purpose of the establishment and remit of the DDC—perhaps we might be able to give wider satisfaction.

You would not, I suppose, expect the Speaker to be advocating the abolition of parliamentary democracy, and I do not personally think that just because on a particular occasion there is a feeding frenzy on Twitter on a particular day, expressing a given view, that means that Parliament is somehow undemocratic or illegitimate if it does not immediately adopt that position; but would one want to crowd out those voices? No. Although I am myself—I say this with some shame—something of a technophobe, I set up this Commission precisely because I thought that we were lagging a million miles behind, and that actually in the form you have heard and witnessed today, people like Douglas, and Robert Halfon and Meg, and Jim in the Lords, are still sort of in a minority, and other people are gradually catching up with them, but only very gradually. I do think there is a hell of a lot more we need to do.

Ed Dowding: That was kind of why I threw the question out there. I kind of agree with you; I think, actually, we have a great system, but there are some really just broken bits in it that just need lifting out and throwing away. But if we asked the same question in Greece, in Ukraine, in Korea, in Brazil, there are times when the democracies that we have are incredibly fragile. With Occupy, for example—this is where it hits into the way of government thing, and I think that is a really brilliant point to make—actually people can take the mandate themselves, really very quickly. It is kind of interesting. I am kind of hoping an awful lot of stuff happens around COP 15, for example. That is a wonderful opportunity for citizens of the world to come together and go, "You know what, this is bigger than any of you. We want this." I think we will see more and more of those processes happen.

Lord Knight: I am not completely sure whether it is evidenced, but there is a sort of theory that I have that every time there has been a big communication revolution in human history, be it inventing language, inventing printing, cheap paper to disseminate the written word and now the internet, there has been a significant transfer of power from those who have it to those who demand it. It is just an interesting question as to whether we are at one of those moments and COP 15 will be the next one of those moments.

Brian Loader: What is interesting, though—and we do have to be careful what we wish for; I would agree with what has been said that it is an institution that needs to change—is that at their best these are quite responsive. Institutions like this can be very responsive; politicians can be very responsive when the pressure is put on. The issue is that the pressure needs to be enabled from civil society and that is where the issue comes in, globally and locally and regionally, using this medium. God forbid we lived in a society where everybody talked about politics all the time. This notion of direct democracy is nonsense. It is always nonsense in these debates; nobody wants that. We want representatives to represent us, so that we do not have to spend our lives doing it.

Q93 Chair: Yes. I suppose, with reference to what Brian said, my theory would be: if we were to go down a sort of complete direct democracy route, and just to work on the basis of those who voted, which is how you would have to work, you are in some danger of creating an activists' charter, and, actually, at the risk of being provocative, I would say to 38 Degrees, and they may not accept this: I do think that they have introduced a dimension to politics which is of interest, but there is quite a lot, it seems to me, of evidence of groups of activists who feel intensely strongly about something perfectly naturally seeking to advance their agenda. But the fact that they are well organised and insistent, and they communicate in real time on a large scale with parliamentarians, does not prove that they speak for the majority of the electorate. I only put it like that; I am not saying that you do not, but it does not prove that you do. I was reading about David Babbs's history and interest in the Iraq war, and so on and so forth. If I can be provocative, retrospectively, it is a little bit like: the fact that huge numbers of people took to the streets does not of itself prove that that was a majority.

If we take an example from further back, in the 1980s CND were very effective at gathering large numbers of people, by which I mean something like 100,000 people. I think it was shown by aerial photography that they greatly exaggerated the numbers, but they did have about 100,000 people typically going to Hyde park or Trafalgar square to remonstrate against the deployment of cruise and Pershing missiles. Bruce Kent and co. used to claim that they spoke for the public, but although 100,000 was a lot of people, as a proportion of the electorate it was pretty small. There was quite a lot of polling evidence that showed that, yes, they had the activists, but the silent majority were of the other view.

I would argue that the articulate, vociferous activists from the Coalition for Marriage patted themselves on the back and said, "What a disgrace! Parliament is ignoring us." I remember seeing somebody on *Question Time* saying with a great air of injury what a disgrace it was that 600,000 people had been ignored in the Government's consultation on equal marriage. She said that 600,000 people had made very plain their strong opposition to what the Government were proposing, and she seemed to think that her point was conclusive. I thought, "Yes, that was 600,000, but as a proportion of the electorate that is pretty small." I would argue that the silent majority were perfectly happy with what the Government were proposing to do.

Douglas Carswell: I would even go slightly further and say that there are some issues where even if a majority disagrees with you on something—I think this is the mark of a true

democrat—it is still the right thing to do to vote against majority opinion. That is not because you are being dismissive of voters, but simply because good governance requires, in an age where people do not trust politicians, people who are authentic. Two plus two can never equal five, and sometimes you have to be the person to say that, no matter how unpopular that makes you.

Chair: I entirely agree. Of course, as a parliamentarian, you take the risk that if you do that and locally people strongly disapprove, their recourse is to get rid of you. I think Douglas has voted more controversially than I have, but I remember upsetting some of my constituents by voting for the equal age of consent in the year 2000, and people threatening not to vote for me again. Even if everybody in my constituency had said, "If you vote that way, we will get rid of you," I would have said, "So be it. That is your choice, but I cannot be expected to abandon a firmly held conviction about what I think is right simply because you are threatening to get rid of me. If that is what you think, that is what you must do."

Q94 Helen Milner: I think we need to calm down a bit, because this conversation is getting very Parliament-focused and not people-focused. Something that I am really proud of is that, as a Commission, we are going out and speaking to people, and when we come back to talk about it, we really care about what we have heard. Ironically, I have met people who say, "Oh, it is so nice that Parliament is coming to talk to me," meaning me, because I am part of your Commission and we are going to have a report. They say, "I thought Parliament was something where I went to vote once every five years and that was it. That is what I do: I go and vote for someone. I live in south Yorkshire in a relatively safe seat, so I am never going to change who gets elected, but I thought that that was what Parliament was about." And then you tell them that they could actually speak to their MP, write to their MP or e-mail their MP in between elections, and they say, "Oh, I am I allowed to do that?"

Let us just make sure that the debate is about how we facilitate people to engage with Parliament. We know that digital is a really powerful tool, but we need to be really careful that we do not assume that everyone who is online will automatically engage with Parliament because Parliament is doing stuff better. We also must not forget about the people who are not online at all, so we must ensure that Parliament and Government are doing as much as they can to make sure that those who are digitally excluded are included not only digitally but more broadly. I would really like it if we could talk a bit more about how we help people to engage with Parliament through digital, rather than focusing on what Parliament has to do to change itself and the way it talks internally.

Emma Mulqueeny: Can I add a PS to what Helen said? I just want to say that yes, that is right, and where it is relevant to this is that it is also about how digital has changed the way that people engage and learn from each other as much as it is about the channel. I think that that is a lot of what this conversation is about, which is why we have these two things going on. It is just a PS: it is not only the tool, but how people engage.

Chair: I take your point. David.

David Babbs: Most 38 Degrees members, certainly those who responded to the survey that we conducted before this meeting, certainly do not think that people should do what 38 Degrees members say on every occasion, and I certainly don't think that either. What they would like is an experience of their elected representatives being responsive, engaging with their views and considering them in their responses. I would argue that although 38 Degrees members reflect a particular set of values and a particular set of ways of seeing the world, they are probably more grounded in everyday opinion and experience than the all too often very narrow set of people who normally make decisions.

I think that most 38 Degrees members would also be incrementalists, pathetic or not—I think I would be as well—in terms of recognising that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to how decisions are taken. Our current constitutional settlement involves elements of both representative and direct democracy. The argument probably would be that the internet offers opportunities for more elements of direct democracy to be introduced. There are other arguments for that as well—for example, 38 Degrees is working with people such as Douglas on a better version of the recall Bill for precisely that reason.

Douglas Carswell: Don't tell my colleagues.

David Babbs: Alongside that, there are lots of examples of best practice that perhaps this Commission could highlight. To give an example, Tracey Crouch MP is someone who seems to take digital engagement seriously, but to be honest I think that that is underpinned less by her being tech savvy—although I think she is—than by her general attitude to engagement, which flows through into digital. An example given by lots of our members who live in her constituency was that the day before the Syria vote, she e-mailed—I think—everyone she had an e-mail address for in her constituency in order to ask, "How do you think I should vote? What are your views on Syria?" She definitely said that she was minded to vote a particular way—I think it was against—and offered her reason for that, but said, "Look, I wasn't elected as a foreign policy expert; I am interested in what you think." That is not particularly technical and it doesn't rely on anything in particular—

Q95 Chair: It is a mindset.

David Babbs: It is a mindset coupled with using the tools—you could not have done that pre-digital because stuffing the envelopes would have taken too long. In terms of how people see Parliament and their relationship with it, that is huge.

Q96 Chair: That is extremely helpful; thank you. Ben?

Ben Metz: This is kind of building on what David said, but really echoing and asking a question building on what Helen said: where is the real democratic deficit that this Commission is looking at? We see in the news expenses scandals and a perceived institutional democratic deficit, and the subject matter we are discussing is a digital deficit, but I am wondering whether actually the real focus is on a deficit in the social contract that fundamentally underpins all the ways we engage with the small p and big P political realms, or, more broadly, with the governance of the public realm. I just wonder whether there is a sort of shift.

Chair: I think our reasoning in establishing the Commission was the latter—that there was a wider disengagement and a need for a wider re-engagement or rapprochement, for the purpose of which digital would be immensely useful.

Paul Kane: Just to take Douglas's point: years ago, this amazing institution was set up because the man was on his horse, he was coming all the way down to London and that was it. This is an opportunity to reflect on where we are today, where we could be in five years and where we could be in 10. The Commission's report, I hope, will be structured in such a way that we will have easily achievable targets such as open data for a whole host of things, including video, to get the MPs more engaged in their local constituencies; but also a longer-term view, which could, on a radical thought, be your fourth Chamber. It could be something else, I do not know, but it is a matter of having a foundation there for people to engage in this place and make this place open for constructive, learned, informed dialogue, rather than it being deemed to be some place in London which is miles away from most citizens' primary place of residence.

Mr Carswell: You said "Where is the deficit?" The deficit is that the people no longer meaningfully control Parliament; Parliament no longer meaningfully controls Government. I think digital technology allows you to solve both those problems.

Ben Metz: That is a powerful statement.

Mr Carswell: It is the truth.

Lord Knight: I haven't got as powerful a statement as Douglas, but I would go back to Helen saying it is about what this means to people. People need to believe that politics is a means for effecting the change that they want; and at the moment I do not think, by and large, most people do, because they do not feel they have got access to it. You then go back to what Brie was talking about in terms of Lucy Herd and bereavement leave, where she now believes politics and Parliament is a means of effecting the change that she wants. The irony, though—and it goes back to my point about representation and giving more space and more power to representatives, rather than just being dominated by the Executive—is that as a Member of the House of Lords, unelected, I have more freedom to advocate for her than if I had been an MP, or an Opposition MP certainly, because in the Commons my ability to advocate for Lucy is defined by my relationship with the Executive, and whether the Executive agree. The Executive was fairly sceptical of what Lucy was arguing. They were sympathetic, but they did not want to impose more burdens on employers; but I have got more leverage in the Lords because we can defeat the Government in the Lords. The Executive is less powerful in the Lords; so even though I am not a representative any more, I have more representative power. That needs fixing. That is a deficit.

Chair: Colleagues, it is certainly possible, and perhaps desirable, while there is the appetite, to continue informally. I have got to toddle off for a meeting, which is not a digital encounter, so to speak, but a live meeting.

Lord Knight: Otherwise, we could listen in, while we did it over FaceTime.

Chair: Yes, indeed. I do not know what the Leader of the House would make of that. Anyway, if somebody else wants to take over, in so far as the gathering needs to be chaired, that would be great; but thank you, first of all, as always, to members of the Commission; thank you to our witnesses and those who are contributing for the first time today, which is great. It is thoroughly therapeutic and helpful from our point of view, and I hope it is clear to you that we are serious about this. We may be sort of feeling our way and groping a little bit in the dark, but we are trying to do something worth while with your help. So thank you.

Justine McGuinness: What we could do, with everybody's agreement, is actually break and just have an informal conversation; so if there is anybody from the public.

Kate Willoughby: Yes, the name is Kate Willoughby. I am just wondering, because it is more the committee: when you were talking about involving people rather than just thinking about Parliament—and all the people that you have brought in, who are experts in this sort of field—would it be an idea to have an event, maybe a day, or an evening, an almost networking kind of event, where you are getting people in who are already trying to reach people digitally for voting. There are all sorts of initiatives, but people are not always talking to each other. You could have it maybe in Tech City, something like that. Probably social media companies, I am sure, would love to sponsor something like that because they would benefit; but it would bring in people and then they can potentially work together, as well, because at the moment there are a lot of disparate things happening—wonderful things—but if people link up and groups link up together, youth groups etc. as well, there is a possibility there.

Justine McGuinness: That is a really great idea, and if I come round and have a private conversation with you in a minute then I can give you my contact details and we can sort it out. Does anyone else want to give any final thoughts before we close?

Dr Cristina Leston-Bandeira: It is worth saying that we already have done quite a few events like that. Things have been happening. These meetings are not just the things we have been doing, by any means. If you go to our website, you will see quite a few reports of different things we have done.

Emma Mulqueeny: I am running something in Manchester and Liverpool.

Dr Cristina Leston-Bandeira: We have been to Tech City also and had a meeting there. Femi did a round table with young people on Facebook. There is a variety of things that have happened.

Kate Willoughby: Good. It's getting the word out there as well. Things like Eventbrite are a good way.

Femi Oyeniran: I thought that was a good shout. There is this private members' club that I go to for creative people. I tried to organise an event, and they were like, "No. Our members don't do politics."

I suppose my main thing with the Commission is that we get a lot of evidence from people who are doing stuff to engage, but what we don't get enough of is how we reach out to those people. Frankly, they don't care.

Brian Loader: I am not sure it's true though.

Femi Oyeniran: I am not sure it's true.

Brian Loader: When you say that they don't like politics, you are right; if you go and ask people if they like politics, most people will say no. But if you ask them specifically about things that interest them in the world, they are political; they just don't think they are political.

Q97 Femi Oyeniran: I completely agree with you. Do we, then, have to change the language of politics? Everyone says amazing things. You listen to all the amazing conversations that happen all the time when we have round tables and these meetings.

We were talking about digital and how it can be used in parliamentary business. Ultimately, the more conversations we have, the more we realise that our problem is not necessarily with digital but is intrinsic in the way the system continues to exist.

As you said, I did a TED talk for Parliament a few weeks ago, and I was saying exactly the same thing. People care about political issues, but they don't know that they are political issues or that they can make a change to those issues through the political system. I feel that Parliament needs to do more to make people aware that its job is to make a difference to those people's lives, because that's what people care about. People care about their lives and the things they do in their everyday lives, but they—young people—don't appreciate that Parliament has an impact on them at all.

Brian Loader: I think you are absolutely right. There is a danger that we get all the MPs to start listening, but then they don't do anything. If you are not careful, young people will become even more disillusioned.

Ed Dowding: I want to share a thought on how we do that. It is kind of the same way as how you get kids to eat vegetables. If you mush them all up and put them on top of a pizza, they get exactly the same nutritional content, plus some bread, and they eat a whole bunch of vegetables; it's brilliant. So you can scatter questions everywhere and put them as part of a set of other questions. For example, what do you think about the World cup? What do you think about this guy's haircut? What do you think about that pop star? What do you think about this thing in the news? What do you think about this thing that has happened? Do you think the

Government should keep you phone records? Would you like more bike lanes near where you live? Do you think the age of consent should be reduced? Do you think kiosk sellers should be allowed to do this? Just chuck questions everywhere. Some of them are going to be relevant to Parliament; some are going to be relevant to pollsters; and some are going to be relevant to other people. It is all at the same time giving people a nice, fun, quick "Yeah, I know what I think."

Brian Loader: Generally, there is a danger as well, isn't there? I am not saying that it is not relevant, helpful or useful in its own way, but that does not necessarily produce efficacy on the part of young people themselves about how they can shape their lives.

Ed Dowding: If you couple such an easy engagement mechanism with something— *[Interruption.]* Is that an important noise?

Lord Knight: It is a vote that none of us here have to go to.

Ed Dowding: If you couple it with something called liquid democracy—who knows what liquid democracy is? Delegative democracy? Imagine everyone has answered a whole bunch of questions and those questions have been tagged on different topics. You can then go, "Hah". On issues you can compare yourself to other people and say, "On issues of education, we are 100% aligned, but on transport, we are totally different. I am going to delegate my vote or allow my vote to be influenced by this person on topics of education but not transport." Then you end up with a flexible—*[Interruption.]* Wow, we really do need better parliamentary systems.

So you end up being able to cascade up influence and delegate influence but be able to switch really easily. So it is exactly the same as every five years you vote for your MP, but instead you have a more granular version of exactly the same thing where you delegate votes and interests by topics more often whenever you want to. So if you couple it with something like that you get both the distillation of responsibility and conscientiousness and thoughtfulness, plus the mass engagement.

Q98 Femi Oyeniran*:* I come from a film background. A lot was said about video. I feel we don't really pick up on it. On online space, young people share pictures and videos more than anything else. So Parliament does not really do much video or pictures yet. How does everyone think we can frame a recommendation to allow for that to happen, bearing in mind the potential cost even though most companies most businesses have their own digital person or they have a digital camera? Bearing in mind that Parliament is so far behind, how do we recommend it in such a way that it is not too expensive? That is what it will boil down to— "Oh, you can't do that because it costs too much."

Eamonn Carey: You have to try to make it easy for people. You are right. There is two days' worth of video uploaded to YouTube every minute. There are somewhere in the region of 50 billion photographs shared every day, whether it's in WhatsApp, Snapchat or Instagram or anywhere else. So that kind of explosion of video content has been huge. It is tricky. A lot of the companies that we work with recognise that visual content is way more engaging. People don't want to read reams of text when they can watch a seven second video that explains the same concept or a 15-second Instagram video. It is working with tools that make that process a little bit easier. So there are companies that allow you to simply annotate pictures and add a layer of text or put a drawing on, or whatever it is, and you can send that out to your followers. With video there are lots of tools out there and you can use online. If the video footage were available, you would just drop in it, so you don't have to have some guy who can use Final Cut Pro, Premier or whatever else who has had umpteen years of training and still can't get the effects quite right.

There needs to be some sort of templated system that is easy to use—Brie talked about this earlier—and almost some sort of induction that allows people to understand: "I can drag

this; I can drop it here and move the end point and the start point; and it is done." There are tools that allow you to do that. Those systems exist. There is expense involved in bringing them in, but there are also companies in this country working on that who would be very happy to do some sort of deal on it. There are lots of ways of doing it. There is a training piece, or there is an understanding piece that is the biggest gap or the biggest barrier at the moment. People look at video and go, "That's going to take me hours or it is going to cost me loads of money." Actually it is really simple.

We did videos for a client at a party conference this year which was just me and my iPhone and a really terrible internet connection. Yet still we were making videos and uploading them within two minutes of people coming off stage and people finishing speeches. It is the understanding that it is not that difficult. People's expectation of videos and pictures is slightly lower. It doesn't have to be a Michael Bay production that is put out every time you do something—God forbid. It can just be a video that is shot on a smart phone with a tripod where the audio quality is fine. Ultimately, you are telling a story and getting a message across. If it looks too polished that is where people also start to go, "Hang on a sec, you spent way too long on this. You are not actually giving me an off-the-cuff answer." So there is a training piece and an understanding that these tools aren't as difficult as you might think.

Justine McGuinness: On that very helpful and extremely positive note, I shall wrap us all up. We have had a really long session. We have explored a lot of ideas. On behalf of the Speaker, I should like to thank everybody for coming today. Thanks a lot.