

VOICES

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The Web as feedback forum

Letter from Kwan Jin Yao

I REFER to “Mixed report card for the new media” (Nov 13-14). It is interesting to read Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts Lui Tuck Yew’s opinions on international and regional new media instances.

In Singapore, the perceived absence of feedback mechanisms as well as the perceived restrictions on the freedom of speech – coupled with the accessibility of the Internet – has served as fodder for the growth of our online community.

The question now is whether the administration has its ears and feet on the ground, actively gauging sentiments beyond its own established channels.

In my view, many new media platforms – most commonly in the form of socio-political websites – are invaluable sources of feedback, with articles constantly providing perspectives in the form of constructive criticism on policies.

Complementing traditional media, new media has the potential to act as an informal check and balance on policies.

The key is not to dismiss online views, or to speedily and pedantically discount their significance in influencing the general populace. Instead, the ministries should be

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working actively to integrate these opinions so as to improve outreach measures and policy implementation.

At the same time, the onus is also on readers to discern between fact and fiction, and not take information presented – online or offline – at face value.

The national feedback agency, Reaching Everyone for Active Citizenry @ Home, or Reach, has failed to empower its community of contributors to move beyond mere complaints, and to develop more cogent suggestions. Its affiliation with the administration may have stifled many voices.

The relevant public agencies also need to be more genuinely engaged with on-the-ground concerns to move beyond the status quo, rather than erring on the side of conservatism.

NEW RULES FOR HOT MONEY

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You may have been born that way but you don’t have to stay that way

Letter from Chan Zhi Jian, Jeremy

I REFER to the letters “I am obese but ...” by Yeo Shaun Chee (Nov 12) and “Penalise the fat of the land” by Liew Kai Khiun (Nov 11)

Singaporeans have the right to eat what they like. Mr Liew’s proposal of a “health tax” would not only be difficult to implement but would not solve the underlying problem: How people take charge of their own diet and lifestyle.

I think the Health Promotion Board has been very aggressive in trying to promote a healthy lifestyle. This is both commendable and necessary given the hefty costs, social and monetary, of obesity. However, there is a limit to what the public sector can do to improve the situation and ultimately the commitment to healthy living must be made by the individual.

Thus, I strongly urge Mr Yeo, and other fellow Singaporeans with similar mindsets, to reconsider how obesity affects their

lives. He says that he is obese but seldom falls ill and that his trimmer colleague reports sick often. It is fallacious to conclude that, based on this single anecdote, the link between obesity and health problems can be disproved. By this line of logic, one should overeat in order to avoid falling ill.

The question here has nothing to do with how he is faring compared to his colleague but what he could gain if he were fitter. While I am glad that he is in good health, this does not mean that this is indicative of the general obese population.

The health risks of obesity are clear and well-established. Let’s not trivialise the dangers with outliers.

Yes, genetics play a role but I do not believe that obese people, even if they are “born this way”, are unable to intervene and take control of the situation. I encourage Mr Yeo to change his mindset and keep his options open. He need not be obese and single his whole life if he is truly willing to take charge.

■ SOURCE OF WHIFF IN THE WEST FOUND: NEA

We refer to the letter “A stench in the air in the West” (Nov 4). The odour detected by some residents in Jurong West recently has been traced to factories which could have discharged odorous substance into the sewer that is connected to the Jurong Water Reclamation Plant – a sewage treatment plant that treats waste water before releasing it into the sea. The odour has subsided

since Nov 3. The NEA monitored the air in the area following the complaints and did not detect any toxic substances.

The NEA is undertaking further investigations with regards to the factories involved. We thank the reader for the feedback.

LETTER FROM TAN QUEE HONG, DIRECTOR, POLLUTION CONTROL DEPARTMENT, THE NATIONAL ENVIRONMENT AGENCY

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