

## **Why The Internet Is Buzzing With Campaign Fever**

*The Straits Times Forum Online Story (April 13, 2011)*

THE observations made by Mr Chong Zi Liang ("Too little time to know new candidates"; last Saturday) are spot-on: Given the sheer number of new candidates introduced and the limited time for introductory sessions and campaigning, it is near-impossible for voters to comprehend and assess these individuals independently.

The situation is compounded by the fact that a majority of constituents will know which party or politician is contesting in their constituencies only on Nomination Day. Therefore, it is difficult for them to be well acquainted with their representatives in terms of weighing their credentials, understanding their policy positions and so on. Does it then come as a surprise that Singaporeans are flocking to the Internet to find out more about the backgrounds of the political candidates introduced so far?

Voting along party lines may not be absolutely detrimental, but it does compromise the individuality of the election hopefuls, and might grant a free pass to weaker candidates who might be comparatively weaker in quality or administrative efficiency.

There are a number of ways new candidates can - and should - proactively reach out to their voters. First, even though the upcoming general election has been dubbed the "Social Media Election", the online methods of engagement by the newcomers have been pedantic, conservative and banal. Voters are not interested in superficial updates such as "having my cup of coffee" or "at Block 123 now"; instead, Singaporeans are intrigued to find out about their opinions on socio-economic concerns, as well as possible policy recommendations to improve the status quo.

Correspondingly, through online commentaries or spontaneous letters to the newspapers and local media, they can expound upon their perspectives on national concerns. These hands-on modes of communication would cement their abilities as future parliamentarians, and convince educated voters of their on-the-ground sensitivities and engagement.

Third, walkabouts should be initiated way before candidates are officially announced, and candidates should simultaneously be given the opportunity to work on grassroots activities. This would allow the individual to be more cognisant of bread-and-butter concerns in the neighbourhoods. Under such circumstances - regardless of when the candidates are formally introduced, or when election dates are announced - voters would be familiar with the faces that have been present in their communities consistently.

New political candidates cannot expect media and public attention to be served to them on a silver platter. If they choose to be silent candidates or meek "yes-men", then they might have to pay the price come Polling Day.

**Kwan Jin Yao**