

SPEECH BY PREMIER NATHAN REES

**NSW PUBLIC SPHERE: GOVERNMENT 2.0
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I'm delighted to be here today, and I want to start by congratulating Penny Sharpe and her staff for the hard work that has gone into organising this event.

This is not only an important event in its own right.

It is the precursor to a larger, whole-of-government forum that I have written asking Penny to convene in her capacity as a Parliamentary Secretary, to drive these ideas through the NSW Government.

We'll also make sure the full essence of today's discussions is captured using a briefing paper, produced via a wiki.

So this is very much a beginning, not just a one-off.

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We're here today to talk about new solutions to a very old problem:

- how governments and their people can interact fairly and effectively.

For most of human history, the answer was easy.

It was a one-way street:

- Government dictated
- The people obeyed.

Sadly, it's still that way in many countries today.

Over the centuries, we in the developed or western world evolved the standards we all take for granted today.

The right to vote.

The right to protest.

A free media.

And in more recent decades, things like Freedom of Information laws and Ombudsmen to handle public complaints.

All those developments are historic and precious, and we should never lose sight of their value.

But today, one-way government can no longer cut it.

It's not enough to be able to express your opinion once every four years at the ballot box.

It's not enough to be able to write letters or petitions or hold rallies.

The game has changed – and it has changed forever.

A technological revolution has swept the world over the past 20 years.

Social media such as Twitter, Facebook, Skype and live blogging don't just make it easier to download music, or keep into touch with your friends, or buy stuff from overseas.

The Web 2.0 technologies are 'tools for democracy' too.

We saw that with Barack Obama's campaign last year.

We saw it on the streets of Tehran in June.

And we're seeing it here today because people all over Australia – and maybe even around the world – are following our discussion online through a video and audio stream, via a live blog, and on Twitter.

Faced with possibilities like that, government can never be the same again.

The only question is whether political leaders will work with the technology, or fight against it.

For us in Australia, there can only be one answer.

We must enlist these Web 2.0 technologies in the cause of democracy and freedom.

And that means changing the way we do business.

First, it means greater openness.

And that in turn means governments have to overcome old habits of secrecy and control.

That's a huge cultural change – something that will take years to accomplish.

But we've got to begin the journey now.

Second, we've got to be interactive.

The old one-way street style of politics has to go.

Government in the Web 2.0 era is about listening and responding.

It's a dialogue, not a monologue.

And I'm determined that the NSW Government will embrace Web 2.0 technologies in everything we do.

There won't be one big-bang.

Change will seep through every public sector agency.

Ministers and Chief Executives will make it part of everyday life in government, not an added extra.

I've made a start by getting on Twitter and YouTube, plus having message boards for each region on our State Plan website.

But Twitter is no use if you just tell people what you've had for breakfast.

It has to be a forum for real issues and real problems.

Here's a small example that happened back in March.

A few young entrepreneurs developed apps that allow people to check train times via their iPhone or mobile.

RailCorp reacted by threatening legal action.

Then one of the developers involved contacted me on Twitter, understandably upset at the wall of bureaucracy he confronted.

I spoke to the Transport Minister and we couldn't find any reason to withhold the data, especially given that RailCorp doesn't offer an equivalent service and this information actually belongs to the people of NSW.

Like every good tale, there is a happy ending.

After a bit of technical and legal work, I'm delighted to say a trial data feed started last Monday, with a full feed to start on September 21.

Even that's not the end of the story.

As a result of that case, I've become determined that the NSW Government will do even more to improve public access to public data and encourage the community to develop creative new ways to use government information.

I've asked the public service to work on some ideas.

But in the spirit of Web 2.0, that's not nearly enough.

I also want to reach out to you in the blogosphere as well.

Today I want to launch a launch a competition looking for better ways to provide information to the NSW public.

- “APPS for NSW”.

This is a serious competition.

We're offering prizes worth \$100,000 for individuals and groups to create ideas and software that use government data for applications to be used on websites and devices like iPhones.

The prizes will be judged by an expert panel.

There will also be a People's Choice Award and a chance for the best entry to go to a prototyping phase.

The competition will run for a three month period, with details available on the apps4nsw website:

- **information.nsw.gov.au/2009**

This is all about making government data easy for everyone to use to solve everyday problems.

Anything we develop as a result of the competition will be licensed as open source and freely available to government and the public.

These will be public apps for the common good.

And that's what this whole thing is all about.

Giving new and deeper meaning to what Abraham Lincoln meant 146 years ago when he spoke of:

- government of the people, by the people, for the people.

The Web 2.0 means there is no turning back.

Government will never be the same.

Digital democracy is here – and it's here to stay.

And I wouldn't want it any other way.

Thanks for letting me share the discussion today.

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