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Sundays at 9.10am , repeated Tuesdays at 7.10pm

Bush's Brain and Howard's Election

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Stan Correy: Ever adventurous, Background Briefing this week takes a strange journey from Bush's Brain to Howard's Election. The journey almost needs a Department of Foreign Affairs travel warning, so unexpected are some of the events and strange discoveries.

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Hello, I'm Stan Correy.

For instance, political parties in Australia are legally entitled to collect a confidential database of detail on every citizen. And they don't have to tell you that they're collecting or what they have on you in their files. Because they have a special exemption under the Privacy Act. It's all to do with getting to know you as a voter, and to restrict that knowledge, they argue, would restrict freedom of speech. The Liberals call their database, Feedback; the Labor one is called Electrac. Politicians turn that information around to send you direct and very personalised mail to influence your voting.

And what about George Bush's Brain? Well, join us on the journey. Cynics and left Liberals may laugh with all the usual jokes, like, Does he have one? But Bush's Brain is politically astute and calculating. It will do anything for its owner, and it found the way to take Texas from the Democrats and make it a Republican stronghold. Bush's Brain is a history buff with a deep knowledge of what destroyed previous Administrations.

Here's a recording of The Brain back in August.

Karl Rove: I'm sort of the amateur historian of the West Wing and I used to have a lot of favourite presidential quotes. You know, there's a great Kennedy 'It's not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country'; there's Franklin Roosevelt, there's Abraham Lincoln. But in the last couple of years my favourite White House quote has come to be one from Warren G. Harding. He once said, 'This damn job will kill you.' And of course, it did. He died in office. But it's come to be my favourite quote, because it reminds me, it's come to embody for me what the job can do to somebody. I keep in my office a picture of Lyndon Johnson who accomplished a great many great



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things. But it's a picture of him in 1966 or 1967 in the Cabinet Room reading the latest list of casualties from Vietnam, and literally weeping, and it's a reminder of the enormous responsibility the office carries with it and the enormous burden it can place on any individual.

Stan Correy: Karl Rove is President George Bush's chief political strategist. The casualty lists from Iraq may be mounting, but Rove's Texas president isn't yet caving in under pressure.

Karl Rove: Your president's just doing great. He gets up in the morning early, he's in the Oval Office by 6.15 or 6.30. When he walks in the door, he reads a simple red and white document that's on his desk. It's on his desk every day. It's called a 'threat assessment', and it's a summary of the overnight intelligence about bad things that are going to happen to our country, our people, if we don't take action. I've read one or two of these, you don't want to ever read one of these documents. But his day begins with that. He then meets with the Director of the CIA, the Director of the FBI, the Director of Homeland Security, Financial Security Advisor, and generally talks with the Secretary of State or the Secretary of Defence, maybe has a meeting in the National Security Council and that's all before 8 o'clock in the morning. And his day goes on like that all day long, it's like drinking from a fire hose every minute. I don't worry at all about him echoing the sentiments of Warren G. Harding, this damn job is not going to kill him.

Stan Correy: But the job could knock off Karl Rove. George W. Bush calls his friend the 'Boy Genius' and the 'Turd Blossom', but Blossom Rove is in all sorts of trouble. The White House is under investigation by the FBI and Rove is at the centre of the storm, accused of leaking State information.

Background Briefing's interest in Karl Rove is his status as the guru of the use of databases and direct marketing in election campaigns. He brought that expertise with him when he joined Bush's staff in the early 1990s.

And his methods are now being copied in Australia; our politicians from all parties, their staff, and their behind-the-scenes strategists, travel frequently to America for briefings and conferences on how to win and stay in power, Rove style. The idea is to get as much information as you can about any individual: why they contacted their MP, how they live, what they care about, lifestyle, behaviour patterns, responses to political issues, and then turn it around to design a very personalised, individual campaign.

At Melbourne University, Sally Young.

Sally Young: Well we're talking about letters; For example if someone's rung up their local MP and said that they're interested in the environment or they've made a complaint or something, a note will be added to their file on the computer, and it will say 'Interested in the environment'. Come election time, or even before then, the parties can identify a whole swag of people in the electorate who are interested in a particular issue, like the environment, design a letter that promotes that party's or that

candidate's achievements in that area, and then send that out to those voters who have been tagged with that identifier. So we're talking about mail that looks personalised, it's addressed to you as an individual, it's signed by the candidate or even the party leader, and it seems as though it might be something that will interest you. And the parties certainly believe that it works, that's why they're spending millions on it now, and that's why they're switching to it as a more favoured method. And it's particularly interesting I think, because I don't know how many voters would be too impressed if they knew that millions of dollars were going into these letters that they receive in their letter boxes, and if they also knew that they were on databases and were sort of tagged in these particular ways.

"We're talking about mail that looks personalised, it's addressed to you as an individual ... the parties certainly believe that it works, that's why they're spending millions on it now."

Stan Correy: How the political parties collect the information, even the fact that they're collecting it is interesting in itself. Through a special exemption in the Privacy Act, political parties and their contractors do not have to disclose the fact they are collecting information.

And if you think your digital mail, via email or mobile phone text messages is safe from the polities, you're wrong. Last month the Anti Spam Bill was introduced into the Federal parliament. It also exempts political parties because they argue restricting political messages is restricting freedom of speech.

Those same kinds of exemptions for political parties exist in America and it's begun a new debate among analysts here and in the US about the political impact of the new forms of political communication on election campaigns.

At the centre of the debate is Karl Rove. He rarely gives interviews, but he can be found at his natural habitat, Republican fundraising dinners.

In August, in Louisiana, Rove was introduced to the party faithful by New Orleans businessman, Boysie Bollinger.

Boysie Bollinger: I have the pleasure of introducing our keynote speaker tonight. Some people refer to him as the brains behind George Bush; well if you knew George Bush or if you knew Karl Rove, you'll say that's incorrect. George Bush has his own brain, he's his own man, he's extremely intelligent, he's extremely committed, he's extremely bright and we're very, very, very fortunate, especially at this time in America's history, to have him as our president.

Applause

Boysie Bollinger: But what most don't say about Karl Rove is his unbelievable vision. Karl Rove took Texas apart, piece by piece. He did it as a career, extremely intelligent, unbelievably knowledgeable, and had a keen sense of direction and shifts in attitude, and today Texas has completely flip-flopped in the House, in the Senate, the gubernatorial, the lieutenant gubernatorial, and most of the

Statewide offices in Texas. And this was a vision, that 25 years ago Karl Rove had, that nobody would have believed.

Applause

Karl Rove: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Sit down. Look, the only reason he said that many nice things was I told him I was going to speak after him, otherwise Boiesie would have told you the truth. The truth is, I didn't go to Texas with a vision, I went to Texas because I married a Texas girl.

Stan Correy: Karl Rove also immersed himself in Texas politics, and he did more than just hit the big oil and energy companies for campaign funds. Rove started experimenting in collecting money and votes from smaller interest groups, neighbourhood activists, the Hispanic community. His direct mail marketing techniques turned Texas from a Democrat heartland to a Republican stronghold, and got the Bush Dynasty into Washington, D.C.

Karl Rove: I like my job. I have a fabulous office on the 2nd floor of the West Wing, once occupied by Hilary Clinton.

Laughter/applause

Karl Rove: I have a steady pay cheque, the work is mostly endorsed, and I'd like to keep it. And when in Louisiana in 2004 it's going to be important to keeping this president, the President of the United States in office.

Applause

Stan Correy: Karl Rove may like to keep his job, but rather like Alistair Campbell over in London, he's looking uncomfortable as the media demands to know who ordered the leak of the CIA agent's name. And the very fact that he has Hilary Clinton's old office in the White House is now becoming a liability.

On the phone from the Columbia School of Journalism in New York, Nicholas Lemann.

Nicholas Lemann: All presidents have a political guru of some kind who runs the election winning side of their life. What's unusual about Rove

"All presidents have a political guru of some kind who runs the election winning side of their life. What's unusual is that Bush is the first president for whom that person has been the same for his entire political career."

and Bush is that I think Bush is the first president for whom that person has been the same for his entire political career, and indeed since before he went into politics. So the entirety of George W. Bush's political life has been kind of with the advice of, or under the guidance of Karl Rove, including talking him into becoming a politician in the first place. Rove has been by his side through the entire thing without any interruption. And then we'll get to the point you make, which

is also a good point, that most presidents, not all, but most, have placed their political person outside the White House, usually in party

headquarters, and Rove has placed himself inside the White House so that he can have more influence over government as well as politics and be close to the President.

Stan Correy: That of course gets the political tongues wagging in terms of this issue of how people rate his power and influence, and whether he is the power behind the throne.

Nicholas Lemann: Yes. I think it's a complicated relationship, the relationship between him and Bush. Obviously there's something about it that works, because all presidents before have serially dumped their political advisors as they move through the system. The political advisor is a sort of consultant who comes and goes in the president's life, and Bush has really stuck with Rove. I don't think it's fair to say that Rove regards himself as the puppeteer and Bush the puppet, though. Rove seems to be genuinely in awe of Bush in some way, and to look up to him, and it means a lot to him that he has won Bush's favour. There's a class feeling that you get from the relationship where Rove is the commoner who has been invited into the palace by the Royal Family and is deeply grateful for that.

Stan Correy: Karl Rove was working for George Bush the Elder when he first met George W. Bush 30 years ago, in 1973. It was love at first sight. Here, Karl Rove is talking to the cable television network C-Span a few years ago.

Karl Rove: I met him around Thanksgiving of 1973 a long time ago.

Reporter: What led to the meeting?

Karl Rove: I was working for his Dad at the Republican National Committee and the Governor was at Harvard Business School and Chairman Bush, now President Bush, but Chairman Bush's Chief of Staff said Mr Bush has to be down at the White House and I'm going to be out at a meeting and George W. Bush is going to arrive from Harvard, it's your job to give him the keys to the family car.

Reporter: Do you remember anything else about that meeting?

Karl Rove: Yes. He walked in, cowboy boots, air flight jacket, exuding a great smile, exuding total charisma, it was unbelievable. I mean as long as I've known him he's a guy who is a person who relates well to people and immediately people feel an affinity towards.

Stan Correy: Rove's political career began when he was very young.

Nicholas Lemann: He belong to the category of people who at a very early stage in life became totally obsessed with one thing, the one thing being politics. And he's clearly been a political obsessive since he was 12 or 9, 6, something like that. And has just, you know, he's a very smart guy who has gone full tilt 7 days a week, 16 hours a day, on the business of winning elections since he was a little kid.

Stan Correy: Since he was a kid, Rove has made the career of many

conservative Republican politicians. And just a few years ago, Karl Rove was saying that he media in fact has limited influence, and he knew he could get at voters with great impact in a more direct way: personalised marketing into the home.

Again, here's Karl Rove, Bush's Brain, talking to the C-Span reporter in 2000.

Karl Rove: I was involved in his '93/'94 campaign, gave up when he asked me to, sold my business to work on this campaign.

Reporter: What was your business?

Karl Rove: Political consulting and direct mail, direct marketing firm.

Reporter: When people get those letters, some call them junk mail, what makes them respond?

Karl Rove: You know, if the message has a sense of urgency and a ring of authenticity to it, if it's a cause that they believe is worthy of their support. I mean you've got to appeal to them on an emotional level, but you also have to appeal to them on a rational level.

Stan Correy: Nicholas Lemann says Rove has transformed US politics into a very large version of the direct mail business.

Nicholas Lemann: It's important to know about Rove that he is a direct mail person because that makes you think in a certain way. You're putting together small identifiable groups of people with very intense feelings, and then trying to reach them. So the TV advertising folks are literally broadcasters, and the direct mail folks are narrowcasters. Again, your mind is working in a different way. The former type is looking for the very general appeal to a lot of people, and the direct mail person is looking for a targeted, focused appeal to a group that cares intensely about a thing. Rove is well trained to look for money and to look for organised groups that can be brought into a political campaign if you assure them that you care about the little thing that they care about a lot.

Stan Correy: And that's interesting isn't it, because there is a feeling in politics that people were becoming very cynical at this sense of mass television advertising, there's this sense of almost going back to the kind of local politics of another time, of a pre-media time.

Nicholas Lemann: There seems to be a feeling in politics that the era of the long, long, long rise of television advertising and all that it implies, is kind of played out. It's not that it's not important but it's no longer rapidly growing in importance. And the growth area in politics is the more old-fashioned stuff, the door-to-door political organising of small groups. What they call ground game.

Stan Correy: The ground game, an American football term, is also called the ground war, because when the broadcast media ruled supreme in election campaigns, the airwaves war was all important. At the Center for Elections and Democracy in Utah, David Magleby monitors new developments in election campaign techniques.

David Magleby: We define the ground war to be mail, telephone calls, personal contact and of course the Internet, and a lot of this, Stan, falls what we call under the radar screen, using the metaphor of the air war again, and is often missed by reporters and by political observers, since it's not broadcast. The use of the ground war now is high tech. It can be something as simple as photocopied pamphlet or leaflet that's dropped door-to-door, but that's not the way most of this is done. This is now done in highly targeted ways. In other words, the firm that is doing the mailing, and Karl Rove was a master of this as a political consultant, knows a lot about their audience, and there'll be some of the communications that will be used to reinforce voters preferences and those would be the partisans who you just need to motivate and activate. But there'll be some that will be clearly persuasion pieces that are aimed at what are called swing or undecided voters, and those voters have been previously identified through polling and through demographic profiles and then they are the ones who receive more of this mail than any other voter, often as many as 12 pieces or more a day.

"We define the ground war to be mail, telephone calls, personal contact and of course the Internet, and a lot of this ... is often missed by reporters and by political observers."

Stan Correy: The ground war has already been used in Australia. Here's an extract from 'PM' on the ABC two years ago. Marginal seat MP Ross Cameron said at the time that Direct mail and the information in the Feedback database was very useful.

Ross Cameron: Whenever I have a contact with one of my constituents, I would want to make a notation about it. And so the next time a person calls me, my PA says to me, 'I've got a call from a constituent on line 2. Her name is Mrs Williams or whatever from Telopea in Sturt Street.' I'll bring her up on the screen, I'll see what previous contacts I've had with her, what issues she's raised with me previously, what I've done for her, what I haven't been able to do for her, and it helps me to build a rapport and then it's also true when campaigning comes, I know what to write to her about.

Reporter: How important is Direct mail in your campaigning efforts?

Ross Cameron: I would describe it as the Rolls Royce form of voter contact. Direct mail is very powerful.

Stan Correy: In the 1996 and 1998 Federal elections, the Liberal and Labor parties each spent around \$15-million on TV advertising. By the year 2001, that had come down to \$8-million. The difference was spent on other persuasive techniques, like direct mail.

In America, the master of those techniques hopes that they will work for the Bush Administration and the Republicans again in the election there next year. They're going to need all the help they can get, and all politics is hand-to-hand combat, says Karl Rove.

Karl Rove: There is a lot to do to get ready for the tough election we face next year. The country is narrowly divided, with Republicans and

Democrats almost equal in number, and with the other side understanding how important the States and the outcome of the election are. So we've got a lot to do and I appreciate you helping give a little fuel into the Republican machine engine in Louisiana by writing a cheque and more importantly, appreciate what you're doing today and tomorrow to help energise the grassroots of our party, because that's absolutely critical to our success.

You know, Texas and Louisiana share more than just a common border. In both States we look upon politics as sort of like Friday night high school football, it's a full contact sport.

Stan Correy: In America, the polls are looking shaky for Bush. The Democrats smell fear and confusion among the Republicans. And worse, the Administration's strongest card with the voters, security and the war on terrorism, has become a joke. This year, a satirical chat show, The Daily Show, with Jon Stewart, was awarded two Emmys. Here's how Jon Stewart is covering the aftermath of the Iraq war.

Jon Stewart: We begin tonight with a discussion about this war in Iraq. Remember back in May when President Bush, offered the US this stirring message on Iraq?

George W. Bush: *In the battle of Iraq the United States and our allies have prevailed.*

Jon Stewart: Wow! We have prevailed! Anyway, funny story. Turns out we haven't really prevailed. I'll let the President explain.

George W. Bush: *Good evening. I have asked for this time to keep you informed of America's actions in the war on terror.*

Jon Stewart: This isn't going to be good. Yes, facing an ever-sickening quagmire in the Middle East on Sunday night, President Bush addressed the nation about Iraq for the first time since May.

George W. Bush: *Two years ago I told the Congress in the country that the war on terror would be a lengthy war, a different kind of war, fought on many fronts in many places. Iraq is now the central front.*

Jon Stewart: Because going after Saudi Arabia would be way too obvious. That's exactly what they think we're going to do so we won't. But don't think the President interrupted your Sunday night TV viewing just to talk abstractions. The real purpose of the speech, the most expensive pledge break ever.

George W. Bush: *We'll soon submit to Congress a request for \$87-billion.*

Jon Stewart: Now that sounds like a lot, although Bush did remind Congress it's only

\$4-billion-360-million-902,000 easy payments of \$19.95. So \$87-billion, yes that's ten times what the first Gulf War cost. But, break it down, what's the money for?

George W. Bush: *And we will help them to restore basic services such as electricity and water and to build new schools, roads, and medical clinics.*

Jon Stewart: But sit down, West Virginia and Arkansas, he's not talking about you.

Stan Correy: This sort of popular media treatment couldn't be comfortable for the White House, nor its chief keeper, Karl Rove.

Nicholas Lemann: Bush is more conservative than Rove. My guess would be that Rove was not particularly a fan of the idea of war in Iraq for reasons that you're seeing now, and that this was kind of something that other people talked the President in to and was given to Rove in the spirit of 'the decision to go to war is a fait accompli, you decide how to handle it best politically.' And the overall way that I'm guessing that Rove thought was best to handle it was, a couple of things: first of all to present it as part of a war on terrorism, and sort of notionally tie it to the September 11th attacks, and second of all, in line with that, to sell Saddam Hussein as a direct military threat to the United States. The first part of that is weakening a little but is still in OK shape; the second part I think was probably a mistake because it's pretty clear now that he wasn't a military threat to the United States.

Nonetheless, if I were Rove I would be a little optimistic about the election. The economy is probably going to be in better shape a year from now than it is now, and Iraq is going to be in better shape a year from now than it is now, I should guess, and the United States will be less involved and there won't be people getting killed every day. I suspect that the thinking of Rove and Bush is identify everything that falls under the heading of taking a hit, do something politically unpopular and make sure you do those things before 2004, the election year.

Stan Correy: A few months is a long time in politics, and things may still swing around again for Bush. In a Washington magazine called *The National Journal*, Julie Kosterlitz said the Democrats still haven't caught up on the Republicans' election marketing strategies. Julie Kosterlitz outlined how the Republicans had harnessed the power of the microprocessor to collect and sort information. Here's a reading.

Republicans have begun aggressively collecting information about individual voters attitudes and are using computers to assemble political portraits of voters, in much the same way that retailers compile data about customers for marketing purposes. Thus Republicans have advanced beyond the crude demographic pigeonholing of voters by party registration or by the candidate they say they intend to support. That in turn has allowed Republican strategists to begin carefully crafting appeals to woo voters, who otherwise would once have been written off as favouring the Democratic

candidate, or as unlikely to vote.

Stan Correy: That's from The National Journal in Washington last month.

Australian party officials have been making the pilgrimage to the US for over 40 years to pick up on the latest campaign techniques, focus groups, wedge politics, private polling, and more recently, databases.

The Labor party were the first to utilise the technique, but though the early databases promised much, they lacked sophistication. Today's methods are wider ranging, able to analyse with greater subtlety.

Here's Lynton Crosby, campaign director for the Liberal party, at the 2001 election post mortem talk at the National Press Club. He told the audience that yes, the Liberals in the press and on TV did focus on illegal entrants as one of the key issues. But this missed the point about what was happening in the campaign strategy that Americans call the ground war.

Lynton Crosby: Many media commentators do not see much of the real campaign these days. It does not take place on TV, on radio, or even in the newspapers. It is the local activity on the ground that really counts. Letters to voters, postcards, newsletters, telephone canvassing, doorknocking. At this level the issue of illegal entrants was one of only several key issues.

Stan Correy: Lynton Crosby. The key words in there are direct mail and postcards, though there was not a single question about that after the speech.

The information for the letters is collected by the Liberal party's Feedback database. The Labor party has one called Electrac. The databases work best for parties in close campaigns in marginal seats and it helps if you're the government in power.

When John Howard made his recent ministerial reshuffle, it wasn't only because of opinion polls that caused the change. The Feedback database would have been accumulating voter discontent and communicating that to the Liberal party strategists.

In his press conference, the PM talked about the importance of marginal seats.

John Howard: Well I think this will make us an even more effective government, but eight seats is all that stands between us and electoral oblivion and I hope people understand that, and every opportunity I get I just want to tell Liberal supporters around Australia, Don't imagine that we're some kind of unbeatable or unbackable favourite at the next election. We are not. Eight seats and we're out of business.

Stan Correy: In those eight seats all political parties will be tracking what it is that people care about. Analysts say for the first time the new technology is perhaps delivering real grassroots democracy, but it could also turn politicians into followers, not leaders. Phone calls to politicians and incoming letters are logged and collated. Doorstep comments are

carefully entered. It may be health, or education or the Iraq war, or just some local problem that's not even a Federal responsibility.

In Federal politics in the past, the parties had to rely on getting the same big national messages out to everyone across the parties. Now they can carefully piggyback their pitch on your local issue that they know about through the databases. Getting close and personal with the voters like this all began with Karl Rove. At the University of Queensland, Ian Ward has been investigating the emergence of these new campaign trends.

Ian Ward: Around the world, campaigning looks more and more the same and there's a convergence of campaign methods and styles which has a lot to do with the kind of American influence, but at its core probably resents the intrusion of commercial marketing logic into the task of selling candidates and campaigns. Part of the marketing logic is to

"You try and figure out what your potential consumers want and then you make a product which matches them."

match the products to the consumer's wants and needs, and so in a kind of standard marketing exercise you try and figure out what your potential consumers want and then you make a product which matches them. That of course wasn't possible in the '60s and '70s when we were still in a kind of ideologically driven political era, and in

which parties made programs and put those same programs to election after election after election. But incrementally and bit by bit since the '70s we've seen a more marketing orientated approach, with parties willing to re-package and re-market themselves in very different ways.

Stan Correy: And these very different ways are all to do with countering voter cynicism about political marketing at a national level. The irony, says Ward, is that campaign strategists are using sophisticated marketing to reconnect with voters at a local level.

Two weeks ago there was a political science conference in Hobart. Peter Van Onselen from the University of New South Wales gave a paper, together with Dr Wayne Errington of the ANU on voter databases. It's important to remember that although political parties are actually private organisations, they're exempt from the Privacy Act. They don't have to tell you they're collecting information or what kind of information. As long as it's for electoral purposes and they don't sell it for commercial gain. And the political parties have access to information that's not generally available to the public, such as from the Electoral Commission. It's not only name and address, they also get otherwise confidential information such as date of birth, gender and occupation. And this is updated monthly. The parties can then mix any other public or private material they've collected. And when all the information on a potential voter is collated the whole thing forms a powerful marketing tool.

Peter Van Onselen: They have a whole series of tags on the database where they can identify voters being concerned about issues of transport, health, or whatever, and in terms of how they get that information, they get that information at a first level, anyone that corresponds with a local Member of Parliament, whatever issue you express interest in or are concerned about, that provides them with the ability to tag that information to the database. And if you call an electorate office, a well-trained office will log that information and feed it back into the database, as long as you identify yourself. Actually, even if you don't

identify yourself, for all the people that often do this when there's an issue that they've got particular concern about, you ring an electorate office and decide to let off a bit of steam about an issue you're not happy with that the government or your local member's involved in, that information can also go into the database about you, if you're calling from somewhere where caller ID is available. Because they can actually look you up, using your phone number. So you've got to be careful about that sort of thing, and the parties are able to log it in a whole series of ways, including trawling through newspapers and that kind of thing.

Stan Correy: When the Labor party was in office, they had a publicly funded unit colloquially known as The Animals. It was a media unit that basically helped out the party machine at election time.

The Coalition government has its own special re-election group called the Government Members Secretariat. It's a very secretive unit, and difficult to find any official recognition of its existence. It seems to be run or funded by the Special Minister of State's office in the Department of Finance. The person in charge is Dawn Crosby, the wife of the Liberal party's former campaign director, Lynton Crosby.

According to Peter van Onselen, one of its main tasks is to educate Liberal politicians in how to effectively use Feedback.

Peter Van Onselen: They provide generic literature, for example which local members can skew to be more reflective to their electorate. But the formatting work has already done, and that information can be sent by email to the local electorate office and then used as part of a direct mail pitch using the database system. They also run training programs for the members of staff to become more effective at using the database. This is one of the big issues for parties to become more effective in their use of databases. It's very effective in theory but in practice there's a lot of staffers and Members of Parliament that didn't grow up using computers, felt that it's the toil of walking the streets that makes them get to know the community much better. They're quite cynical about some of this new technology. I think it's too professionalised. The Government Members Secretariat looks to try to overcome that through training and through showing the effectiveness of the database systems quoting statistics back to Members of Parliament at how impressive the database is in terms of seats that have a lot of marginal voters tagged, suffer a less substantial swing against them than do other seats where they haven't identified as many swingers. It plays a very strong role in convincing the local electorates to use the database and I guess how to best use it.

Stan Correy: It's hardly ever discussed, this Government Members Secretariat. We hear occasional talk about the Government Communication Unit which is involved in I suppose government advertising and issues like that.

Peter Van Onselen: The Government Members Secretariat won't talk to the public.

Stan Correy: But it's actually publicly funded, actually its role is very much to liaise with a political party function.

Peter Van Onselen: Yes, that's the interesting question. This idea of where do you stop, where do you draw the line with public funding in terms of helping out for partisan gain for the parties. It's a difficult one,

because in many ways being in government means that you get substantial advantage by being a minister for example, you get extra staffers, you get access to a department, you therefore have a plethora of extra information. The Government Members Secretariat is I guess an extension of that advantage, that sort of information can also be used for database compilation, or for general professional campaigning, or even just for fund raising, much easier to fundraise if you're in government and you're a minister, than it is when you're a shadow minister and don't look like you're even going to get in government at the next election. So this issue of use of public position or public resources for partisan gain is a contentious area and I guess that probably feeds into why the parties are so secretive about a lot of this stuff.

Stan Correy: Peter Van Onselen. He thinks that the major parties don't need to be so secretive about the databases, because if used properly, they can help politicians be better representatives.

But as things stand, very few people know how much personal information is collected, and if you're concerned about what your local member, Liberal or Labor, has on your file, there's nothing much you can do about it.

Peter Van Onselen: Recent amendments to the Privacy Act basically tried to cut out private organisations being able to compile information about people without their knowledge. Now that was obviously I think being done to stop a lot of the direct marketing techniques and campaigns that get done by private organisations about people, stopping them from being able to compile that information without people knowing; how effective that is in practice I don't know. I don't know quite how they regulate that. But at least it is deemed to be illegal to do it. But yes, political parties are private organisations technically, yet they are excluded from that legislation, and to me it's not surprising that the very parties that have political databases that drafted the legislation and passed it through parliament decided to exclude themselves from that, because that would stop them being able to effectively operate their databases. And it was passed, as I understand it, with bipartisan support, without much debate.

"The very parties that drafted the [privacy] legislation decided to exclude themselves."

Stan Correy: So important has direct mail become in political strategy that in August the Senate was asked to pass a bill which would increase the amount of public money made available to politicians for printing, because they're sending out so many more letters. Each sitting member now gets \$125,000 a year, but they wanted that increased to \$150,000.

After some negotiating Greens Senator Bob Brown got the numbers to defeat the government proposal. He didn't deny the value of direct mail, just the extent of it. Here's part of Bob Brown's speech in the Senate.

Bob Brown: Who on earth amongst us can justify a printing allowance for an electorate of up to 100,000 voters of much more than \$100,000 per annum. And remember there's just so much that members of electorates can absorb. But you can see, letterboxes receiving three, four, five pieces of mail in the run to an election, giving the incumbent MP a total advantage over all other comers for that election. Now why would MPs want to do that? Because whether we might like it or not, wozzy materials

in letterboxes works, it influences people. It creates votes, exactly Senator Abetz, that's why the Greens do it.

Stan Correy: Bob Brown's move was not widely reported, and mostly as 'Bob Brown helps stop junk mail'. But for politicians their letters certainly are not junk mail. Karen Middleton of The West Australian newspaper reported that several Liberal MPs had complained to the Prime Minister about the defeat of the printing allowance raise, because it affected their campaigning in marginal seats. And research done by Lee Cox from Griffith University has shown that direct mail had a direct influence on the voting patterns of nearly 4% of voters. It certainly does work.

Lee Cox: When it comes to swinging voters, undecided voters, many of them are too busy or not interested enough to actually sit down and watch a 30-second spot on the television, and 30-seconds doesn't convey much information. In 30-seconds you've got about 80 words, and that's not going to sell much, bar image. You're relying on the pictures to tell your story. Whereas the narrowcasting methods as Karl Rove uses, direct mail, allows you to create this relationship with the voter in a more personal sense. It's a more one on one relationship and it's harder to vote against a friend, whether it's somebody who has come doorknocking and you've had a brief five minute chat to them, or somebody who has taken the time to find out a bit about you as an individual, and send you a piece of mail that addresses specific needs and concerns you have. It's the development of a relationship and it's harder to vote against people once you have developed that relationship.

Stan Correy: At Melbourne University, Sally Young is sceptical that the new close local relationships politicians are having with voters via database and direct mail is helping our democracy. In fact, she believes that it's actually killing competition, because it favours the party in control of government.

Sally Young: If you're targeting a citizen because you know they're interested in one particular issue, what aren't you telling them? So you're leaving out a lot of information, and you might be for example telling them, OK, this economic policy's going to affect you individually in terms of your interest rates by X amount. But what aren't you telling them about the national broader implications of that policy change. So in some ways, people are worried about it because it's targeting individuals rather than creating a sense of community or common national sort of interest. The other thing I'd say about it is that although it's a direct form of communication, it's still very much one way. It's from the politician, who has the resources of these professional advisers to the citizen, rather than the other way around.

"You might be telling them' This economic policy's going to affect you individually in terms of your interest rates by X amount.' But what aren't you telling them about the national broader implications of that policy change?"

The other thing is that this is at the moment confined only to select key seats, so they're only doing these sort of techniques in the key marginal seats that they're targeting, so it's not happening everywhere, and also I think a problem with it is that many voters probably aren't aware that their phone call to their local MP is recorded, and used to gather information about them, and that in return what they'll get is a letter showing up in

their letterbox reflecting that recording of information. So many people probably aren't aware of what's gone on behind this, when they have that newsletter turn up or that letter in their letterbox. And also not aware that they're paying for it.

Stan Correy: In America, both the Democrats and the Republicans are limbering up for full campaign mode. They'll both be trying to win the hearts and minds of the voters, finding out which buttons to push on which citizens, and how to soothe the anxious hearts of every individual concerned about jobs, the war, health, education, about lies and leaks in Washington, about family values.

Bush's Brain, Karl Rove stunned the Democrats last year with some new campaign techniques that won the Republicans an historic victory in the Senate and House of Representatives. We can expect some of the same techniques to find their way to Australia next year. On the phone from the Center for Elections and Democracy in Utah, David Magleby.

David Magleby: Coming out of 2000, Mr Rove and Mr Melman, his associate, engineered a strategy called the 72-hour task force. The 72-hour taskforce was a strategy building towards the last 72 hours of the campaign, aiming at voters receiving mail and a personal contact in some instances, multiple pieces of mail, in the period leading up to the last 72 hours, and they invested in technology and in a very sophisticated way, in the off-year elections in 2001 in Virginia and New Jersey, which elect their governors in the odd years. Literally did experiments, as if they were going into laboratories, but instead the laboratories were voting precincts to see what mix of mail, phone and personal contact was most effective. To see which kind of messenger was most effective, a personal messenger at your doorstep, or a phone call, and they refined their techniques coming out of that 2001 election and the experiments they conducted. And I believe they were using 2002, that is Mr Rove and Mr Melman, to further test how they'll try and mobilise voters in the 2004 presidential race.

Stan Correy: Last week in Washington, President George W. Bush spoke at a Republican party dinner. It was the day after Arnold Schwarzenegger's election as a Republican governor of California. Arnie capitalised on what Americans call the angry voter syndrome. Once the rage starts, it's hard to stop. Bush's Brain, Karl Rove knows this syndrome well. He's used it to gain political victories in the past. Now he has to provide the President with the right rhetorical lines to calm down any voter rage over Iraq and the economy.

George W. Bush: There's a lot more to investigate, yet it is now undeniable, undeniable, that Saddam Hussein was in clear violation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1441. It is undeniable that Saddam Hussein was a deceiver and a danger, the Security Council was right to demand that Saddam disarm, and America was right to enforce that demand.

Stan Correy: Background Briefing's Co-ordinating Producer and technical operator, is Jenny Parsonage. Research and website master is Paul Bolger. Executive Producer is Kirsten Garrett. I'm Stan Correy. You're listening to ABC Radio National.

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