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Inglis admits he has much to learn about Internet-based social media tools

By Rudolph Bell
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U.S. Rep. Bob Inglis learned a lesson last week while trying his hand at live reporting using Twitter, the latest social media craze.

During a closed-door meeting in which President Obama was trying to sell House Republicans on his economic stimulus plan, Inglis used the online communication tool to put a quote from the president onto the Internet in real time.

In doing so, he broke an unwritten rule against communicating direct quotes made by the president in meetings where the press is not allowed.

"I think in the future I'll be more careful to make it clear that I'm stating my impressions than getting anywhere near quoting somebody in such a meeting," Inglis said.

The Republican congressman mentioned the incident Tuesday while seeking input about how to use Internet-based social media tools such as Twitter, Facebook and MySpace to interact with constituents.

About 50 people attended the gathering called by the congressman on the third floor of the Innovate building in downtown Greenville.

Also speaking were Mihaela Vorvoreanu, a Clemson University communications professor who specializes in Internet technologies; Geno Church of Brains on Fire, a local marketing communications firm; Phil Yanov, founder of the GSA Technology Council; and Trey Pennington of Showcase Marketing.

Obama used social media to interact with voters during his campaign, and Inglis said their use was a hot topic at a GOP retreat in Hot Springs, Va., this past weekend.

Among the issues he brought up Tuesday was whether sharing the mundane details of his personal life online amount to self-absorption and whether he should use Twitter to keep up with a constituent if the constituent is a member of the Ku Klux Klan.

Inglis also said he's trying to figure out how to use social media without running afoul of federal law requiring a separation of his office and campaign activities.
