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Wednesday 25 February 2015

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Mercredi 25 février 2015

**Standing Committee on
the Legislative Assembly**

Petitions

**Comité permanent de
l'Assemblée législative**

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Hansard Reporting and Interpretation Services
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DE
L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Wednesday 25 February 2015

Mercredi 25 février 2015

The committee met at 1302 in committee room 1.

PETITIONS

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Good afternoon, everyone.

Mr. Steve Clark: Good afternoon, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Thank you. This is our regular meeting of the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly, February 25.

Our agenda, and the purpose of our meeting this afternoon, is to discuss petition procedures. I'm very pleased to welcome Deb Deller, Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, and Todd Decker, Deputy Clerk.

Committee members will know that we also received a document that was distributed by the Table Research Office. It is titled "E-Petition Models for the Legislative Assembly of Ontario." We welcome that background material.

I would like to ask both Deb and Todd if they wish to maybe kick off with some remarks from the witness table. I leave it in your hands, if that's okay with the committee.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Absolutely.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): All right.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): When I was first asked to come before the committee to talk about e-petitions, I'll be honest and tell you that my reaction was, I've already done that. Because, in fact, it is a conversation that I have had at this committee and with the House leaders in the past, and I'm not sure that I have anything really new to add to the discussion.

Or at least I thought I didn't have anything new to add to the discussion. Then, just like magic, yesterday, doesn't the UK come up with something new to add to the discussion. I'm going to first turn the floor over to Todd to explain what happened in the UK House of Commons.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): Exactly as Deb said, just coincidentally, yesterday, the UK House of Commons adopted a motion and amendments to their standing orders to make provision for an enlarged e-petitions process in the House of Commons and the establishment of a dedicated e-petitions committee.

This arose out of a report made by their procedure committee and tabled in the UK House of Commons in November 2014 that made a series of recommendations. That finally came to fruition yesterday.

Basically, what's going to happen is that the House of Commons e-petitions system is going to be merged with the government's existing e-petitions platform and it's all going to be run out of the House of Commons. They've decided on that collaborative approach just to streamline things and make it a one-stop petition shop, and it's going to be principally administered out of the House of Commons. The committee decided that the House of Commons should be in control of the petitions that are going to be presented to the House—that made the most sense—rather than departments of government or anything like that.

The technical platform of the government's e-petitions site is going to be the one that they're going to be using. It's going to be administered out of the House of Commons.

The threshold for a petition appearing on that site is an initial six signatures, six signatories. That's what is required to get the petition mounted in the first place.

Petitions will remain live on their site for a maximum of six months. At the end of that time, the petition will be referred to this dedicated e-petitions committee.

It will be up to the committee to decide what action it wants to take with the petition. It has a number of things it can do. Once the petition has been taken off the site, the committee can decide that it wants to meet with or correspond with the petitioners, learn more about the subject matter, have a hearing or receive testimony from the petitioners on the subject matter of the petition.

They could refer the petition to another committee of the House of Commons that's a policy-field committee that's dedicated to the specific subject matter of that petition, so that that committee could maybe have a more in-depth look at the matter that has been raised.

They could seek further information from the government, so the committee could call in departments of the government and have a discussion and a hearing about what has been raised and possible solutions etc., for the issue that has been raised.

They could ultimately recommend that the subject matter of the petition be scheduled for a debate, either in the House of Commons or in Westminster Hall, which is sort of their second, mini-Parliament.

That's the system that has been adopted in the UK House of Commons.

One thing worth noting is that the committee identified the likely cost of this. I don't think the scope

and scale of what they're doing in the UK House of Commons is comparable to anything that's either being contemplated for here or likely to be adopted, but it does give you an indication that all of this isn't free. There is some cost to it. In the case of the UK House of Commons, they're looking at £188,000 for the initial set-up, and £115,000 ongoing annual maintenance of the e-petitions technology. They're suggesting that they probably will need four full-time staff to administer the process.

As I say, it's unlikely that our system—whatever would get adopted here, if that's what ends up happening—would be on that scale, but it's just to put it on your radar that there is some likely cost associated with doing something differently than what we're doing now.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Thank you, Todd. I don't know whether there are any questions on the UK system. Would we wish to continue?

Jagmeet?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Thanks. Just on the UK system, and questions with regard to that: The six signatories—how do they obtain the identification of an individual? What are the requirements? What do you need to do to sign a petition?

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): The person or organization that wants to originate a petition is basically responsible for obtaining those signatures. They will coordinate with the petitions office, the House of Commons staff that will be responsible for administering the e-petitions system. They will be looking at things like making sure that that minimum threshold for starting a petition has been reached, that the signatures are proper, that the design of the petition is in order, that it's appropriate, that the subject matter is within the authority of the House of Commons to deal with, and all of those sorts of things. It will be moderated, if you will, by House of Commons staff initially, before being mounted on their e-site.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Sorry, can I just ask a couple of questions, just to clarify? My first question is on the form itself. Is the form itself hosted by the government? Or is it the organization that wants to do an e-petition, and they host the site, or host the platform, on which people will sign the e-petition?

And then what are the types of platforms that people use? There are various forms of online petitions. Which of those are approved and are valid, and how is that determination made by the government?

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): Petitioners will be required to use a template that will be provided on their website. It's a form that's filled in. Information is provided, and it must conform with what's required by the House of Commons. It can't be just an ad hoc approach to it. It must be that form.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): You'll see as we go through the presentation, Mr. Singh, that we've identified a couple of options with respect to how that process might unfold. Different jurisdictions use different options.

1310

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: That's it. Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Thank you. Randy, I had you up next.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Yes. Are you going to continue on with the presentations that you've done to the assembly in the past, for the benefit of the people who haven't heard it previously?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Yes. For those of you who have, I'm sorry. You'll have to suffer through it.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Okay. I will hold my questions, then, until you finish your presentation.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Thank you. I'll go to Kathryn, please.

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: Thank you. I just had a quick question, just to clarify the initial start-up cost for the other system we were talking about, the £188,000. Was that the software itself, the actual IT support, as well as any licensing agreement that would have to go through?

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): Correct. It's all related to the technology that would be required to bring it in-house, and then an estimated £115,000 ongoing yearly, for the technology, software licensing and all those sorts of things, and then a staff component.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): You can put that into some perspective more locally, too. The House of Commons, in its consideration of going the route of e-petitions, has an estimate of \$200,000 for start-up costs; that is, to get the process in place. Then they have calculated 20% of that annualized in terms of staff and maintenance costs ever after.

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: Okay.

Mr. Randy Hillier: That was £200,000?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): No, it's \$100,000 to \$200,000 in Canadian dollars. That's the House of Commons estimate.

Mr. Steve Clark: Just a question, through you to the two Clerks: On page 11 it talked about the most recent UK meeting. They had four recommendations, I believe. Did they adopt all four of those recommendations into their announcement today?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): In some form.

Mr. Steve Clark: So the box to let your MP know that you signed the petition was included in their decision?

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): It's discussed in the report. The standing order amendments that were adopted by the House yesterday don't specifically mandate that, but the petitions committee, once it gets constituted, will likely make those kinds of decisions and rules.

Mr. Steve Clark: So really, they did recommendation number 1, which would be to establish the committee, and then the other recommendations—in terms of the threshold, letting your MP know or the reports—would be dealt with by the committee.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): Right. They made the decision not to require the sponsorship of an MP for any petition, so it's independent of any—

Mr. Steve Clark: Yes.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): But they had a discussion about how it was that they could keep all members, specifically the member whose riding that petition might most specifically relate to or where the largest number of constituents have signed on—so they were looking at ways to map that within their system, so that they could produce reports to the House of Commons and to individual members.

Mr. Steve Clark: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Thanks, Todd. To Chris.

Mr. Chris Ballard: I missed a comment at the beginning. I think you just covered it off in terms of how a petition gets set up. It's not sponsored by an MPP, but by an individual or an organization outside of—

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): Correct.

Mr. Chris Ballard: Okay, good. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Thank you, Todd. Deb?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): All of you have received, I think, this paper that was done up by our Table Research Office with respect to e-petitions. I'm not going to walk you through the whole paper. I think there are a couple of things we'll talk about, but just before we do that, for those of you who are maybe new to this game: I think that any e-petition process that you might agree to probably should mirror as closely as possible the current paper petition process. If I could just explain a little bit about what those paper petition rules are there for, then I think that kind of puts into some sort of context any discussions you have in the future about e-petitions.

Specifically, paper petitions currently are required to be addressed to the Legislative Assembly; I think it's pretty obvious why we want that to be the case. The notion is that it has to be something that is addressed to Parliament, not to the government of Ontario or to the opposition or something like that.

In addition, we require that the prayer, or the text of the petition, appear on every single page. The reason for that is that the House wants to be assured that people who sign the petition know what they're signing, that somebody hasn't put a cover page on a list of signatures and said, "Here, sign this. This is what I'm asking you to sign," then ripped the cover page off, put a different one on and presented that to the House as if it has been signed by those 350 people.

We also ask for original signatures. The specific reason for that is so that we can be assured that we're not receiving the same petition signed by the same people, over and over again. We might be, but in the paper petition world, it's difficult to do. We make sure that we are looking at original signatures and not photocopies, so that someone isn't just sitting at the local Staples on their

photocopier and handing members copies of the exact same petition, signed by the exact same people.

In addition to that, we ask for addresses. The reason for that is to have some assurance, at least, that the people who signed the petition are, in fact, residents of the province of Ontario. Specifically, the reason for that is that lawmakers presumably don't want to be influenced unnecessarily by opinions from outside of the jurisdiction that they make laws for. The critical issue is what the people inside this province think on any particular issue.

Those are specifically the reasons behind the rules that exist for paper petitions. I know that sometimes they can be a nuisance for the members, but like most of the rules—I will say not all, but most—that govern the House procedures, there is a pretty good reason for them being there in the first place.

I'm going to just have Trevor distribute. In the document that you got, you'll note that there were two basic options that we presented in terms of the way you might go for the process of e-petitions. I think maybe one of the issues previously whenever we've presented this is that it's a little bit difficult when you read through them to understand what the process means. So we've just done up a flow chart that I hope more easily explains what we mean by the two different options that we have.

Basically the two options are an online form or a downloadable template, which is something that Todd just referred to. The online form is something that most people who sign petitions or sign any kind of document currently online are used to. It's the one where, basically, you go on, you say, "Oh, yes, I agree with that," and you click a button and now you've become a signatory to that.

The downloadable template is different. It has a button that allows a petitioner to click and create a petition, and then they have to download the petition form. In either case, the petitioner is invited to register as a user or to sign in with a username and a password.

In the online form, the petitioner enters the title of the petition and then will click "continue." If there are other petitions already up that deal with the same issue, then those are displayed. In that case, the proponent of the petition may decide to just add his or her name, or if there isn't one, the petitioner then might decide to proceed with a new petition.

In the case of the online form, the petitioner enters the details of the petition and then clicks on a box that says "submit." Then it comes to the Legislative Assembly. The petitioner will receive an automatic reply; you've all seen them when you've done that. The assembly staff will review that petition and make sure it's in order. They may actually make sure there isn't another petition that's identical already. It could be deemed out of order, in which case we'd let the petitioner know why it's not in order, or it might be deemed in order and go through the process and be put on the website for signing.

The downloadable form—the petitioner fills out the form electronically and then can either send it to the

Legislative Assembly by mail or email. Really, the difference between the two is that in that case, the petition is actually posted online by assembly staff at some point later, once it's determined that it's in order.

There aren't huge differences between the two. Certainly option two, which is the downloadable form, is, from an administrative point of view, the easier one to manage. Option one, the online form, on the other hand, is the one that I think particularly young people are more familiar with. It's certainly easier from the petitioner's point of view to submit that kind of a form. But there are pros and cons, and those are outlined in the paper, to both of the options.

1320

There are a number of things that you have to consider. One of the things that we've just talked about are the technical considerations. Either option that's chosen requires the development and installation of the electronic—what's the word I'm looking for?

Interjection.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller):

Platform, and it's going to require some significant amount of time and resources, certainly at the outset and potentially farther as we go down in terms of staffing resources and technical resources.

Part of the reason for the increase in staffing resources potentially is that, currently, petitions—it's 15 minutes in the day. We receive from you the petitions that you receive in hard copy. We review them—it doesn't take very much time—and put a stamp that certifies that it's an in-order petition and can be presented in the House. None of that takes very much time. What we would be converting to, though, is a 24/7 operation now with what we anticipate to be quite an increase in volume of petitions, because once you make something that much easier, then more people will make use of it.

The other thing that has to be considered is the validation of signatures. What you want to make sure of is that you're looking at 350 different signatures and not 350 signatures generated electronically from the same computer. So it is one of the things that you do have to be careful of. That can be managed to some extent by some kind of basic email confirmation system, like CAPTCHA. That's when you go on Ticketmaster and you buy tickets; you'll know that they ask you to copy the letters that you see in a little box and then press the submit button. The reason they do that is to make sure you're not some computer somewhere that's automatically buying up all the tickets to the Rolling Stones when they come available. What CAPTCHA does is basically makes sure there's a live person at the other end of the computer.

Some consideration ought to be given, too, to monitoring IP addresses. That has the effect of blocking multiple signatories from the same IP address so that you can be assured that you've got one person signing once and not one person signing 3,500 times. The problem with that is, it could block legitimate signatures. If I'm signing a petition from my computer and my husband wants to sign

that same petition, then potentially one of us is going to be blocked, depending on what the threshold is.

On the other hand, it also identifies out-of-province signatures, and you want to be careful about that, too, because for the same reason that we mentioned before, you don't want to develop public policy for the province of Ontario based on what people in Sydney, Australia, are sending you.

I mentioned very briefly that in the jurisdictions that have gone the route of e-petitions, I think what they have learned is that as much of the process as they can have mirror the current paper petition process, the better. The changes in the standing orders are limited then. There are processes already in place that you don't have to change. So being careful to sort of say, "Well, we already do it this way, so there's some merit in continuing to do at least that part of it the same way," probably warrants some consideration.

You'll have to give some consideration to the level of detail that's collected about both the signatories and the proponent of the petition. Typically, what is requested is name, address and email—potentially more information, sometimes phone numbers. There are obviously some privacy concerns, and the privacy concerns are twofold. One is, does that information in its entirety appear on the website? Currently, the information is located on the paper petition that we get, but it resides in our House documents office. Everybody has access to it who wants it, but you have to come in and take a look at it, so it's not something that's there for people who are browsing the Web to find, or for somebody to google somebody's name and all of a sudden have it pop up on a petition. It's much more public, so some consideration has to be given to how much information you want to collect and how much actually appears on the website.

The other issue with respect to privacy is the potential for data mining—probably, in this environment particularly, by political parties but also by others. I think that it probably impacts the system negatively if in fact the petitioners are subject to data mining by anyone—in other words, the generation of a list that's then used for telemarketing or other reasons that people want lists of contact information.

The other thing that you need to give some consideration to is the length of time the petition appears on the website. There are two areas there: One is, once a petition is accepted and appears on the website and is available for people to sign off on, when does it end? You presumably don't want the petition to stay there forever—so some reasonable length of time. Some other jurisdictions have a shorter period of time. Some of them have two or three months, some a few weeks. I think it really depends on what you're comfortable with.

The other question of how long something remains on the website is with respect to once the petition is closed. In other words, once we're no longer allowing anybody to sign on to it, does it remain on there as an information piece for some time after that? Do we archive them so

people can search past petitions? If we do archive them, how long do we make those available?

There are some other issues. English and French: Currently, obviously, the petitions can be presented in either/or. We don't expect some members of the public to provide their petitions in both official languages. However, the information that we have up on the assembly's website is in both official languages, and we follow the French Language Services Act for that purpose, so some consideration would have to be given to whether or not there's a reason to translate any petitions that might appear on the website.

How do you deal with multiple petitions on the same subject? You've probably noticed that we cluster them currently, so if you stand up on successive days and present the same petition, it actually goes into the one petition file on that subject when it gets to House documents. You probably want to give some consideration to how you manage that, so that on the website, you don't have multiple petitions that are on the same or a similar subject. Then if you're going to make a decision that there shouldn't be multiple petitions on the same or a similar subject, the question becomes, how do you determine what is the same or similar?

Then, I think, probably it's worth taking a look at follow-up procedures. Many of the jurisdictions that have gone the route of e-petitions have now also added a whole other dimension to the petitions procedure. As you just heard from Todd, for example, in the UK, that often means that when a petition reaches a certain threshold—that may mean the number of signatures; it may mean the number of members that have signed on as sponsors to it—it could be sent out to a petitions committee. The committee may decide that this is something that bears further consideration, and then there is a process to determine how to proceed with that. While it's not a requirement, obviously, of an e-petition process, it is something that may be worth taking a look at, to see if there's something that's value-added to the e-petition process in terms of public consultation.

I think the only other thing I was going to talk about was about cost level. There are costs. We've already discussed those. I really won't go into more detail about them except to say that is something that has to be taken into consideration.

1330

If we have an indication of the direction the committee or the House might want to go in, then that enables us to put together a more accurate cost analysis. That's kind of the Reader's Digest version of the same old presentation, but we're happy to answer whatever questions you might have.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Questions or comments? Yes, Eleanor?

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you very much. It's always nice to see you, Madam Clerk.

A couple of things: I would assume and hope that if we go in this direction the concerns about data mining

would be somewhat mitigated by the federal legislation that was just passed that governs that area. So anything that we did would be compliant, I'm sure, with that federal legislation.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): One other way you can mitigate the data mining is that some jurisdictions don't post all of the information. Some jurisdictions will only post the name and some actually only post the numbers.

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: Oh, interesting. Well, I think these are all such excellent points. I just thought I'd raise, for thought and consideration, change.org. It's a website that routinely—now, I know it's not legislative and I know it's not the same, but they have a pretty good way of taking people's information and giving you the confidence that no one else is going to see it. They're pretty clear about that. I just flag that as a possible example that we could look to in terms of safeguarding people's privacy. They probably have some information, too, relative to how long they keep information on their website as well. I just toss that out as a possibility to consider.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): When Joanne prepared this document last November, there was reference in it to change.org and the platform they have. Joanne comments approvingly, I think, of the system that they have and using it as a possible model for a potential system in our House.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): And I should be clear: I don't mention those things as obstacles. What I am doing, though, is saying that these are things that have to be considered if we go down the road of e-petitions.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Yes, Randy?

Mr. Randy Hillier: Thank you, Chair. Thanks for the Reader's Digest version. It's much appreciated.

Listen, I pose the question to either or both of you. I just want to explore a little bit more. We all know how we do petitions today—you know, all the members. We all know what the process is for ourselves to do them and how they're presented in the House, but we don't really see what happens once they land on the order table. Right?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Well, we could tell you, but then—

Laughter.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Well, you know, we can all see—it's evident that the text of the petitions should be addressed to the assembly and that the text is in order and is consistent with the standing orders and with the jurisdiction of the assembly as well.

There are two things I want to focus in on: original text or original signatures, and addresses and residents of Ontario. What do you do at the present time to verify that it's an original signature and that they are a resident of Ontario?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): By original signature, what we mean is it's not a copy.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Not a copy.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): What we do is—you noticed us doing that?

Mr. Randy Hillier: Yes.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): It's because we can feel the signature on the back of the paper, but if it's a copy we can't.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Right, okay. Is there anything to see if the same individual has signed the petition more than once?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): No, because currently there's no—

Mr. Randy Hillier: No mechanism.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): No. The safeguard against that is the fact that it's an original signature itself.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Sure, yes. Somebody would have to physically—

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Yes, sign it multiple times. If somebody was signing it that many times, we'd pick it up.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Yes. And the other thing is to verify that that individual who has signed it is indeed a resident and it's a viable and real address.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Yes.

Mr. Randy Hillier: What is done to verify that, or anything?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): We don't employ any investigatory powers to make sure that that person actually lives at that residence. We take it at face value that the signatory is, in fact, somebody who is living at that address.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Right, so there's a level of—

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Our concern is more that the address is, in fact, an Ontario address.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Right, but do you verify if that address is an Ontario address?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Only because it says that.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): It's an honour system.

Mr. Randy Hillier: But if somebody said, "RR 5, Tatlock," and you didn't know if Tatlock was part of Ontario or not, nobody goes and takes a look through the place names of Ontario to see if there is a Tatlock, or if there is an RR 5, for that matter.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Correct.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Okay, I just want to make sure that e-petitions have similar safeguards to what we have today. There seems to be an awful lot of concern in the briefs about the verification process, which is not present today in paper petitions. Through all the briefs, a lot of people have spent a lot of time looking at that verification and ensuring that there is a high level of verification within the electronic process, which isn't available in the paper process.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Yes, and I think you'll find that every jurisdiction that is currently considering e-petitions or has gone down the road of e-petitions has had that same level of concern, because it's easier to electronically sign or send a petition from out of the province than it is to do that with a paper petition—

Mr. Randy Hillier: Sure, absolutely.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller):—and the volume would be that much greater.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Yes. I think one of the other things—and this is where we have to split up the discussion—is also the difference between the process of petitions and the outcomes of petitions. They're very distinct. So we'll just follow through on that.

Once that petition lands on the table—correct me if I'm wrong—the only outcome of that now is that the first petition on that subject gets responded to by the government of the day. If there are similar or like-minded petitions, or the same petition is introduced on multiple occasions—whatever the case may be—the only outcome is that there is a response, not any other tangible action.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): Each member who presents it. So, if Mr. Clark presented a petition today and you present the same one tomorrow, he will get his response within 24 days, but you will also get—every member who presents the same petition will separately get a response.

Mr. Randy Hillier: It'll be the same response.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): But your specific question is whether the only outcome is a response and not any kind of action.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Yes.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): I guess I would say that's probably something that could be the subject of further debate, because I have been here long enough to have seen petitions have an impact on policy, and specifically because of the numbers. So, a large volume of petitioners have had a member submit petitions to the House, and as a result of that, there has been a decision made to alter public policy.

I think one of the best examples of that was the elimination of the spring bear hunt, which was, from where I sat, a direct result of a large volume of petitions being presented to the House. So I think it's arguable that while the only outcome of petitions is that formal response from the government, in fact there are outcomes that are directly related to public policy, depending on the nature of the petition and the size of it.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I would agree 100%. There's nothing in our standing orders that compels any action, other than a response; we don't have a petitions committee or anything else. But the real value of a petition is to demonstrate public interest in the subject, to encourage the government to take action on that concern. Of course, one of the reasons why we're here is that electronic petitions would facilitate that, or we certainly expect that it would be more convenient for public interest to be conveyed to the assembly.

1340

But I just wanted to keep it separate. There is that process, and there is also possibly a discussion for outcomes. We may change what we do with those petitions. But at the present time, the process, I think we can all agree—I think nobody will disagree that the process is good for the outcomes that are required. There is no other petitions committee or anything else.

Maybe I'll leave it at that for the time being. Maybe I will ask the government side: Is there an interest by the government in exploring a difference in outcomes from petitions? Is there any appetite at all for having a petitions committee, or some other tangible, concrete action to be—an obligation that the government wants a certain threshold for petitions to have met?

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): I'm not sure who speaks for the government. There's not a parliamentary assistant—

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: If you allow it, Mr. Chair, I would give it a straight statement.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Certainly.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: We have had no discussions, and we would have to take it back.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Okay, sure.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): I'd like to go to Kathryn.

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: Thank you, Chair. I just had a quick question regarding e-petitions. I know that in the US, for instance, there needs to be a minimum number of signatures before it's considered to be taken forward by the House. Are there other jurisdictions that propose a minimum requirement for e-petitions to be eligible to be tabled in the House?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): To be posted, or a requirement to just present it in the House?

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: To be presented in the House.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): I think so, but I'm not—

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Could I ask the table researcher for a brief comment? Joanne?

Ms. Joanne McNair: Yes. Currently, the Canadian House of Commons is also considering e-petitions. Procedure and house affairs is looking into it. It's based on a motion put forward by an NDP backbencher.

Currently, a paper petition in the Canadian House of Commons requires 25 signatures to be tabled. For the e-petitions, he's proposing a threshold of 1,000 signatures for the petition just to be tabled in the House.

I think it's either Wales or Scotland—I forget which one; I'm sorry. One of them requires at least three signatures; I think it's Wales. The UK House of Commons—we've heard they're going to require six signatures before it goes live on the site. So, yes, there are some that put thresholds in for it.

The White House one, I think, requires three signatures, or five, before it appears live on the site. The person who starts it gets the link to it, but it's up to them

to get five other signatures before it shows up to anybody else who goes to the website.

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: Thank you.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): There are two different types of thresholds too. One is a threshold to just get the petition up on the site. Then, in some jurisdictions, there is a different threshold that applies to moving the petition further along the process, once it's been presented.

But also, in keeping with the notion of trying to align the e-petition process as closely as possible with the paper petition process, it's important to note that in Ontario, the threshold is one.

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: Thank you.

Mr. Chris Ballard: Just one?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): You only need one signature for it to be considered a petition.

Mr. Randy Hillier: One of the smallest ones was Dalton McGuinty Sr.'s petition with nine signatures on it, years ago.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): We've had smaller.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Yes, but that was a small one.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): One of the biggest was mounted by a large beer company, and it resulted in us having Family Day as a statutory holiday. You might remember that. They put them in beer cases.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Did I see a question from Chris? No?

Mr. Chris Ballard: I guess what I'm trying to wrap my mind around is—I first wanted to say that it's a great research paper. I will have to confess that I really didn't get a chance to start going through it until today, for a couple of reasons, both of them technical. It went to an account that had it sitting for me in my community office but not here. So I haven't had a chance to really go through it, but there's a lot of good information in it. If I ask questions that are answered in here, I apologize.

I'm concerned about the verifying of signatures. On the paper signatures now, we just check to see if it's Ontario or an Ontario community. There are a number of electronic means that you've mentioned, whether we're monitoring IP addresses or we're using some sort of—what's it called? CAPTCHA, right? It's CAPTCHA. I should know that one; I use it often enough—to make sure that it's a not a robotic signatory program hammering away.

I'm both excited and concerned. This can be a very powerful tool and I want to make sure that it's representative of what people are thinking and want to see move ahead, that it's not a process by which a very, very, very vocal minority can move government policy ahead.

Verifying signatures: Are there any jurisdictions that you're aware of where there is some type of audit process whereby when a petition gets to a certain process someone says, "There's a thousand people on this petition and we're somehow going to verify 10% of them or 1% of them, just so that we're absolutely sure" —maybe not at

the very beginning, but at a process; maybe if there's a committee and that committee says, "Okay, we're interested in moving this onto the table. We have to make sure that we can put the stamp on this and be comfortable that the process was followed."

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): So what you're talking about is making sure that the signature is a real person?

Mr. Chris Ballard: That the signature on the petition is a real person. I could think that people would have to submit their email addresses, so maybe we verify the email address by sending them out an email saying, "You've recently submitted to this petition. Click here." So if someone is signing up for me, I get an email and I say, "What the heck is this?" Or I say, "Yes, I signed that." I'm just nervous. This will become a very powerful tool and I want to make sure it's not hijacked.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): I think some jurisdictions take extra care with respect to determining that the proponent, the initial petitioner, is a real—

Mr. Chris Ballard: —is a real person.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): —person. Some of them require that person to fill out a longer form than the signatories. I don't know of any jurisdiction that—although Scotland might have experimented with it—that actually take a look to try and verify—

Mr. Chris Ballard: I don't expect staff to be sitting on the phone calling a thousand people to say, "Are you real?" But again, it just comes back to that I'm excited, because potentially this is a very powerful, positive tool for democracy and inclusiveness. I just want to make sure that if we're going to treat petitions in future differently, that if they are given more weight in future, we're absolutely sure that the people signing it legitimately have a right to sign it.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Yes. I think you're right. You're right to be excited and you're right to be cautious, because I think that it is a powerful tool. But the credibility of its power depends on how carefully it's structured and how carefully it's monitored, in terms of making sure that you aren't receiving petitions that are automatically generated. Even CAPTCHA now I think is called into question in terms of an actual tool that works 100% in terms of ensuring that you're not getting automatically generated signatures.

Mr. Chris Ballard: Now it's words and an image.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Yes. So you're absolutely right. I think if there's a decision to go down this road, you want to make sure that you're very, very careful about how you do it.

1350

Mr. Chris Ballard: Yes. Thanks.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): We have a comment from research on that point.

Ms. Joanne McNair: In Scotland, I believe it is, before you can create a petition or sign a petition, you have to create an account on their site, and to create the

account you have to provide an actual physical address in Scotland, just to log in. Once you're in the system, then you can participate in it. Of course, if you have an uncle who lives in Scotland, you could just put their address in. There's always going to be a certain degree of faith in there, but there are ways.

In Quebec, they have software called Gestion des signataires, which apparently will scan all the people who have signed it. It looks for certain things like duplicate names or names that look suspicious, like if someone signs it "Mickey Mouse." There are other criteria it will highlight, and staff can then look at those more closely to see if there's something there that might potentially be out of order. There are things that exist that can help cut down on fraud in that sense.

Mr. Chris Ballard: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Randy, then Bas.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Yes. I just wanted to add to the conversation here. Again, we're talking about the audit process, safeguards and verification. I remember a few years back—I think it was 2010 or 2009; somewhere around there—when the government of the day proposed a bill that would restrict the number of people under the age of 21 from being in a vehicle at any time. There was a huge public outcry, a significant number of petitions, mostly—I would say just about exclusively—done by third-party outfits. But the outcry was evident and apparent. There was no auditing process, no verification process and no requirement by the government to act, but it was clear that the public were not in favour of that policy, and the government altered that bill and removed that restriction.

We have been doing petitions in many different fashions since the beginning of responsible government—

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): It is the beginning of responsible government.

Mr. Randy Hillier: It is. That's right.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): That's how it started.

Mr. Randy Hillier: That's how it started. Although I enjoy reading history, I haven't read everything about every history, but I can't think of an example—especially in Ontario, Canada or in our modern history—of a petition being abused, other than some of these joke petitions to build a Death Star or something.

What my comment there is, is that we need to keep cognizant of just what our experience is with petitions. They are a way for people to express their view on a subject of public policy. It is not a demand or a requirement in any fashion for the government to act. The government ought to, and I think that history has shown this to be truthful. They look at the whole context of a petition—where it came from, where it was originated, how many people were involved and what is the injury or the injustice that is trying to be remedied by the petition—and then make a determination.

My view of this whole electronic petition discussion is, how do we facilitate it? How do we use technology to

continue with this long, historic tradition of responsible government to allow people to express their views, while the government retains its jurisdictions and its responsibilities and will act in a manner that is consistent with their views?

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Yes, Bas?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Madam Clerk, if we're looking at the paper petitions that we have today and to replicate it with technology, I don't have a problem with that significantly, but I do have some concerns if somehow out of this process we get a movement towards making petitions have a little bit more clout than what they do today. If we go that route, then, to me, the signatures or the people who have signed an online petition—there needs to be some verification.

I'll tell you why I'm concerned. If you remember when Twitter and Facebook first appeared on the scene, people got attracted to them and then all of a sudden they could organize a storm in a particular location with a couple of hundred or thousands of people in no time and give that particular incident power. You could do the same with petitions.

You need to start thinking in terms of what tools we can look at to verify the folks who are getting online and creating these petitions, but more so the people who are attaching their names to them. I can think of several tools that are available to us, but it'll be costly. We effectively own Teranet, which has all the land addresses in the province of Ontario. So if I was to sign a petition online, at least you could verify the address I gave is one that is correct. There are other tools that you verify that a person with that last name lives at that address, but you will have to buy it.

It's the same with the telephone numbers. If somebody gives you a telephone number, there are many databases you could buy out there today that verify that that phone number belongs to this person, but I think we would need somebody to do that research and come back to us. My concern is if the petitions are going to get moved from what they are today, to give a little bit more concern or awareness or whatever to the Legislature as a whole, how would that relate to me as a member of an area that has a pressing issue in my own area and my private member's bill dies when a petition gets to the front of the line? A huge concern of mine in that regard is where do you find the equity in the system?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Yes. To be clear, just because you've implemented an e-petition process does not necessarily mean that you also have to add any kind of a follow-up additional procedure—

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: But I think there will be people here pushing for it.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): And that may be true, but they can be dealt with separately. Just because you do the one does not necessarily lead to doing the other. I think that's one thing—

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: No, but I think we need to raise the red flags, that before you go over from step 1 to step

2, here are all the risks or here are all the factors and concerns that the whole Legislature has to—

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Sure. I think it's important to know exactly what it is you're—

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I raise that because it does bother me. Today, the petition that is handwritten or typed—it does take some effort to go around and ask somebody to sign this and explain to them what you're doing. When you put it online, there's no face-to-face contact. It'll all be Twitter, Facebook and all these other things, and people are signing it based on their own interpretation, and it could be misleading.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): I'll go to Jagmeet, please.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Thank you very much. I've got to sit down here. It's the opposite of—

Interjection.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: It's the opposite of a problem, isn't it?

I guess there are a couple of issues. One issue is, this is the future. People are more and more engaged online and creating movements online for the benefit of democracy. It's already happening and we're falling behind. We're not able to engage people who are already doing this as a way to talk about issues, to raise awareness about issues. People are already using online petitions regularly. It's a way to create movements. It's already happening.

There are two issues that come up that I think we really need to look at. One is to Mr. Hillier's point. I think it's very valid. A lot of the safeguards we're talking about for online petitions we don't do when it comes to written petitions. It's a fair question; right? We're not verifying names. We're not verifying addresses. We're not verifying any of that stuff. We're just taking it on people's word. So Mr. Hillier's point is pretty valid in the sense that we've been using this system so far and we haven't done any of the verification. We're not verifying signatures. Arguably, someone could make a petition up, change their signature, put in addresses and submit one with hundreds of signatures on it, but it would be one person. That could, in our current system, actually happen. We have to think: Why are we applying a different standard to electronic petitions?

1400

There is a reason that I think the different standard can apply—and this is the part I think it's important to think about. I don't want to put words in Mr. Ballard's mouth, but in terms of the weight we give to the petition, I think that's the question: the weight we give to the petition in terms of informing us, not necessarily Mr. Balkissoon's concern about the next step. I think those are two separate matters altogether. They're absolutely separate. We can decide to make petitions have a next step or not; that's separate. But the weight we as parliamentarians give to a petition—if I see a petition that has 10,000 signatures and I hear that, I'm going to assume that that's an issue that's big. But what if those 10,000 signatures

were a result of someone writing a very elaborate, very slick computer program that was able to generate that many signatures? It gives me a false sense of the climate of the problem; it gives me a false sense of what's going on in the province—not because there's going to be some sort of next step with the petition, not because there's going to be some sort of weighing that this petition is now going to take precedence over a private member's bill, not because of that, but just as a parliamentarian who wants to know: What's the pulse of the community? What's going on? Is this an issue that's important or not? For that reason, perhaps having some form a bit more robust than otherwise—because it's a lot easier to write a program and to get a lot of petitions signed than it is to physically do it by hand. The amount of hours it would take you to write down 10,000 signatures versus—I was in computer science in undergrad, and I had friends who could write a program that could do that easily.

Mr. Chris Ballard: Virtually anything.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Yes, it wouldn't be a problem. I didn't get that far in computer science so I probably couldn't do it, but anyway, I know folks who could do that pretty easily. They could have a petition, have it populated with signatures and give the impression that there are a number.

That's where Madam Clerk talked about the idea of what we already use when we sign to prevent people from mass-signing up to a website and overloading it, and you have to identify that you're not a robot; you're a human, and requiring you to see things that a computer otherwise couldn't scan or pick up. That's a great way to identify that it's at least a person. If a person wanted to click through 1,000 times and do that, that's something that Madam Clerk did bring up as a concern. That could happen.

I guess that's a bit of the debate: We want to have an accurate gauge of how much this petition is actually informing us about the sentiment of what's going on in the province, and to know that that's something that's a big deal or a small deal or a pressing issue or not. It's for that reason, not because we don't trust people per se, but because we want to be able to gauge how accurate this information is so that we can be informed by it, however we are. I think that's why it is.

My final concern is that I'm very, very aware of the growing trend and concern with privacy and security online. I think it goes without saying that privacy and security go hand in hand with freedom of thought and freedom of expression. There is a concern around how much we rely on or require identification and how much that would infringe certain privacy concerns, which arguably would go against the whole purpose of a petition, which is to encourage democracy. If you are, in some way, decreasing a sense of privacy and security, that might actually work contrary to our initial goal, which is to promote democracy. That's another thing, just to confuse us further.

Those are my thoughts.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): We'll go to Steve, please.

Mr. Steve Clark: Thanks very much, Chair. I got elected in March 2010. There was a parallel between two provinces, Ontario and BC, on implementing the HST. There was a tremendous amount of people whom I found—and listen, I worked for my predecessor for a few years as well, and I saw a big change in 2010 when it came to electronic petitions. There were thousands and thousands of people who signed an electronic petition or multiple electronic petitions because they were swirling around people's email inboxes. There was an expectation that these petitions were going to have the same strength and effect as what was going on in British Columbia. Obviously, we all know that we have two different sets of legislation, but I think 2010 was the watershed moment when people became engaged in electronic petitions.

Now, Bas and I are old municipal politicians. I remember when the fax machine was a revolutionary piece of equipment when it came to communicating to a city council or a township council.

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: Careful; you're dating yourself.

Mr. Steve Clark: I am dating myself, but I'm trying to make a point that technology changes and the electorate changes. I was an MPP when that issue came with those young people, and I had a tremendous amount of engagement by young people via electronic means.

Mr. Hillier and I both have electronic petitions on our website. I haven't experienced any abuse whatsoever in terms of that connection. In terms of the cost, other than increasing the bandwidth the first time I did an electronic petition—and my website crashed multiple times that night—I've had no issues since then. So, yes, there are some costs, but I don't believe they're insurmountable.

What's happening now is that technology is passing us as legislators. I had a constituent who went out on her own, went on the legislative website, crafted a petition that, to me, met the rules if she decided it would be a valid paper petition. She went out, put it up on an electronic site, got 25,000 or 30,000 petitions, sent me the link and expected me, as her representative, to table it. And when I told her, "I'll print it out and you and your husband and maybe some of your neighbours can sign one so I can table it in the Legislature," she was offended. She was angry that what she had done was not good enough.

I think that Mr. Hillier makes a valid point about whether we need to change the process of how we respond to petitions, how we deal with those answers. But in terms of the technology—and the clerks know my position on this—we're doing it now. Some of us are doing it now. Our party is doing it now. The PC Party is doing electronic petitions and we haven't experienced this sense of fraud in the system right now. My view is that with a paper petition in my office—and you can walk into my office and see everything from soup to nuts on the petition table. I have had the same experience

when it comes to electronic petitions. There isn't that, at least with my constituents.

In terms of my Kemptville college petition, obviously it had people from all over the province in the agricultural community expressing concern. The day we had our public meeting at Kemptville college, the students were the ones who set the 10 computers up and had people line up at the computer, enter their email address and table it. It wasn't me. I did nothing. I established it and put it on the site. But I suggest the reason that my site crashed was because of the level of engagement and knowledge of technology by those young people.

So, friends, I think we're there and we need to move forward like so many other jurisdictions do, but I don't think that cost is as big an issue as maybe some have felt. In terms of fraud or fraudulent entries, it hasn't been my experience with my electronic petitions, nor has it been with my traditional paper petitions, just for what it's worth.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Yes, Eleanor.

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: I appreciate very much the comments from the member opposite, particularly in the context of someone who has been in public life since the fax machine came around.

Mr. Steve Clark: Revolutionary.

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: But for those of us who are new, just building on your comments, this has been a very good discussion so far. I do appreciate your time, as does everyone, I know, in terms of bringing us up to speed. Having a conversation on what's happening in other jurisdictions, best practices, the work of the research table—thank you very much, Ms. McNair, for that.

A couple of quick comments, perhaps by way of response but just reflecting on the member opposite's comments earlier: I was a vice-president at United Way in Ottawa for a number of years. One of the things that has really revolutionized the not-for-profit sector and, in particular, organizations like that, is online donations. I just had lunch with my former boss in Ottawa recently. It really has transformed the movement in Canada and worldwide, the United Way movement, in terms of how they receive donations.

One of the things that makes people give more—people in the not-for-profit sector know this—is ease of transaction. Much in the same way, ease of transaction, I think, is what's going to really facilitate something that we all want, which is encouraging democracy and encouraging people's participation.

1410

However, I do think it's wise to have a conversation about safeguards, not just because we're worried about the credibility of the system, although that's important. I think we need to send a strong message to the people who are filling out the surveys that their security will be safeguarded, that their private information will be safeguarded and that it's not going to be used by anybody for deleterious or nefarious purposes. So for the comfort level of the end-users, in order to facilitate that ease of

transaction, I think we need to have safeguards in place that really are what people expect when they're dealing with the Legislature of Ontario.

So I guess with that little footnote, I'm just underscoring that I'm enjoying this conversation and finding it enormously helpful; I appreciate your comments and just building on them. I think we need to really send the message that we care very much about people's security. I know there are ways to do that. There clearly are, so I just want to keep that in mind. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Randy, then Bas.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Yes. Just a couple more, as we go on with this conversation. Like my colleague, I've been doing electronic petitions for a number of years now. I have an email checkoff on them. I actually also do petitions by text on my website. I've got a checkoff on it. Everybody gets an automated response back. If that email is invalid or a corrupted email or text number, it rejects it.

I'm doing it in my office at really no cost. I already have the website and it's pretty much an automated system. I think it's got some pretty adequate safeguards in it. Then, of course, I print one off and get signatures on that hard copy and introduce that one into the House. I think all those things can be dealt with in pretty—they're certainly not insurmountable obstacles to deal with.

To Jagmeet's concern about privacy and security: I think what we have to first look at—there are people who have a much higher regard for their individual privacy and the security of their information. Those people generally don't use their Visa card and eBay and purchase things online. They may not even have a Facebook page. But there are a lot of people whose level of privacy and security is at a much lower threshold, and they're more likely to engage in electronic petitions.

There are a couple of other things here. The two models that have been presented—from my understanding, the Australian Senate uses a system that's much more akin to the system that I use presently, where people do electronic petitions and then they present a hard-copy petition to the Senate. That's on page 16 of the binder that was done up in September 2014. I see that as an effective model. It's low cost to implement or essentially no cost. We would be mirroring the same present process for the petition once it is in the member's hand and is read to the Legislature and then provided to the Clerks' table.

We've got 107 members in this House. If the petition remains within our responsibilities and our jurisdiction to table it, then we don't have to worry so much about the Death Star petitions. I don't think there are going to be too many members who are going to bring forth invalid or inappropriate—you know, we've got 107 checks on those petitions if it's left within the members' responsibilities. I really believe and I think convention and tradition demonstrate that it is the proper jurisdiction of individual members to bring that petition forward in the assembly.

I just put those thoughts out. My own view—not that it's been asked for but I'm going to share it anyway—is

that we ought not to change the outcome of a petition. I don't personally see benefit and value in compelling the government to take any further response to a petition. I do believe government, with all its failings, is still responsible, and they will make the determination based on the whole set of evidence and context in front of them if they should act on a petition or not. That's the perspective and the premise that I'm coming from.

With that view, you can see that the requirement for added security and verification beyond what we have today becomes less needed and less necessary. I'll leave it at that.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Can I just comment on that? The Australian Senate essentially has a paper petition process. It would be much akin to, for example, you and Mr. Clark receiving in your office the electronic petition and then having some kind of a certification or a sign-off saying that what you had, the prayer or the text of the petition, was what appears here. That's what was posted when you received the signatures. Then, you present it the same way you present a paper petition. I guess you could consider that to be option three.

I guess the only thing I think you need to consider in that respect then is: Do any of the rules that currently apply to paper petitions really also need to apply or do you simply say, "Whatever I tell you is a petition is a petition"? Then, I think you have to go further and say, "Are you then eroding the integrity of the process and the value of the petitions themselves by doing that?"

I think it is an option three. It's certainly one that this committee will have to make a decision on, if that's the road you want to go down.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Yes, my view on that—I guess maybe I wasn't fully clear—is that if somebody came to me with a change.org petition or some other mechanism that I had no involvement with and I had no ability to determine anything, then I would reject it out of hand anyway. So the premise was members being the authors or the partners in the petition process—that's where I'm going with it.

One other thought that I didn't finish off with was: In my time, and I think it should be obvious, it's hard enough to get people engaged in the political process in the first place, as a general statement. If I have a petition about a proposed carbon tax in Ontario, the likelihood of me getting people from Newfoundland or wherever to be engaged in the public policy process in Ontario, I think is pretty limited. Most people, in all my experience, aren't going to go onto petition sites from all kinds of other jurisdictions and append their name or whatnot to them—

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I disagree with you. All you've got to do is get a search engine there and it'll do it for you, and they'll all be notified.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Let me ask you this, Mr. Hillier: Would the people in Alberta have an interest in signing a petition about the proposed eastern Canadian pipeline?

Mr. Randy Hillier: There are some examples; yes. I'm not saying it's a fail-safe. I'm just saying, as a general rule, petitions are on the public policy of this province and more often than not—

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): I think if I might, too, the one thing that I think is kind of the unsaid thing is this business of members being the authors of petitions.

1420

Mr. Randy Hillier: Or partners, I guess—

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): That's something that's kind of recent history. Traditionally, petitions are petitions that are generated from the public, and the members, whether they agreed with them or not, presented them to the House. But this notion that members are—and they are—authoring and generating the petitions themselves is a fairly recent phenomenon.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): We'll go to Bas and then Chris.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to go back to Mr. Clark's comment, because I'm not familiar with what you did on Kemptville college.

Mr. Steve Clark: It was just the same—

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: If it was an electronic version, I'm sitting here saying: Okay, that's fine. But it stops in your office. It doesn't come to the assembly in that form, unless you did present it to the Clerk and there is something that we're unaware of.

Mr. Steve Clark: No. The same petition that I tabled in the Legislature is the same petition that's available electronically. So it's available both electronically and in the traditional manner, but it has the table-approved language.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): And original signatures. In other words—

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: So it was hand-signed? Or it was signed online?

Mr. Steve Clark: Both.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): But what we accepted was the one with signatures.

Mr. Steve Clark: So when I stand up, for example, and say, "I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and I have these signatures, plus another 7,000 more online," it's the same petition.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Oh, so you've only tabled a couple. You didn't table 7,000.

Mr. Steve Clark: No, I didn't. No. They'd reject those ones.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I have no problem with what you were doing. My concern is the next step. If we make electronic petitions out of the assembly, and the 7,000 signatures get on there, it's the effectiveness or the awareness that 7,000 signatures were raised with everyone so that we know that the data is valid, rather than—what my friend on the other side was saying was that somebody can develop a computer program and multiply it out. All you need is a database list and you could fill out that petition in no time.

Mr. Randy Hillier: But if there is no outcome that's a requirement, why then would they go and do that?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Well, but my fear is, if we start it, somebody will be looking for an outcome down the road, because it becomes easier to move to the next step.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Trust the integrity of the members.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: You've got to think—I never think for tomorrow; I think 10 years down the road.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): We'll go to Chris, please.

Mr. Chris Ballard: Thank you, Mr. Chair. There has been some really good discussion around the table that has been quite thought-provoking. I'm scrambling to go through the research document and to align my own thoughts.

Years ago—and unfortunately I was around with the introduction of the fax machine. I recall that the first one cost me \$7,500.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I still have a broken one.

Mr. Chris Ballard: Yes, they usually did. You're going to get it fixed one day.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: No, it's good for faxing out; it just won't receive.

Mr. Chris Ballard: Oh, okay.

There was a formula that we used to go by in the world of newspapers. If someone walked into our office to talk about an issue, to complain about an issue, they represented, we'll say, 10,000 people. So if one person walked into the office, you were pretty sure that there were about 10,000 other people because they took the time to come to you and to talk about the issue. If they wrote to you, it was about 1,000 people. If they phoned you, it was about 100 to 200 people. If they faxed you, it was about 50. Now if they email you, it's, what? I don't know. I haven't seen any research.

What I'm worried about, and I get back to the weighting of e-petitions: If it's so easy, the ease of transaction for an e-petition, if we're not verifying or whatever—I don't want to debase it. I don't want to say, "That's one in 10." That's speaking to the importance of petitions. I don't want to see them debased because they are so easy. I don't know what the answer is to that, other than perhaps what we do with petitions maybe needs to change; I'm not sure. But I always keep that in the back of my mind when someone walks into my office versus firing off an angry email.

Interjection: From another town.

Mr. Chris Ballard: From another country.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Could I ask the committee—I'd like to ask a question without vacating my chair.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: No, go right ahead.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Okay.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Chair's prerogative.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Thank you.

Mr. Steve Clark: If it was me, they would've disagreed.

Interjections.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): It's your prerogative.

First of all, I have four fax machines and I use them all the time, especially the one at the farm. On Saturday, it's a godsend.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I see Steve and you will become really good friends.

Interjections.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Hey, there's an idea. I was a government MPP, and on occasion, we would have to put a big banana box at the end of the fax machine to handle what was coming in during demonstrations and what have you. We went through a lot of paper.

There were just two issues—and I know, Deb, you mentioned at the beginning that young people are more familiar with the online form. So I just raise the issue: Is that skewing it somehow or discriminating perhaps against those who are not young? Perhaps, maybe much more elderly people spend a lot of time on this, so I'm just wondering to what extent it skews the process as we move into this. I do know—and I see it on the petitions that I gather. Not all of them get sent into the table, but I look at them over the years, and even recently we ask them to fill out their mailing address and their email address.

In my riding, people will not give us their email address. It's either for security—they don't want to be on a sucker list. The word is out on these sucker lists big time, to get the unnecessary emails. They don't want to put their phone number down, so that's not a concern, but I just know there are so many people—we deal with people in our constituency offices. My offices are downtown and these are people who don't want to even fill out forms with a pen. So we help these people. They don't do the computer thing, really. So many people—I think of my rural area where they're running a bulldozer all day. They don't have an office environment where they can go on a computer. They're not really into that at home either.

I'm just wondering how, during this transition, it skews the process, perhaps discriminates against those people. The last thing they want to do is open up a computer at night after work, or the last thing they want to do is give somebody their email address.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Yes. I think it would be more of a concern if what we were talking about was replacing the paper petitions with an electronic petition process, but—

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Still have the option.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Yes—and I think that probably would be something that would be ill-advised. But I think if you're talking about supplementing the paper petition process so that the folks in your constituency can still go to the corner store and see a paper petition there and sign it and it still ultimately goes through the same process of getting presented to the House and responded to, then I don't think you have put them at any kind of unfair disadvantage. They can still do what they're more comfortable doing.

I'm one of those people who doesn't give out my email address at stores or whatever when they ask for it. I think you raise a very valid point there. There are people who want to maintain some level of privacy with respect to that, and I think that's one of the reasons why my suggestion is—one of the things we have to think about is, what information are we collecting and then how are we displaying it, if at all? I think that's something that really has to be carefully considered by the committee, to maintain that level of privacy.

It may be, if you decide to go the route of e-petitions, that you decide that the only information you need is the information you currently collect on a paper petition, which is a name and an address and not email addresses.

I think the problem with that is—when I talk about authenticating signatures, I'm not talking about making sure that that's—

Interjection.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Yes—that that's a real person, but really that it's not something that's been submitted electronically. So for that reason, you need an email connection.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): I also felt that with the EBR registry that's been around for well over 20 years. You've mentioned the spring bear hunt. I don't know how many hunters, for example, went on computers in their mom's basement and put in a submission. The right to hunt and fish—that went through the EBR registry; I was involved with that, and we knew that there's a certain cadre of people who were on computers who were opposed to Ontario enshrining the right to hunt and fish by law. Those who were very interested in hunting and fishing, and also trapping, weren't really part of the process. We were the government at the time—I don't think it was a factor—but somehow we factored in that this was skewed in the decision-making. Of course, we have that political decision-making as well. There's no magic formula to accommodate the skewing of this and the situations where people are left out.

1430

I still have situations with my petitions with people who do not read English. They really have no idea what I just gave them, no idea at all.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I have the same issue.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Very much so. I think we talked about English and French. Do we consider other languages? Even in my riding, I think of the Hungarian community that have been here for decades and decades and decades and many of the people do not read English.

Thank you for the opportunity to raise my concerns.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Chair, can I just ask a question?

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Yes.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Madam Clerk, if you were to give a recommendation to the committee—and I'm just asking—would you say that we should just complement what we have in paper form today with something similar electronically, just to allow those who want to do it

online to do it, rather than go to the next step because of the next step having many risks?

Mr. Randy Hillier: That's an unfair question.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I think it's a fair question because she handles the paper ones today. I'll leave it in her hands. I just asked for your opinion.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): I'll be very honest: I am of the opinion that if you're going to go the route of e-petitions you should do it properly. You should take a look at what other jurisdictions have done. You should follow their best practices with respect to e-petitions and do a good job of it. I think if it's something that is part of the process of this Legislative Assembly then it's probably something that ought to be something that people can access—on the Legislative Assembly, non-partisan website—in order to submit a petition.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Yes, Jagmeet.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: A couple of points have just come up so I just wanted to touch on them.

Mr. Chair, you brought up an interesting point, and I think it's absolutely valid: the concept of questioning what would skew the process. I think it's obvious that the process would be skewed, but it's currently skewed. The fact is that written petitions would be easier to collect and gather if you can drive around—if you are older, if you have a car—and to drop off at your MPP's office. Probably, again, if you're older and more mature, you would feel more comfortable—that process is probably already skewed in one direction. So having an online process, I don't think is a problem. I think that just opens up the door to more folks because the current system is limiting in a certain way to certain folks. Absolutely, if we only went with one or the other, there would be people who are not comfortable with computers, who wouldn't want to do an online process. I think having both makes sense.

Responding to Madam Clerk's response, I think, absolutely, we need to look at other jurisdictions that are doing it and see what their process is so that we can come up with something that's reflective of the respect to which we hold our Legislative Assembly—something of quality; something we can be proud of.

In terms of democratic value, obviously, members will continue—if there's an issue—to raise their issues through writing their petitions, if that's the choice of a member. But I think the principle of allowing and having a very easy and accessible format for the public to be able to do it independently is something that's in line with one tradition but more importantly in line with that democratic value of openness, transparency and accessibility in allowing a citizen to create their own petition independent of a member. I would agree with having something housed in the Legislative Assembly or some manner that's non-partisan and a member of any riding would not necessarily need to seek out their own member to be able to do it. If they do seek out the member, that's great, too, but they don't have to.

Going back to Mr. Hillier's point, though, I do see the potential for using data and software combined, having a

database and software to perhaps do something that would not really reflect what's really going on in the province.

I think if I was to err one way, I would err on the side of doing whatever it takes to—I would err on the side of having a certain minimal requirement set forth, but erring on the side of making sure that it's available and possible, rather than being so caught up in the concerns of validating it that we don't move forward with it. If I was to err on one side, I would err on the side of: Have a certain protocol in place, but don't make it so onerous and so difficult that we'll just get bogged down by that and not be able to move forward with an actual process. I think that's important.

Just on the point of the weight of the petition, I agree with Mr. Ballard. I do the same thing when someone walks into my office. I think it's probably a bigger deal if someone took the time and effort to come to my office. Then it goes down from there, in terms of the ease of communication. I think that's pretty accurate. But then I think that if you look at online petitions, you actually see an increase in numbers, so maybe it's a one-for-one situation and you don't really weigh it higher. Maybe you weigh it two or three. But if there are 10,000 people, that's 10,000 people. If there are 20,000 people who sign it, that's 20,000 people.

The beauty of online is that it's easier to do. You can be at home and do it, so it's kind of a more direct democracy. It shows you exactly what's going on, a little bit of a feedback of how people see an issue, and you can weigh it for what it's worth. That was at least one person who did that. If you have a list of 100,000 signatures, that's at least 100,000 people. That's weight enough, I think.

Those are all my points.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Yes, Granville?

Mr. Granville Anderson: I just had a few comments. I'm interested in the discussion, and it's all valid points. Yes, we have to move to technology. Things have changed, and we want everybody to partake in democracy. Yes, you have to maintain the legitimacy of the system, because as the Clerk said, it does influence decisions, from time to time, that are made. But still, we cannot be too strict on the rules, because we want participation in democracy.

Steve said—when you get those signatures, those petitions, online, do you go look for the people to sign them physically? How does that happen?

Mr. Steve Clark: No. We have different systems on our two sites. These folks were from agricultural families, so it was very easy to deal with them, because most of them, in addition to signing the petition, sent me emails or sent me a letter, indicating, first, that they've supported the petition, and, second, here is the level of detail that they think should happen at, for example, the Kemptville college petition. These were people that were actively engaged, giving me recommendations.

Then when the municipality did a feasibility study, I actually emailed all of them and said, "I'm emailing you

because you were interested in this. The municipality is doing a survey. Here is the survey link." It was those people that decided whether they would take the survey. I have to tell you, I didn't get thousands of emails bouncing back. These were live people.

Mr. Granville Anderson: Okay.

Mr. Steve Clark: Some of them, for example—and Toby would know this—a husband and wife would have one email account in their house, so I would get the same email account twice, from John Smith and Jane Smith. A lot of times that happened—not thousands of times, but quite a few times. But again, they were all very valid, very engaged, and used email back to me about very specific recommendations.

I found it was very satisfying and something that I hadn't experienced in the almost five years that I've been a member. This was the time that I was dealing with people all over the province—nobody outside of the province; nobody in the US. It was a typical Ontario issue because it affected farm families, people that graduated from Kemptville college, people whose kids attended the college. I found it was an eye-opener for me.

Mr. Granville Anderson: Yes, there's so much apathy. So anything that allows people to participate in democracy—

Mr. Randy Hillier: I'll just add on to that. The only problem that we've experienced is that single email checkoff, where an email goes back for verification, and the husband and wife get mad because they both can't sign the petition, right? That has been my biggest beef with my petitions.

1440

But electronic petitions are much like any other petition. If you think back to just regular paper petitions, there are people who will take them out to their friends and families. They'll take them out to hunt camps, corner stores or bingo. They'll take them wherever. I have them in my office. I'm sure most members have petitions in their offices, for people who walk in. The electronic petition is just one more. I've had lots of people print my petitions off from the website and then go out and do them the old-fashioned way, putting them out at the gas stations and the corner stores. We've had all kinds of people share them on Facebook, and tell people on Facebook or Twitter to go to that web page.

I would just say one other thing, Toby. It goes without saying, but I'll say it anyway: It's a very changing dynamic, this medium. The last thing I saw is that the fastest-growing demographic on Facebook is women over 55. I can tell you that even the amount of people who are engaged in technology as a way to communicate with their member of the Legislature has skyrocketed. The number of emails that I get today as compared to when I was first elected in 2007, the people sending me requests on Facebook, which didn't exist for me in 2007, and people sending me messages by Twitter—these are constituents.

Things are going to continue to change, and that's why we have committees: to make alterations to our standing

orders as circumstances and contexts change. We don't need to be too fearful of that change. We need to examine it and investigate it, even if we do it as a pilot project for a period of time. We have also seen, when you read through these briefs, that there have been a lot of different processes tried, and a lot of them have failed. Whether the bureaucracy of government is the host of petition sites, or when the legislative body is hosting—there have been many different examples. You know, 10 Downing Street used to have its own petition site, and it failed—well, I shouldn't say it failed; it was altered. Now we've gone to the House of Commons, which is a more appropriate body to host petitions, in my view, than the executive. Anyway, those are just a couple points of view from where I see things.

And what I'd say to those husbands and wives who only have one email account is to either get another email account or come on in to the constit office and sign it on the paper copy.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): I'm assuming that, both Deb and Todd, you probably have some responsibilities with the House reconvening at 3 o'clock? I would ask that, if you wish to slip out, we could continue our discussion; we'll just leave it that way.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Sure. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Feel free to just slip out at any time.

On my list is Jagmeet, and then Steve.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I was just thinking of next steps. We're getting close to 3 o'clock anyway. For next steps, I think we all probably need to caucus this, to make sure that we have a good sense of where our parties stand in terms of the direction. Is there additional research that we need to request where we're unclear? We have a lot in front of us. Is there additional research that the Clerk's office needs to do or wants to do?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): Actually, if I could just—because we will have to leave—make this parting comment, I think that what the committee has to do going forward is determine whether, in principle, they want to pursue the notion of having an e-petition process. Because then, once there's an agreement there, you can start looking at the options that are available, what the best practices in other jurisdictions are and essentially how to go about it. I think there's not very much merit in going through all of that if, at the end of the day, you find out that in principle, the committee is not in agreement with making that recommendation. Once you get that far down the road, we can help a lot with developing the processes that you think you're leaning towards and giving you a framework for doing it.

If I might suggest, because you asked for additional research, what I think would be useful is if—I don't know whether this committee has the document that was previously sent out, which is the overview of e-petitions in other jurisdictions. I think it would be useful if we updated that, given that there are some changes in some

of those jurisdictions now, and made sure that the committee had it. I think that would be helpful to you.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I'll just wrap up.

Sorry, was that everything, Madam Clerk?

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): I'm sorry?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I didn't want to cut you off. Did you—

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): No, that's it.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: One thing I'll request on my behalf—I don't know how many members; I know at least Mr. Hillier does have the—I don't have the overview of e-petitions in other jurisdictions; I don't have that myself. I'd request that. We'll get that for everybody?

Mr. Randy Hillier: You should also go on my website—

Mr. Steve Clark: My website too.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I will go on both their websites and check it out.

So (1) everybody gets that research; (2) obviously, we're going to need to caucus this and make sure. But can we all say that in some form, we do agree with the idea of having e-petitions? I think that's pretty clear. No? Yes? Maybe?

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Any comments on that? Are we—

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: As I said before, our caucus has had no discussion. I'd have to take it back to them.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Fair. So let's caucus it and come back. We can't do anything beyond that.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Randy and then Chris.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Chair, I'd like to move a motion. I move that the committee should limit its consideration of e-petitions to ways of supplementing the current paper petition process and should not include changes to the processes that follow the tabling of petitions.

Chair, if I might, my view on this motion is just to help us concentrate and focus our discussion. I'll move this forward so that we have a discussion for next week. I think we can see, if we're not sure of the output of a petition, if the output of a petition is going to alter or change or is unknown, that to establish a process to get to an unknown outcome is impossible. So know what the outcome is first. Then we can develop the proper processes to get to that agreed-upon outcome.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): We have a verbal motion from Randy. Discussion?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Only to say that I made the request that we bring this to our caucus. I would prefer to bring an open request on e-petitions to my caucus rather than a restricted one at this time. I can't support that.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I understand this. You've got to bring it back to the caucus. Just what are you bringing back to the caucus if not—

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: E-petitions with all options.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Sure. What my hope and my intention here is—as I just said, do we know what sort of

outcome we want? We don't even know that yet. So have that discussion with our caucuses. When we come back to the committee next Wednesday, we'll have had an opportunity to discuss with our caucuses and have the ability to engage in a thoughtful conversation, whether we want to not consider output changes of petitions or whether we want to go with something else. This will help us focus in our conversations and our discussions and have something of tangible merit to bring back to our caucuses.

Mr. Steve Clark: Chair, I just want to agree with him. I was on this committee when we did standing order changes for years, and nothing was ever accomplished. We all discussed things that we agreed upon, not just e-petitions. There was a myriad of things—Mr. Balkissoon knows. Nothing ever got finished. I agree with Mr. Hillier—

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Well, the House was prorogued.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Two years.

Mr. Steve Clark: That's not just the case. But we have to decide whether we're going to supplement the existing process or whether we're going to create a new process, if we're ever going to decide how to move forward. I think it's very important—

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I'm ready to vote, Mr. Chair; I already expressed my opinion.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Are the members ready to vote? It's a verbal motion. We don't have this in front of us.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I wasn't considering a vote on this right at the present time. Because we're approaching the end of our time, I'll continue to discuss past 3 o'clock if we need to. The purpose here is to actually have something to bring forward to our caucuses so that we can have a thoughtful conversation next Wednesday and be able to be in a position, possibly—

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I thought he said he was tabling a motion. It's up to you, Chair. You're the Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): We do have a motion on the floor, but a request not to vote on it?

Mr. Randy Hillier: I'd like to see if there's any further discussion on the merit of that motion.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Further debate?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Maybe I could just ask for some clarification. So the motion is essentially to sort out whether or not we are in agreement that the online petition, the e-petition, should be a supplement or a replacement.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Yes.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I would assume that we would certainly want to maintain the paper as part of our tradition. It's easier for some folks. It's an existing system. There's no reason to get rid of it. The e-petition,

I would assume, would be something that supplements it as opposed to replacing it. As long as I understand the motion correctly, I guess I'll turn it back to—

Interjections.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Maybe we could get the motion photocopied and circulated to all members of the committee.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Do the members want a copy of this motion?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: To vote?

Mr. Randy Hillier: A copy so that you could read it and have it.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I don't need it. No.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Are the members ready to vote?

Mr. Randy Hillier: Chair, I'd like to call—

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Defer it?

Mr. Randy Hillier: I'd like to defer the vote. If not, I'll call for a 20-minute recess.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): All right. So we've got a choice to either—

Mr. Randy Hillier: Bas, we went through this all, for two years, of never having anything on the table to actually vote on. Are we going to do that again?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: With due respect, I have a lot of new members who are unaware of anything that went on, and I'd rather leave it wide open.

Mr. Randy Hillier: But you're taking the exact same path as what happened last time.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I have four other colleagues. I've just given you my opinion.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Is there anybody opposed to having e-petitions supplement paper petitions? That's a pretty easy concept.

I'll withdraw the motion. I will retable it next week. I would like to have some discussion that has—

Mr. Steve Clark: A purpose.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Yes.

Mr. Steve Clark: And I want to give you our assurance that we will take that motion before our caucus and have a discussion before our meeting on Wednesday.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I didn't say I wasn't taking this issue to my caucus. I want to take it wide open.

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm making a statement. I'm not doing a request to you. I'm making a statement on what we're going to do.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Any further requests before we adjourn? The committee is adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 1454.

CONTENTS

Wednesday 25 February 2015

Petitions.....	M-27
Ms. Deborah Deller, Clerk of the Assembly	
Mr. Todd Decker, Deputy Clerk of the Assembly	

STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

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