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**Official Report
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Wednesday 25 March 2015

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Mercredi 25 mars 2015

**Standing Committee on
the Legislative Assembly**

Committee business

**Comité permanent de
l'Assemblée législative**

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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 March 2015

Mercredi 25 mars 2015

The committee met at 1304 in committee room 1.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): We reconvene the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly for the purpose of organization. It sounds familiar.

Ms. Soo Wong: I hear an echo.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I move that Randy Hillier become the Chair of the committee.

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: That's not what we're doing?

Mr. Randy Hillier: No.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Oh.

Interjections.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Committee, as I understand it—and I did not chair the last meeting—normally, we would be voting on the amendment of Mr. Hillier to the motion of Mr. Ballard regarding Bill 56. I might ask the Clerk to just briefly explain where we're at right now.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Trevor Day): In the last meeting, we were awaiting a vote on Mr. Hillier's amendment to Mr. Ballard's motion on Bill 56. Since that last meeting, the bill has been discharged from this committee and sent to another committee. Therefore, Bill 56 is no longer before this committee, and I'm assuming that the Chair is about to rule both the amendment and the original motion out of order.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): On behalf of the whole committee and as Chair, I think I would rule that both the amendment and the motion are out of order. Thank you.

The next order of business: Seeing none, I open the floor for any new business.

Mr. Steve Clark: Chair, we had a motion before the committee, which I believe the Clerk is handing out, that programs a discussion for a finite period of time before the committee, that being the finite three-week discussion of e-petitions, and then the committee would deal with the three private members' bills that were part of the motion several weeks ago. My understanding was that after we dealt with those three bills, there would still be an opportunity for us before the House rises to have another discussion, if we don't come into some consensus on moving forward.

Certainly from our perspective, Mr. Hillier's and my perspective, based on the discussion we had on e-petitions, we do have a motion that he would like to table regarding e-petitions. But I'm just wondering if the Clerk could tell us, based on the motion that we passed on February 18, what would be the schedule for this committee from now until this motion has been satisfied.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Everyone has before them a page that was passed on February 18—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: This hasn't been passed, it says.

Mr. Steve Clark: It's been passed.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): —carried February 18.

Mr. Steve Clark: Through you, Chair, to the Clerk, can he go through the schedule for this committee based on the motion that was passed on February 18?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Trevor Day): I will try. What we have is, this was passed on February 18. We would have had the order of business set on February 18. February 25 would be considered e-petitions week 1 and March 4 would be e-petitions week 2. According to this, there is a revisiting of the schedule after two weeks of e-petitions, which—because we really didn't move any further on that second week, the 4th, the motion for Bill 56 was first introduced. The committee then moved to the motion on Bill 56 on March 4 and the motion for Bill 56 on March 11. We now find ourselves with that motion gone.

We are sitting after two weeks, roughly, of e-petition work. According to this, the committee will revisit its schedule with, potentially, at least another week of e-petitions, depending on the outcome of the committee, before it moves to these other bills, as I read it.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Mr. Balkissoon.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Did I hear you say we had two weeks of e-petitions? Because I thought we only had the Clerk on the one week. In the original week, the first week, we discussed programming, what we were going to do.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Trevor Day): What I've got—and again, this is subject to checking—this was carried on the 18th. We had the 25th meeting on e-petitions—

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Right. And the Clerk was here.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Trevor Day): That's correct.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: So that's the first meeting on e-petitions, in my mind.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Trevor Day): On the 4th, we had scheduled a meeting on e-petitions at that time, and the motion on Bill 56 started. So the definition of how much was e-petitions and how much was Bill 56 is open for interpretation.

1310

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Right. In my mind, it's one week.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: So you've done one week on e-petitions.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Mr. Hillier.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Just for clarification—hopefully it's clarification. If you look at the motion that was adopted on February 18, and we take out the e-petition component of it, it had seven weeks of hearings on the three other bills. We did consume a number of weeks talking about Bill 56 instead of e-petitions. Looking at the legislative calendar, I believe we have nine more sitting weeks until we rise in June. So we can still accomplish the seven weeks that we've put forward in the February 18 motion if we dispense with the e-petitions considerations fairly rapidly.

With that in mind, Chair, I would like to table a motion regarding e-petitions and get us back onto the schedule.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): First of all, I don't think you asked the Clerk about the timeline, the nine weeks.

Mr. Randy Hillier: If my timelines are incorrect, then maybe he can correct that.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Trevor Day): What I am seeing right now, including this meeting, so March 25 being the first, are nine more potential meeting dates, including this meeting today.

Mr. Steve Clark: That's what Mr. Hillier said.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Do you want to read in your motion?

Mr. Randy Hillier: Okay. So my motion is—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I thought we were still on this here—just before you get to that motion, because there was a point that I wanted to make to this.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Would that be—yes?

Mr. Randy Hillier: Well, that motion has already been carried.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: No, no. But I wanted to discuss this—

Mr. Randy Hillier: I'll defer to—

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Yes, I understand. I just wanted to make a point in regard to that.

I understand that it's been voted on in committee; I understand the process and I know where we're at. But it just seems to me that what essentially now you have—because when you made that decision, those were the bills that were before this committee. There were two Liberal bills and one Conservative bill. We've since then had two other bills referred to this committee, one

Conservative bill and one New Democratic bill. I would ask for a friendly amendment, that if we're going to do two weeks on each of the bills, we do one from each caucus, now that we actually have a bill referred to this committee. So there would be one Liberal bill, one Conservative bill and one NDP bill. So I'd like to propose a motion to amend the February 18 motion, that we actually reflect that. It seems to me that that would be fair. Everybody gets a kick at the can.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I'm going to go on a point of order. I thought that was—I deferred because there was a clarification. I would kindly ask the Chair that I had requested a motion to be tabled first and that my motion be heard first.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I have no objection to hearing your motion. My point is, I don't want to let the opportunity go, that the committee business is now—if it moves forward as proposed by the February 18 motion, I ask that it be amended so that in fact there is a bill from each caucus that is dealt with within that rotation.

So we want to deal with yours first? I'm fine.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): So let's hear Mr. Hillier's motion, and, if need be, Mr. Bisson, perhaps an amendment to that motion would be in order.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Yes, because we're now discussing the last point of the motion on February 18, right? So it says that the committee revisit—anyway, okay.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Okay. I move that the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly recommend to the House that the assembly permit the tabling of electronic petitions that mimics the current process for paper petitions; and

That any signatures on any petition can only be collected on a member's official legislative website; and

That the format of the electronic petition be presented to the Legislature in printed form, including the individual's full name, email address, mailing address and phone number, as well as the full-text copy of the petition that has been signed; and

That the electronic petition process be implemented on a trial basis up until the end of the fall legislative session of 2015.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): We'll get copies of this motion. Now, my understanding is, we were discussing scheduling before this motion.

Mr. Randy Hillier: My understanding is that we—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: That's why I was trying to make an amendment on scheduling.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): So the motion is on the floor. Let's have a five-minute recess for a copy.

The committee recessed from 1315 to 1320.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): We do have a motion on the floor which was read in by Mr. Hillier. I saw some indications of discussion—

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I had my hand up.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Oh, I'm sorry.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I think Gilles had his hand up first. I was second.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Yes, are we talking to Mr. Hillier's motion now?

Interjections.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): We should allow Mr. Hillier to speak to his own motion first.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Yes, not a problem.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Then Mr. Bisson and then Mr. Balkissoon.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Thank you, Chair. As we all know, we've discussed electronic petitions for a few years in this assembly, and we've heard from the Clerks. A significant amount of analysis and evaluation and considerations have been provided. I've tabled this motion, which I believe meets with the spirit of those discussions and limits any negative consequences or unknowns that were explained to this committee.

This motion, as it states, would mimic the existing system completely. There would be no new costs borne by the assembly. The same safeguards that are in place for the paper petitions are included and encapsulated with the electronic petitions. The safeguard is further reinforced by no alterations in the process of what happens after a petition is tabled in the House.

I've also done this in a spirit of co-operation, that we implement and try it for a period of time which I think is reasonable, but that it is indeed a pilot project, a trial basis, and that this committee or the House would be able to evaluate it or make changes in due course.

It's also worded, in the proper fashion, that this assembly recommends to the House. We can't unilaterally alter the standing orders, but our jurisdiction and our responsibility here is to investigate, examine, evaluate and make recommendations to the House.

That's my statement on this motion. I hope you find that it considers all those discussions that we've heard from professional people, and that it is in keeping with the idea to modernize the Legislative Assembly and safeguard the institution at the same time.

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

Mr. Bisson?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, I want to be supportive. I think the idea of moving to e-petitions is long overdue. I think there are problems in doing that, and I think other members will speak to that in some detail. But I want to speak specifically to your motion.

I don't have a problem with it being on members' websites. However, our websites are not set up to deal with some of the issues that have to be dealt with when it comes to e-petitions. For example, and I don't know how this is done, but I've seen somebody do it before where they go up and they vote numerous times on those polls for the papers. They do something. I don't know what they do. They do some kind of command on the computer and they vote multiple times on the poll for the radio station or the poll for the paper, so that one person ends up voting a gazillion times and skews the outcome of the poll.

My website doesn't have the ability to deal with that kind of stuff, so I could end up with a legitimate petition that the member wants to move forward—and I entirely support the idea of putting it online. But you could end up with a situation where one person represents 50% of the signatures on the petition that's coming forward by doing whatever voodoo magic you've got to do with the computer to get it to do whatever it's got to do. I want to put that on the record.

The other thing is, I remember when we sat and dealt with this issue in a minority Parliament. I was a member of the Legislative Assembly committee then. There were a number of technical things that needed to be dealt with above the standing orders, because the standing orders are meant currently to deal with paper petitions. It was never contemplated that the current standing orders would deal with electronic petitions.

I do remember us talking to various people at the time that are more learned on this than I am—and I want to, first of all, say that I'm certainly not an expert. But there are a number of issues that we need to deal with. I'm just trying to remember some of them. Currently, when it comes to a petition, is there a lower limit as to what is a petition or what isn't a petition when it comes to the number of signatures? There were threshold issues. There were other issues that I can't remember.

But I just want to say that I want to be supportive. I think this is really a step in the right direction. I think the member is right: It's high time that we move forward with electronic petitions. This committee has been dealing with this at a snail's pace. It's been, what, two Parliaments now and we're still no closer today than we were two Parliaments ago in getting electronic petitions. But I have a problem with this particular motion, especially with the second bullet point, and somewhat with the first bullet point.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Mr. Balkissoon?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I will state at the onset that I'm a full supporter of e-petitions. I'm also highly supportive of modernizing the Legislature and public engagement, but I have a lot of difficulty with what Mr. Hillier has just moved, because—if I could just go through his petition, and maybe he'll get an opportunity to respond and clarify things.

We started out, as a committee, when the committee tabled to study e-petitions in their entirety, all options, all the obstacles and all the technical issues that Mr. Bisson just covered. I think we started out in the right direction because we had a particular motion with X number of days. We clearly put in it that after two days of discussion and hearing some witnesses, we would revisit our time schedule if we believed there was more to be done.

If I look at Mr. Hillier's motion, in the first one he says to recommend to the assembly to permit the tabling of electronic petitions that mimics the current paper process. So right there, he has decided what process it would be, and that circumvents the original intent of the committee's work. I have a lot of difficulty with that because it's making us make a decision today that we

haven't studied; we haven't looked at all the various options that are available to us.

The piece about signatures: I have difficulty understanding. Is he talking electronic signatures or the physical signature of a person whose signature you recognize? That one leaves me open so that I'm not sure what the second paragraph is.

If I look at the third paragraph, it says to present the petition in printed form with all these details. I have difficulty understanding what the petition will look like when it's presented to the Legislature. Without seeing what it looks like and understanding, I'm reluctant to support this.

If you look at the whole motion, Mr. Hillier has actually circumvented the committee's work to study petitions and he's telling us that this is the model we should adopt. To be honest with you, Mr. Hillier and Mr. Clark have been very good; they've shared with us that they have electronic petitions on their websites. I don't have any. I don't have a website. I have a Legislative Assembly website that's pretty basic because it can't do these things. So if you want to make this available to all members, it's not going to happen overnight as it's sort of perceived in this particular motion.

There are a lot of difficulties I have with this motion because it's not allowing us to study. It's not allowing us to do research. It's not allowing us to bring people here who are experts where they have adopted e-petitions already, as we discussed, like the House of Commons, Wales, England etc. In fact, I just came back from a tour of Westminster and I did ask the question of the Clerk, "Who is in charge of e-petitions?" They went through an almost two-year study about where they wanted to land. They had a lot of discussions and they had a lot of difficulties dealing with it. They haven't come to that final model yet. They were actually copying something that was at 10 Downing Street, but they want to modify it and modernize it. They have not finished, and they've been doing it for two years. I've asked the Clerk at Westminster to provide us with their minutes of meetings or reports or whatever they have available, and it was promised that it would be mailed to the Speaker of the House. I'm hoping to get that soon.

1330

I don't want to rush, but I think Mr. Hillier's trying to give us a quick fix. You know what, Chair? I came here not to find a Band-Aid solution to petitions today; I came here to study something that will really engage the public in a true fashion to modernize the Legislature. I'm prepared to do that much. In fact, I came with a motion that we go back to e-petitions and leave it wide open; that we research it and do it right.

I was going to look at how I can amend this motion, that we just go back to what we were doing on e-petitions and continue to study and continue to call the experts in, even if we've got to get them by phone or video or whatever, or get them here in person. I'm prepared to do that. I'm not prepared to do a Band-Aid solution.

So I have difficulty with this motion, and I hope—no offence, that he's had it on his website. I haven't had the experience. I haven't even gone to your website to see what you do. So I have difficulty in putting a lot of credibility to what you are doing. I have to personally experience it before I feel comfortable.

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

Mr. Steve Clark: Thanks, Chair. I'm in favour of the motion, obviously. I, like Mr. Balkissoon and Mr. Bisson, sat on the committee as we dealt with the standing orders, and I don't think the standing orders are a Band-Aid solution. They're the rules that our Legislature operate under.

I feel that this motion allows us to run on a provisional basis, because we can actually do something while we're studying this issue. I'm certainly not saying we can't continue to study it, and Ms. McNair has done a wonderful report. I'm sure the report you got from Westminster—I don't travel, obviously, in the same circles as Mr. Balkissoon that I can go to Westminster and talk to the Clerk. But I do think that what I didn't see in the previous review was any action. I didn't see anything moving forward.

I know that, as the opposition House leader—I'm not going to speak for the third party House leader—in my conversations with Mr. Naqvi, and I'm not saying this to get him mad at me again. I see his staff in the back, and I don't want them to rush out and tell him I was saying anything disparaging. But I think he wants to change some of the things on how we do business.

All Mr. Hillier and I are trying to do is to take what we do today on our websites—certainly Mr. Hillier does it more than I have done—with very little cost, with very little extra expense in my constituency office. I provide the constituents, in a small way, with a vehicle that they use every day. The fact of the matter is, our constituents—mine, yours, ours—use electronic petitions and other electronic forms of communication. We have not met their needs in terms of providing a vehicle for them to communicate to us electronically.

This provisional measure can still satisfy this committee's motion of February 28. It still could give us an opportunity for us to hear these three bills and, even with two weeks left in the schedule, could even hear one of Mr. Bisson's bills to help him, and then continue to give us the opportunity to have this study that you want, to get feedback on our provisional decision to allow e-petitions, to legitimize e-petitions, at next to no cost, while we're studying it for six months, 12 months, two years, whatever the committee decides.

I think we can have the best of both worlds. I think we can continue to provide paper petitions and allow an opportunity to test e-petitions. And listen: I hear, through you, Chair, to Mr. Balkissoon, what you are saying with your website. Not everyone's website has the technological capabilities. I didn't think mine did either and was surprised at how easy and quick it was to be able to

provide this feature to my constituents. They loved it. They thought it was great.

I think we can pass this motion and show that this committee is actually making some progress. I know that, as the opposition House leader, I would be delighted to say that we've made some progress.

Our caucus is already doing it. Our caucus is already doing electronic petitions, and we're communicating back. So it's happening now, and I just feel that this would be a natural extension, as Mr. Hillier does, to the paper process, to allow us the opportunity to try this until the end of the session.

We can have our hearings. We can have hearings for these three bills, even add a fourth to make the NDP happy, and still give us the entire fall session—the times that this committee meets in September, October, November and December—to continue this discussion, just like Mr. Balkissoon had suggested in his motion.

I support this motion. I think it's the right way to go. I know Mr. Hillier has some comments to respond directly to Mr. Balkissoon, but I think this is a good move on our part.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Mr. Hillier.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Yes. Thank you. I'd like to respond in order. I'll respond to Mr. Bisson's comments first, and then Mr. Balkissoon's.

First off, I put this in there: that it's the member's legislative website. The purpose and the reason behind that, the rationale, is because that falls under the Members' Integrity Act. So, if there is any wrongdoing, it's captured under the Members' Integrity Act, and we have an independent officer of the assembly who has jurisdiction to enforce and ensure compliance under the Members' Integrity Act.

That's one very substantial safeguard, and I think it's most fundamental that we understand our actions as members and on our websites are guarded and enforced by the integrity officer, as well as other independent officers of the House. It also permits any other MPP to lodge a complaint with the Integrity Commissioner if somebody is using their website inappropriately. There's a substantial safeguard.

Further to Mr. Bisson's comments, websites are not static. You make them the way you want them to perform. On my website, my petitions only allow one email address to be inserted, and that's a pretty common practice. I get complaints because a husband and wife who have the same email address can only sign once.

But again, I'm going to take the committee back to what the Clerk mentioned as far as safeguards: There is nothing at the present time that prevents somebody from signing the same petition on multiple occasions. There's nothing there. But we do know that most people have better things to do than going around and sign the same petitions over and over—there may be a few odd ones out there, but generally speaking.

The last comment by Mr. Bisson was on thresholds. At the present time, our petition process has no reference to thresholds. All you need is one signature. That's the

minimum threshold. There is no maximum. One of the reasons why there are no thresholds is because there is no action that is compelled by the government from a petition.

If I might just expand a little bit, we've seen other jurisdictions where they say, "If you reach X," and X is 100,000 petitions, "then the government must do" action A. I'm suggesting that we leave our electronic petitions in the same format as our paper petitions and not alter that. We can continue to study this through this trial process. But for the time being, this motion just says, "Leave everything as is, status quo," except for allowing the electronic.

1340

To Mr. Balkissoon's comments, I am not trying to impose on this committee anything. What I've done is, I've offered up a suggestion by way of a motion for the committee members to consider, for the committee members to possibly amend or whatever else they might choose to do, and then it will be the members of this committee who will actually make the decision. It's not I who will make a decision. I'm asking for this committee to consider this.

The other comment by Mr. Balkissoon: He suggested that I want a decision to be made without study. We have studied this; we've studied this for over two years. There has been a substantial amount. I don't believe our evaluations are complete, but for us to study further without having anything that we can actually measure the outcomes of is somewhat, you know—just a continuous discussion without ending. At least with this motion, it would allow the House—all 107 members, not just this committee—to test, to try, and to make their own evaluations as well. If some of them, such as Mr. Balkissoon, don't want to do electronic petitions, that's fine. For others who do want to, they have an avenue. But we shouldn't all be prevented from trying things because some members don't want to engage that technology or whatever the case may be. This allows continued evaluation and examination but with the added benefit of being able to actually measure outcomes, when none of our other two-year conversations has actually allowed us to measure anything.

I just want to again emphasize that this is not me making a decision; this is me putting forth a motion for this committee to consider. Even at that, it's a motion to recommend to the House. The House still has the ultimate authority and jurisdiction. Even though this committee recommends adopting e-petitions as a pilot project on a trial basis, the House may reject it anyway. But I think it's time we give the House something to consider after over two years of conversation on this one subject in this committee.

Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): I'll just run down the list: Mr. Balkissoon, then Mr. Bisson, then Ms. McMahon. Mr. Balkissoon?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Mr. Chair, I put my hand up to just quickly make a comment that I sat on this committee

when we did the standing order review. It was the standing order review and it included e-petitions. We spent more time studying the House schedule and the changes that were made in the previous session and how you could undo it and try to come up with a schedule that the minority government agreed to. That was the majority of our debate.

We asked the House for permission to continue to meet during the summer, and if my memory serves me right, because I know several times I got on the phone, we could not get the subcommittee to set the committee work for some of those meetings that were scheduled, and then everything died.

To say that we studied, in depth, e-petitions before—no, we didn't. We had a little bit of research, because it's still available, but to get into it in detail, we did not.

I just wanted to put that on the record, that I was part of that committee. I sat through those meetings. Our focus back then was the schedule of the Legislature because everybody did not agree with the schedule that was there. We had two or three or four versions of a new schedule. Ms. MacLeod, as the member from the PC Party, submitted many of those. We took them back to our caucus. We didn't get agreement. To make those comments—being a member of the committee, I don't feel that they were correct.

Mr. Hillier explains the position that he's putting this in front of us. I have to clearly state that I see it as circumventing the study and the research that need to be done.

I do have a similar concern as Mr. Bisson about security, verification of signatures and a whole lot of other things, because the electronic world today is very complicated, and I have an electronic background, so I should be the guy who is supportive.

I do want to improve the Legislature. I do want to see a better petition process. I am not prepared to do a quick fix or a Band-Aid and rush this stuff, and then you have to undo what you rushed. I'd rather we did it properly, like what the other governments are doing: study it in detail, look at costs, look at implementation, how much staff it will take to run it. In fact, many of the governments have a vetting process to vet what's a valid petition and what is not—

Mr. Randy Hillier: Chair, point of order.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Mr. Hillier.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I'd like to withdraw the motion.

Interjections.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Mr. Balkissoon has the floor, so we'll wait.

Mr. Balkissoon.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: So, Mr. Chair, I have difficulty supporting the motion. I was prepared to go back to studying e-petitions in detail, calling our witnesses and getting the research we need to do, and then the committee can make that proper decision and recommend something to the House eventually.

If I could just make a comment, when the Clerk appeared before us, I asked a specific question to the

Clerk: "If you had your druthers"—and I know some of my colleagues actually said to me that that's not a fair question. I did say to the Clerk, "If you had a preference to recommend to the committee, would you recommend mimicking the paper model we have or to have a better and a complete system and something that would improve the Legislature?" If my memory serves me right, she wanted us to do a good job and recommend something better than what we have. So I take her advice.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Mr. Bisson, I have you down on the list.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I think that what Mr. Hillier is trying to do is a good idea. I was going to actually suggest maybe there's something we can do here to make this work.

First of all, he's talking about doing this on a trial basis. The idea is that after X amount of time, and I think it's the end of the fall session, we get a chance to see how it worked and what needs to be done in order to address it and all that. I think that's not a bad approach. I think it's actually not a bad idea.

The problem I had is using my website. The member is suggesting that you can collect a petition online, then you have to print it, and then you have to present it. That's all he's suggesting. It's another way of collecting petitions. I'm worried that my website doesn't have the ability and capacity to duplicate people voting five times as they do on these other things. But I'm sure the Legislative Assembly does. Maybe the way to do that would be—

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: No, they don't.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'm sure that they do. We have very smart people who work here; they're called LIS. So what I was going to suggest—

Ms. Cindy Forster: They contracted all that out. Don't you remember?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: No, LIS is still here.

But there are two points I want to make here. The first point is maybe what we need to do is, rather than being collected on the member's website, they be collected on the Legislative Assembly website, and when printed they're given to the member where they came from because you'd have to fill out the form that says, "In the name of the riding of Haldimand-Norfolk, the following people sign the following petition"—the Legislative Assembly can make sure that the technical part gets worked out—and then what happens is, it's printed and given to the member from Haldimand-Norfolk, who actually presents it.

But that's up to you if you want that amendment or not. That's something that I'm prepared to talk about.

1350

But I do want to make a point in regard to what Mr. Balkissoon said. If the sole reason that the government doesn't want to deal with this is because, in the previous Parliament, we only spent four or five days talking about e-petitions—and if that's true, I don't remember; I remember talking about it a little bit more than that: Listen, I've seen bills come through these committees in

less than a day. Let's be real here. When a government wants to move a bill forward, they time-allocate. They send the bill into committee; it gets short shrift for public hearings—you're lucky if you get a day—and often you don't even get hearings; you just get clause-by-clause. So the fact that this thing was dealt with quickly in the previous Parliament—and I'm not entirely in agreement with you. We spent a fair amount of time, and I think we vetted most of the issues in the previous Parliament having to do with what we need to do electronic petitions.

It seems to me that the member is putting forward an idea, and if we tweak it a bit, there might be a way to move forward on a trial basis so that we can say, "This worked or didn't work" at the end of the fall session.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Ms. McMahon.

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: Actually, just to step back for a second, I think what we're hearing—and it's interesting, your comments, Mr. Bisson, because I was going to make some of them myself. So I concur. I'm by far not a technical expert. In my family, they refer to me as the techno-peasant, so I will cheerfully admit that this is not my area of expertise.

By way of saying that, what we're hearing around the room today is a lot of cheerful agreement that we need to move forward on this basis. I think what I'm hearing, and I could be wrong, is that we just differ a little bit on how quickly to get there and by what means. Mr. Bisson raised a very valid point in terms of where it should be hosted, potentially. Where you're going, Mr. Hillier, and the comments that you've added, Mr. Bisson, tell us exactly what we're trying to discuss here and what we're trying to put forward, which is that we need to study this a little bit.

There are some very valid concerns about security. I have a small concern about validity and managing people's expectations. They sign a petition; they hope and pray that it goes somewhere off into the universe and that it's validated appropriately and considered, it's in a secure place and it gets the right stamp of approval, like the process we have now. So we want to make sure we have those safeguards in place too.

Again, I want to come back to what we have in common, which is a desire to do this. I think we're just having a little bit of a disagreement on how to get there. There's a spirit of co-operation that Mr. Hillier elucidated on at the outset, which is really important, in modernizing the Legislative Assembly, which is also so important, and we are in hearty agreement with that. "Let's get it right" is what we're trying to articulate; let's do it properly and use the time that we have to do that.

I'm not saying we have to take as long as the British House, which is eight years and rolling, or the federal Parliament, which has taken 12 years to study this matter. Let's build on those best practices. We don't have to take that long, but what those two processes perhaps tell us is that this is an important matter for our consideration, for our public's confidence in us and in the process, too. To be sure that we have the right process, let's take the time that we need to study this and get it right. I think we can

do that; we're smart people. I think there's a lot of will here to get it done. I make my comments in that spirit.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): There was a comment from research—sorry, Mr. Hillier.

Ms. Joanne McNair: I just wanted to say that the UK House of Commons has adopted e-petitions. They adopted them in February. The report is online, all their hearings—everything is online. You can easily download them. They are going to be implemented early in the next Parliament. Their election is on May 7. So they're going full steam ahead with that.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Thank you for that. Mr. Hillier.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I move to defer consideration of that motion.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Sorry, I didn't hear you.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I'd like to defer consideration of this motion.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Trevor Day): Mr. Hillier is moving to defer consideration. It's a dilatory motion, which can be moved while there is another motion on the floor. Basically, what it says is that the committee not deal with it at this time. It doesn't put any conditions around it, just "not now." If it passes, the committee moves on to any other business on its agenda.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Can I just ask a question, then? If you defer this, does it become the next order of business that the committee deals with, or only when it's called by the committee?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Trevor Day): It would remain on the committee's agenda, to be called by the committee.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Yes, it just sits on the order paper, essentially. Okay.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Mr. Hillier has moved that this motion be deferred. All in favour?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: A question, about the debate.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Yes, go ahead.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Just to the Clerk: I've been here for—

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Chair, can we take five minutes before we vote?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Can I ask my question before you go? It's just a very quick question.

I've been here many years. I've never seen the deferral of a motion, or maybe it has happened and I don't remember. Are we breaking new ground here? Is this exciting?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Trevor Day): No. There are different types of dilatory motions. There are three: closure—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I understand it's a dilatory motion, and that's—

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Trevor Day): Yes. Closure is one; adjournment completely is another; and, yes, to defer consideration of something, without a condition. If there's a condition, then it becomes a substantive motion that you would—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Yes, but this is a dilatory one. I've never seen a dilatory motion moved in committee to stand down. Is this a first?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Trevor Day): No. *Interjections.*

Mr. Steve Clark: You moved adjournment 10 times—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: No, no; I'm not talking about adjournment. This is just—

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: A five-minute recess?

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): I do have a request for a five-minute recess.

The committee recessed from 1356 to 1401.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Committee, we're about to vote on Mr. Hillier's proposal to defer his motion.

All in favour? Those opposed? I'm not sure what I would call it, but it passed—a proposal?

I declare that motion deferred, if I'm not mistaken. This isn't going to hang up the committee, as I understand.

Mr. Balkissoon, please.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Mr. Chair, I move that the committee continue its consideration of e-petitions.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Does anyone need a copy of that? Does anyone need a recess? Do you wish to—oh, we do have a copy.

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Mr. Balkissoon, any comments on your motion?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Mr. Chair, as I stated before, I'm in full support of e-petitions. I'm in full support of proper committee work to adopt it. I'm in support of listening to some expert witnesses and others who have experienced it. Then the committee can deliberate and make a decision to go forward with a system that we could all be proud of, a system that we understand would improve what we have, and it would engage the public in the political process a lot better than it does today. I'm all for that.

I would rather go through the exercise of reviewing every possibility and then look at best practices and come up with something that we could send to the Legislature.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Any further discussion on this motion?

We have a motion on the floor from Mr. Balkissoon that—

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Ms. Forster, please go ahead.

Ms. Cindy Forster: How long are we going to continue to consider e-petitions? I understand that you earlier agreed on some date, February 18, to deal with some bills—some Liberal bills, some Conservative bills—and that you haven't firmed up any of those bills at this point.

In the meantime, there's another bill that has actually come to this committee: Peggy Sattler's Bill 64, the Protecting Interns and Creating a Learning Economy Act.

I think it's important that we've debated these bills in the House for hours on end. We all talk about wanting to actually get some work done here in the Legislature. Apparently there was no interest in even doing a trial of e-petitions, so we're going to study it.

We've heard from the research clerk that the British Parliament is introducing e-petitions in the House this spring, so perhaps we'll get a copy of that report and that process, which we can look at. But I think that to sit here today and waste our time continuing to talk about this when we could actually be setting up dealing with some real bills that impact some real people here in the province of Ontario—that's important.

I don't know whether it would be in order, Mr. Clerk, but I would like to move an amendment to this motion that would include Ms. Sattler's bill on a particular date—perhaps at the next meeting of the Legislative Assembly committee—in rotation with what was already set out in this document on February 18.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Do you have that motion for distribution?

Ms. Cindy Forster: No.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Could you draft that motion?

Ms. Cindy Forster: Yes.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Okay. A five-minute recess?

Ms. Cindy Forster: Sure. That would be fine.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Is that okay with the committee?

The committee recessed from 1406 to 1411.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Our committee is to reconvene. Ms. Forster had the floor.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Yes. At this point, I don't have an amendment. I understand there is going to be another amendment to this motion from the government.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Thank you. I have Mr. Clark, Mr. Hillier and Mr. Ballard. Mr. Clark.

Mr. Steve Clark: Yes. It's pretty obvious, Chair, what's going to happen today. The amendment and the discussion that the committee had on February 18 is going to be superseded. The government is going to shut down the co-operation that was expressed on February 18 and go ahead with their desire to have an e-petition review for as long as the government decides they want to have it.

I think Mr. Hillier and I have stated so many times—I can't even count the number of times that we have stated—our support for e-petitions, how easy and inexpensive we believe they could be started on a provisional basis.

But you know what? Listen, as House leader of the opposition, I lost the battle on committee representation. This government has the majority on this committee, and it can do whatever it wants. It's appearing to me that what the government wants is not to have public hearings on Bill 12, not to have public hearings on Bill 27 and not to have committee hearings on Bill 42.

I feel we had, with nine weeks remaining, an opportunity to talk about e-petitions and an opportunity to hear those three bills and, in fact, Ms. Sattler's bill as well. We had ample time to do everything and still give us lots of time to work on a more permanent discussion and a permanent policy on e-petitions.

If I was Mr. Potts, Mr. Barrett or Mr. Ballard, I would be disappointed that my bill wouldn't receive hearings and clause-by-clause debate prior to June. But you know what? Ms. Wong, Ms. McMahan, Mr. Ballard, Mr. Balkissoon and Mr. Anderson can pretty well control whatever they want. If they want to have a discussion on e-petitions, that's what we're going to have. I'm disappointed, but that's up to the government.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Mr. Hillier.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Thank you, Chair. I think it's pretty clear and evident that the intent and the motivation of this government motion is to purposefully frustrate the will of the House and purposely prevent any private member's bill from being considered by this committee. I find it, indeed, very unfortunate—I find it extremely unfortunate—that the spirit and the co-operation that we found on February 18 has now been frustrated by the government. I would suggest and I would ask, Chair, that when this motion comes for a vote, it be a recorded vote.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Thank you, Mr. Hillier. Mr. Ballard?

Mr. Chris Ballard: Mr. Chair, I'd like to make a simple amendment to Mr. Balkissoon's motion. It would simply be to continue on the sentence with "until otherwise decided by the committee," so that the amended motion in its entirety would read: "I move that the committee continue its consideration of e-petitions until otherwise decided by the committee."

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Okay. We now go to discussion of this amendment. Ms. Forster?

Ms. Cindy Forster: The amendment doesn't really matter, because, at the end of the day, the government has the majority. Regardless of what the committee wants to do, the other two parties here really will have no say. We could talk about e-petitions for the next two years and never talk about any of these bills.

I find it interesting that the government has been in such a hurry, since the election back in June, to time-allocate all kinds of bills, to stifle debate on many important issues in this province, yet here, when we actually have an opportunity where we've fully debated the bills under the rules of this Legislative Assembly, we're now going to delay having any public hearings, delay having any clause-by-clause, delay bringing them back for third reading or any royal assent.

Mr. Potts was in a big hurry to actually co-opt Mr. Prue's bill on protecting employees' tips, which I think received all-party approval during that time. Certainly, this was a huge issue across the province. We heard from thousands of employees. Michael Prue was across this province from one end to the other and heard about owners of restaurants and bars actually taking part of employees' tips, employees that are paid probably the

lowest of any occupation in this province. They're paid, in many cases, even lower than the minimum wage, unless they are working in a high-end bar or restaurant in a community. So it's a bill that is important to thousands of low-paid workers in this province, but we're going to let it sit here idly on the Legislative Assembly paper and not deal with it.

Now, Mr. Ballard is not too concerned about his bill moving forward, because we just had a municipal election and there won't be another one for four years. As long as his bill is dealt with in the next two or three years—

Interjections.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Order.

Ms. Cindy Forster: —it doesn't really matter and it's really about one person in one region.

Then there was Mr. Barrett's bill, which certainly is important to him and important to a number of people in this province, important to health issues across the province. But we're going to let that one sit on this order paper as well. For how long?

Of course, new bills coming forward in the meantime as well—the bills on the utility all-terrain vehicles, which was a bill that a member of my caucus, Mr. Vanthof, and a member of the PC caucus, Mr. Miller, have brought forward, because it is so important.

Mr. Randy Hillier: And a member of the Liberal caucus, Mr. Crack.

Mr. Steve Clark: Yes, Mr. Crack had a motion on it, and it got approval.

Ms. Cindy Forster: And a motion from Mr. Crack, but we're not going to act. We're not going to deal with that motion, we're not going to act on it, even though it's certainly important to people who live in rural communities and people who live in the north.

Then we have Ms. Sattler's on protecting interns, and we've all heard about unpaid internships. We've heard about deaths of people, actually, who were unpaid interns working two jobs, one as an unpaid intern and another job somewhere else, trying to make ends meet so they could support their family. But we're not going to deal with that issue either.

I have to say that certainly on behalf of my caucus, we're very disappointed that the government is just going to kind of stall this out and not deal with any private members' bills for who knows how long.

1420

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Thank you, Ms. Forster.

I remind the committee: We have before us Mr. Ballard's amendment to Mr. Balkissoon's motion. Are the members ready to vote?

Ms. Eleanor McMahan: Can I continue debate?

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Please go ahead.

Ms. Eleanor McMahan: I just want to respond, in part, to the member opposite by saying that I have been sitting here since the committee started at 1 o'clock. What I heard clearly from this side of the table, Mr. Chair, unless I'm mistaken—and we can check

Hansard—was an absolute desire to examine the issue of e-petitions: a support for that and a desire to have that conversation. I didn't hear anybody over here saying that we weren't going to discuss private members' business; that's certainly not our position. I just think it's really important to say that on the record, so that people understand that that is not our position. By way of responding to your comments, thank you for making them, but I do think it's important that people understand that we didn't say that, and that is not our intent.

I heard and I witnessed, sitting here, some very good dialogue about co-operation today. It's actually been an absolute pleasure to be here and sit and listen to the support. As someone who likes to focus on what we have in common, I think what we have in common is a desire to proceed on e-petitions and have that conversation, because we all want to modernize our Legislature and our processes, and improve our democratic process.

On that basis, Mr. Chair, I just wanted to make that point as part of the conversation we are having and underscore again what I've been hearing today from my colleagues and certainly from the members opposite: a great deal of co-operation and consideration for our common ground. I just wanted to assert that.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Ms. Wong.

Ms. Soo Wong: Following my colleague Ms. Mahon with respect to the motions and the concerns raised by the opposition members, Mr. Chair, when we talk about e-petitions, we have to be very mindful of diverse Ontario. I remember that yesterday in question period a member of the opposition party asked a question about equity and what have you.

When we're having this conversation on e-petitions, it's already challenging that in this committee the members are having challenges with technology. On top of that, we have very diverse communities. I know that many of my constituents are what they call digital natives. Those individuals have very little access to technology. So when we're bringing forth a petition that is outside the traditional pen and paper, and now you're saying you want to rush this to deliver, I would have concerns.

I'm prepared to listen and to work—I have worked with committee members on different committees—and I am prepared to get whatever bill needs to be done. But this particular issue of e-petitions cannot be done in such a quick manner, the way the opposition parties suggest we should just go and do it, have it done, deliver it to the House and what have you.

I would dare say there are individuals in our communities who don't have computers. If they do have computers, the access piece: Is the electronic signature okay, signed in the mother tongue versus English or French? Those are things we have to look at.

At the end of the day, Mr. Chair, to criticize the government members of this committee as not prepared to work with the opposition members is far from the truth. I have sat here patiently, and this is the first time I spoke in almost two hours of this committee. I want to find some

happy solution to move forward on some of these items. People elected us from our own ridings to hear, to serve and to work with items. I don't believe this e-petition should be done in such a quick manner, without real, robust conversation, getting the research department and bringing in the experts.

I know I am not an expert, and I would dare say nobody in this room is an expert; if you are, I apologize in advance. I am not prepared to rush the e-petition conversation in the next 45 minutes. I really believe that Ontarians expect us to do better, because this is new territory when it comes to having documented records. Their name and personal information, privacy legislation—all these things have to be considered. We're changing to a new phase of the technology era, and at the end of the day we have to make sure that we do it right. There's an old saying: If you're going to do it, do it right, instead of doing it, slapping it on and doing it quickly; then you have got to come back, re-track and make more changes.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, for allowing me to speak.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Thank you, Ms. Wong. Are the members ready to vote? We're voting on Mr. Ballard's amendment to Mr. Balkissoon's motion. All in favour? Those opposed? I declare the amendment passed.

Are the members ready to vote on the motion by Mr. Balkissoon, as amended?

Mr. Randy Hillier: Chair, I call for a recorded vote.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Recorded vote.

Ayes

Anderson, Balkissoon, Ballard, McMahon, Wong.

Nays

Forster.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): I declare the motion carried.

Mr. Balkissoon?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Yes, Mr. Chair. I'm a little surprised at the vote, but I have another motion I'd like to move.

I move:

(1) That, in order to assist the committee in drafting its report on the advantages and disadvantages of integrating e-petitions into the assembly's existing petition procedures, each member of the subcommittee provide the Clerk of the Committee with the names and contact information (where possible) of expert witnesses that they would like to invite to appear before the committee, no later than 12 noon on the Thursday of the week following the passage of this motion;

(2) That these witnesses are scheduled based on their availability;

(3) That each witness receive up to 20 minutes for their presentation, followed by 40 minutes of questions from committee members; and

(4) That, at the next meeting following the passage of this motion, the committee hear from the research officer on the process that other jurisdictions followed when considering e-petitions.

Examples of that are the House of Commons, the British Parliament etc.

You'll have to make a copy, because I had some modifications.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): I guess we'll recess for a copy. Five minutes.

The committee recessed from 1428 to 1445.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): I would like to ask Mr. Balkissoon to read the motion again. I understand there were some minor changes to it.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Yes, with the assistance of the Clerk, Mr. Chair, I am happy to do that. I move:

(1) That, in order to assist the committee in drafting its report on the advantages and disadvantages of integrating e-petitions into the assembly's existing petition procedures, each member of the subcommittee provide the Clerk of the Committee with the names and contact information (where possible) of expert witnesses that they would like to invite to appear before the committee,

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(4) That, at the next meeting following the passage of this motion, the committee hear from the research officer on the process that other jurisdictions followed when considering e-petitions.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Do you wish to speak to your motion?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Mr. Chair, I'm moving this motion to facilitate the work of the committee, at least as I originally perceived that we were going to do.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Any further discussion? No further discussion.

Are the members ready to vote? All those in favour? Those opposed? I declare the motion carried.

Any further business? Shall this committee adjourn for the day?

Mr. Randy Hillier: Yes.

The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett): Adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 1447.

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Mr. Toby Barrett (Haldimand–Norfolk PC)

Vice-Chair / Vice-Président

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord PC)

Mr. Granville Anderson (Durham L)

Mr. Bas Balkissoon (Scarborough–Rouge River L)

Mr. Chris Ballard (Newmarket–Aurora L)

Mr. Toby Barrett (Haldimand–Norfolk PC)

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord PC)

Ms. Eleanor McMahon (Burlington L)

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock PC)

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Bramalea–Gore–Malton ND)

Ms. Soo Wong (Scarborough–Agincourt L)

Substitutions / Membres remplaçants

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James ND)

Mr. Steve Clark (Leeds–Grenville PC)

Ms. Cindy Forster (Welland ND)

Mr. Randy Hillier (Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington PC)

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