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**Official Report  
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(Hansard)**

**Wednesday 1 April 2015**

**Journal  
des débats  
(Hansard)**

**Mercredi 1<sup>er</sup> avril 2015**

**Standing Committee on  
the Legislative Assembly**

Petitions

**Comité permanent de  
l'Assemblée législative**

Pétitions

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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 1 April 2015

Mercredi 1<sup>er</sup> avril 2015

*The committee met at 1301 in committee room 1.*

**PETITIONS**

**The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett):** Welcome, everyone, to the regular meeting of the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly, April 1, dealing with standing order 108(g), electronic petitions.

We have a briefing before the committee written by Joanne McNair, table research clerk. I would like to ask Joanne if you could give us an overview and entertain any comments or questions as we walk through this.

**Ms. Joanne McNair:** The report that you were sent is sort of a thumbnail sketch. I have a bit more detailed information I can provide on each of the jurisdictions covered.

If you had the chance to go through it, you'll see that the jurisdictions that did adopt e-petitions all took fairly different ways to get to that. We saw some that were initiated directly by the government. Some were initiated by backbenchers. Others were the result of a much larger overhaul of parliamentary procedures and other initiatives. And some did take the more traditional committee route: They were proposed by a committee and brought forward that way.

If we start with the Canadian jurisdictions, the Canadian House of Commons is the most recent jurisdiction to adopt e-petitions; they did that just last month—yes, March, because it's April now. The matter first came up over a decade ago when the Special Committee on the Modernization and Improvement of the Procedures of the House of Commons was looking at all—they weren't looking specifically at e-petitions; they were looking at the larger issue of parliamentary reforms and ways to improve it. A lot of their focus was on private members' business. But in the course of their investigations, they travelled to Scotland, the UK and Australia and looked at what was happening in those jurisdictions. They were very impressed by the e-petition systems that were set up, particularly in Scotland. In their report to the House in 2003, they did recommend that the House of Commons adopt an e-petition system. That report was adopted, but as we know, nothing actually happened on the e-petitions front. A lot of their other recommendations were adopted, but nothing came up with the e-petitions side of things.

Then you fast-forward to October 2013, when an NDP member's private member's motion passed, barely—it

was 142 votes to 140—to refer the matter of e-petitions to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, asking them to look into what was being done elsewhere and to set up a system for the House of Commons. As I indicated in the report that you were sent, the procedure and House affairs committee started looking into it only last November. They had four public meetings with 11 witnesses in total, and then they met four other times in camera to write their report. They recommended that the House do adopt an e-petition system, and that report was adopted just last month.

They're supposed to have the new system in place for the beginning of the new Parliament, which I assume would be fall of this year if they stick to their fixed election date. The election is supposed to be in October. That was the process that happened there.

If we jump to the Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories—no, we'll do Quebec. Quebec's approach was very different because they weren't focused on e-petitions at all. They had undertaken a massive overhaul of basically everything. It started in 2004 when the Speaker of the assembly actually presented a series of reforms to the House for consideration. The government House leader presented a different set of reforms to the House for consideration, and then they set up what they called a subcommittee consisting of the House leaders of each parliamentary group and chaired by the Speaker. They were going to go over the proposals, not in a clause-by-clause sort of way but just looking thematically, like private members' business, what's been proposed here, that sort of thing.

They also set up a number of smaller committees that were chaired by staff of the assembly: procedural clerks, research clerks and committee clerks. Those smaller committees—there were about three or four people per committee—were tasked with very specific areas, either private members' stuff or technical issues etc. At that time, when they began this process, nobody was talking about any sort of cyber-democracy initiative—no e-petitions, nothing on that front. They were really just looking at their own standing orders, the way they did business in general and how they could improve things.

It was only near the end of that specific Parliament, in 2007, that the cyber-democracy issues started to creep to the fore. They had an election, there was a slight change of government, and they went from a majority government to a minority government situation, but the work

continued at the subcommittee and the smaller working groups. That's when the new government House leader brought forward another set of proposals for more reforms. It was then that really the e-petitions started to come to the fore because they were also looking at completely overhauling their website and they wanted something that they could integrate into that context.

Anyway, that was the approach that they took. They looked specifically at Scotland and Queensland in Australia because those were really the only two jurisdictions that were doing e-petitions at that time. The recommendation that was put forward was to include e-petitions in some way. The House adopted the report in April 2009 and they proceeded to set up their e-petition system.

The Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories: This too was initiated largely by a private member. First, he delivered a statement saying that they should have e-petitions and then the next month he moved a motion to get their Standing Committee on Rules and Procedures to look into the matter of setting up an e-petition system. They too looked at Quebec, Scotland, Queensland and Tasmania, and reported back to the House recommending that they start a pilot project on e-petitions, which they did. It ran for six months. They re-evaluated it and saw what the issues were and how well it worked, and then recommended that the House make this a permanent feature, and that's exactly what's happened. So it was a fairly straightforward process.

Going over to the United Kingdom, the UK House of Commons also just adopted e-petitions earlier this year, in February, but the issue of e-petitions had been batted around there going back to the previous Parliament, the 2005 to 2010 Parliament. Their procedure committee had recommended adopting an e-petition system. They produced a couple of reports. One included a very detailed outline of what form this e-petitions process should take. Initially, the government—it was the Labour government at the time—indicated they were quite interested in pursuing that, but then, for whatever reasons, they changed their minds and the whole thing just kind of disappeared.

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It more or less stayed that way until July 2011, when the—I'd say the current government, but they're dissolved now for the election, so the most recent government, the coalition government, unilaterally set up their e-petition system. These were petitions to government, not to Parliament. They didn't consult with the House of Commons. They didn't tell anybody they were doing this. Just suddenly, in July: "Hey, look, we have e-petitions." While they didn't consult with the Parliament at all, it did affect Parliament in that they'd set up this special feature where, if any petition got over 100,000 signatures, there was potential for it to be debated in the House of Commons.

The House of Commons was not exactly thrilled at having this dumped on them without any consultation or whatnot. It did cause a bit of tension between the Backbench Business Committee, which got dumped with the responsibility for organizing these debates, and the—

*Interjection.*

**Ms. Joanne McNair:** The procedure committee produced another report looking into this, saying that it really wasn't the best way to go—without consultation, blah, blah, blah—and that it created a few issues. So in May 2014, the government moved a motion recommending that the procedure committee work with the government to set up what they called a collaborative e-petition system, meaning that we'd still have the government ones but the House of Commons would also have its own e-petitions, and they would share the technology, the software framework, for that.

The procedure committee held four evidence sessions and heard from eight witnesses—some are the same ones who spoke to the Canadian House of Commons committee that was looking into it—and they recommended essentially what the government proposed. They considered adopting the model that had been proposed previously, in the previous government, by the procedure committee, but decided that since the government's model was up and running and they demonstrated that it worked, it didn't make any sense to start over with something new from scratch. So they would just move it over to under the Parliament's jurisdiction and run it there. That's what they are working on now and what's supposed to be in place by the time the new Parliament starts in May of this year.

Scotland and Wales are quite interesting but really of no use to us, I don't think, because they have the benefit of being brand new Parliaments being created at a time when technology existed, unlike Parliaments that were started up in the 1800s, when you didn't have much beyond paper and pen.

Scotland was actually the first jurisdiction anywhere to have e-petitions. After the 1997 referendums on devolution, when the mandate was there to create the new Parliament for Scotland, from the outset it was decided that technology would be a fully integrated feature in everything they did. Everything was going to be technology driven, not like here where we're trying to move towards a paperless office and move everything to being online. There, it was going to be primarily online first; they would just take advantage of the technology that we had.

They were also very focused on petitions in general, just as being a really positive way of engaging with the public and building on democratic participation, but they weren't talking about e-petitions then. Nobody was doing e-petitions; e-petitions weren't really on the radar. But from the start, they set up their Public Petitions Committee and they had the whole process in place for petitions. When they are presented, they aren't presented in the House the way they are here. They go directly to the petitions committee, which reviews them and decides what actions should be taken on them.

In 1999, they were approached by the International Teledemocracy Centre from Napier University, which developed this e-petitioner software to do online petitions and said, "Would you guys be interested in doing a trial run to see how this would work?" The House agreed. It

was hosted by the IT Centre but it linked to the Parliament's website. So if you went to the Parliament's website and you saw e-petitions, you would click on it but you were actually being taken to the IT Centre. They set up the petitions there and ran it as a pilot project for two years, after which they reviewed it and decided, "Yes, we like this. It's going to be a permanent feature of what we're going to do. But we're going to move it over to our website and host it here and take full control of it," which is what they have now.

Wales is similar, as a brand new legislative assembly that was built from the ground up after the 1997 referendum on devolution. Unlike Scotland, though, Wales had just regular petitions, but they weren't a big focus the way they were in Scotland. Members could table them if they wanted to, but they didn't have to. Members could move that they have a debate on one, but that almost never happened. So, consequently, they hardly got any petitions at all.

Then, in 2006, the UK government passed the Government of Wales Act, which significantly changed the power structure for the Welsh assembly. That required them to completely overhaul how the assembly worked, their standing orders and whatnot. It was during that process that they decided, "Since we're changing how we're going to be doing petitions, let's see what else is out there." They looked mostly to Scotland. They saw how things worked there. They were quite impressed with the dedicated petitions committee and the e-petition system. So they recommended that the Welsh assembly adopt something similar, and that's essentially what they've done.

Lastly, we come to Australia. There are two jurisdictions in Australia that do e-petitions: Tasmania and Queensland. But Tasmania didn't get back to me, and I couldn't find anything much on their website. It's not the best website in the world. But in Queensland, it was a purely government-driven initiative. Back in 2001, the Labor Party's election platform had major—it was a major reform platform in general, but they did focus on e-democracy initiatives. They formed the government in that election, and they put forward their—they just started implementing the various things that they had committed to during the election.

The whole process was overseen by cabinet office, essentially, by an e-democracy unit that they set up there. It was really difficult to find any relevant information about them because they don't archive a lot of stuff. The only thing I did find was that when they got around to doing the e-petitions and also the broadcasting of proceedings online, they realized that they didn't really control that. That was Parliament's jurisdiction, and so apparently things kind of stalled out there for a bit as they tried to negotiate how this was going to work. But, anyway, they finally got it up and running.

That, essentially, is the different approaches people have taken.

**The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett):** Thank you very much for that report. I would ask the committee if they have any comments or questions. Yes, Chris.

**Mr. Chris Ballard:** Well, thank you very much. That is a great overview that gives us a sense of what other jurisdictions are doing and some of the timelines that they've taken to put the whole concept of e-petitions into play.

I've said it before, and I'll say it again: Anything that improves democratic participation in our system is a good thing. If e-petitions are one of those things that attract people to get involved where before they maybe wouldn't be as interested in getting involved, then I'm certainly interested in investigating that more.

I don't know if our research clerk has this kind of information at her fingertips: I'm interested in those few jurisdictions that have been running e-petitions for any length of time. I mean, even the ones that are haven't been doing it for that long. What sort of uptake has there been? Can we say that before there were X number of paper petitions delivered and now there are Y number of petitions delivered, or the number of signatures went from X thousands in all the petitions one year to two X the next?

**Ms. Joanne McNair:** I have seen that. I could get some of those numbers for you. I don't have them at my fingertips, because I was asked to look primarily at the processes used—

**Mr. Chris Ballard:** And that's what I figured.

**Ms. Joanne McNair:** So I don't want to give you information that is incorrect.

I know the UK government site, when it launched, for the first week or two, it just crashed constantly because—

**Mr. Chris Ballard:** So many people were interested.

**Ms. Joanne McNair:** Yes, and they had released—I think after the first year of it being up and running, there was sort of a report that came out. In the first few months, it skyrocketed—really high usage—and then it just—

**Mr. Chris Ballard:** It starts to drop.

**Ms. Joanne McNair:** As the novelty effect wore off, it kind of stabilized. They still get a fair number of paper petitions, too.

Scotland, since they've had it for so long and it has been such an integral part, I think—

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**Mr. Chris Ballard:** We couldn't really map a differentiation between the before and the after.

**Ms. Joanne McNair:** Yes. I don't know if they, even on their site, differentiate the action that they take, if it was a paper or e-petition, necessarily. But I will try to find figures for you.

**Mr. Chris Ballard:** Yes, it would be interesting. I guess the other area I'm interested in—and we didn't ask you to give us this information, but I'll just make a general comment. My issue is sort of the overarching principles of implementing an e-petition-type system. Is it just a stand-alone? Or are we going down a trail at some point to cyber-democracy and improving democratic participation? I think the members who have been advocating for this strongly here are interested, obviously, in the e-petition system. I'm more interested in almost

taking a step back and saying, “Where does this fit in in the whole concept of democratic participation using ICT?” That’s where I’ve been a little more cautious in saying, “Let’s not rush into something. Let’s see how to make sure we do it best. And is it the only thing we should be doing?” But this is a good start, and I’ll leave my comments there for now.

**The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett):** Thank you, Chris. Granville, you have a question?

**Mr. Granville Anderson:** Yes. I just wondered, having reviewed all of these jurisdictions, which one, would you say, in your opinion, would be best suited to Ontario? I know it’s a tough question.

**Ms. Joanne McNair:** In terms of the process they used or in terms of how their systems work?

**Mr. Granville Anderson:** Yes, both.

**Ms. Joanne McNair:** Well, we can’t do what Scotland and Wales do because we’re stuck with the building that we have. I quite like what Quebec did just because they were dedicated to looking at all their procedures—you know, “How can we make everything work better?” E-petitions wasn’t even part of the discussion then, but it came forward. But that’s a massive, long-term thing.

I think what you’re doing here, having a committee look at the issue and decide if it’s a good thing, and if it’s a good thing, how you are going to go about doing it, what’s the outcome we want from this, and, if you even want to propose a model, then reporting that back to the House—I think, realistically, that’s the best thing you can do right now. It might not work. As we’ve seen many times, it might not do anything on the first go-through, but at least you’re putting the idea out there and giving them something to consider.

**Mr. Granville Anderson:** Yes, and I noticed that in Quebec, it was a lengthy process. It took a number of years before it was finally adopted.

**Ms. Joanne McNair:** Yes. It spanned the course of three Parliaments.

**Mr. Granville Anderson:** Okay. Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett):** We’ll go to Soo.

**Ms. Soo Wong:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I just note when you did the review of different jurisdictions with e-petitions, I didn’t hear anything about the issue of security, in particular privacy. I don’t know—Mr. Chair, through you to the staff: At the end of the day, I’m particularly interested in not just having a landscape review, an overview of different jurisdictions that had e-petitions before us, but what are some of the challenges when it comes to security and protecting each individual witness who signed the petition and making sure that private information is protected? Do you have any information about that?

**Ms. Joanne McNair:** Certainly. Every single jurisdiction considered that. Once they decided to proceed with it, that’s one of the issues they looked at. So yes, there is information available about that. It varies slightly by jurisdiction depending on what model they adopted and how they decided to handle the information. If you

want a separate report on that, I can certainly put something together on that.

**Ms. Soo Wong:** I think, Mr. Chair, through you to the staff, it’s important for us to have that conversation. Particularly, you made a comment earlier that you prefer the Quebec model. What is it about the Quebec model that is unique or different from Scotland’s, the UK’s, Wales’s, that kind of stuff? I’d like to hear your opinion as a staffer about the security and safety of the Internet. If there’s going to be e-petitions, I want to make sure that that information is protected. So if you could come back with a report—I don’t know about other members, but I certainly am interested in any kind of research from your office about this particular security piece. It would be helpful.

**The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett):** Just maybe a comment—we have a request for some more research on security. Do you understand the parameters of what would be requested?

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Trevor Day):** Do you need anything else from Ms. Wong?

**Ms. Joanne McNair:** You just want to know what security measures they all have in place for handling the data that comes in?

**Ms. Soo Wong:** Yes, for instance, from the House of Commons to the Quebec National Assembly, all the jurisdictions you listed here—have each of those jurisdictions looked at, when they implemented e-petitions, security and protection of e-petitions?

**Ms. Joanne McNair:** Yes. They all have.

I just wanted to clarify: When I said I prefer Quebec, I like the process they used to get to e-petitions, which was a larger overhaul of all their procedures. It’s not my favourite model for e-petitions, however.

**Ms. Soo Wong:** Oh, okay. That’s the next question.

**The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett):** Just further to that request, maybe to clarify in my own mind: With e-petitions, people sign off. Does that mean that their email address is automatically in a data bank, and they’re basically on an email list or a sucker list after that?

**Ms. Joanne McNair:** For most of them—I’m not going to say all of them, because I’d have to go and refresh my memory—if you want to sign an e-petition, they do try to verify that you’re using a real email address. It’s like when you sign up for something, they mail you a link, you click the link, and it confirms your account—that type of thing. But their email address does not appear. Some of them don’t even list; they just put a number: “This e-petition has 35 signatures so far,” but they don’t list them. Some of them list their names. Some give signers an option: “Do you want to appear as anonymous?” You can tick that, so you’ll see “anonymous,” “anonymous,” “anonymous,” listed. It varies.

But yes, most of them do require you to either create an account on the e-petitions site, and then you can sign as many petitions as you want—you just log in once and then you can just sign—or if you just want to sign one in particular, it’s just that one time. It varies. But yes, most of them do require that type of information.

**The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett):** So people who sign, would they be aware, then, or have the expectation that they may be getting emails back for the next five years?

**Ms. Joanne McNair:** They won't be getting emails back. They will get a confirmation: "Congratulations. You've signed this e-petition." But no, I don't know of any jurisdiction that then sells that information or makes it available.

**The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett):** Yes, next on the list is Garfield.

**Mr. Garfield Dunlop:** Because I'm new to this committee on this particular topic, I just want to get a bit of a clarification. I think, Soo, your comments on the security are very, very important. Anybody signing a petition—I'm talking about the big picture because I don't really understand the electronic part of it. You'd want to make sure that that list never got out to people or salesmen—you know, bugging people over the Internet or something like that. That's a must. I'd like to see it completely confidential.

But is it the duty of this committee right now to come up with a recommendation to the House on electronic petitions that the House would implement at some time in the future?

**The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett):** I could mention, there is a motion that was carried. Maybe I'll just read that sentence briefly. "That, in order to assist the committee's review, the Clerk and Deputy Clerk of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario be invited to appear"—we've done that. The other sentence: "That the committee produce a report on the advantages and disadvantages of integrating e-petitions into the assembly's existing petition procedures, and recommend whether e-petitions should be implemented, and if so, which would be the best practical model." So we do have to report—

**Mr. Garfield Dunlop:** So we're just trying to respond to that, and there's no time frame on it? Because I'll tell you, some of you folks are—I think you're all new. No; Soo wasn't. But we had the changes to the Legislative Assembly. We spent a summer here—

**Ms. Soo Wong:** Really?

**Mr. Garfield Dunlop:** Yes, trying to make changes to—

*Interjection.*

**Mr. Garfield Dunlop:** But seriously, all these other jurisdictions had travelled the world—like to Scotland and Tasmania and stuff like that—and we tried to make changes to the Legislative Assembly right here and we spent the whole bloody summer doing it. At the end, everybody kind of said, "Nobody wants to make changes to the Legislative Assembly Act." So I hope this isn't a whole bunch of work for nothing here, okay?

1330

**The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett):** We are responsible to produce a report, according to this motion.

One other thing I wanted to mention: that the committee hear from any other witnesses it deems relevant. We did hear from the Clerk and the Deputy Clerk.

Yes, Chris.

**Mr. Chris Ballard:** Just speak to your point, in terms of hearing from other expert witnesses, we are to submit a list of anyone we would like to talk to, if possible, to the Clerk by tomorrow—

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Trevor Day):** Tomorrow noon.

**Mr. Chris Ballard:** Tomorrow noon. So if you know of anybody—I don't think we can fly anyone in from Tasmania that fast, but if there are any local people or whomever you'd like to hear from, people involved in e-democracy or whatever, get them in by noon tomorrow. I'm certainly interested in hearing from some people.

Again, from my perspective, I am interested in the bigger picture before I drill down too far on which solution to pick.

**The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett):** Thank you for reminding us of that date.

Yes, Peter?

**Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn:** I am new to this. I was unexpectedly thrown into this over lunchtime, but now that I'm here, I understand you have relatively narrow terms of reference that the committee has given you. But I would be interested in seeing some of the research, not just about the, let's call it, physical act of how you sign a petition, but what other elements of other jurisdictions were added to e-petitioning to increase the value of it. If it's merely making it easier to sign it, that's one thing. But I imagine that a lot of jurisdictions, either at the front end or at the tail end, have done other measures to actually move towards e-democracy, more citizen engagement, whether it's using this as a means of furthering how legislation gets created, and—I know that this is not a Canadian tradition—around ballot initiatives, around referenda and so on.

So it would be interesting to know how these other jurisdictions are actually using the e-petitions, not just how they're collecting the signatures, but what they're using them for. I don't know if that's something that you could do some research on as well.

**The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett):** Maybe I would just mention that the committee has received one or two other documents from research that can be made available to you fairly rapidly.

**Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn:** Okay.

**The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett):** Do you want to remind us of the other papers? I know there's this one.

**Ms. Joanne McNair:** Yes, that was the first one.

**The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett):** The first one was titled E-Petition Models for the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

**Ms. Joanne McNair:** Then there was a cross-jurisdictional—no, that's the Canadian House of Commons.

**The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett):** So we did receive the 33rd report of the Canadian House of Commons.

**Ms. Joanne McNair:** There was that other one, an older thing—

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Trevor Day):** We would be happy to forward the previous exhibits on e-

petitions and the background information. We'll have that forwarded to your office.

**Ms. Joanne McNair:** I can, if you want, quickly give you a couple of—well, there are basically two approaches: Either you do an e-petition but then you just integrate it into your existing paper petition process, so the actual procedural process of petitions doesn't change—that's what the Canadian House of Commons essentially has adopted. They'll have e-petitions now, so instead of doing a paper one you can just go on their site and fill it in, blah, blah, blah. But then once the petition closes for signatures, it will just be a copy printed out, presented in the House by an MP, and then just follow the normal route that a paper petition currently follows.

Then you have other Legislatures like Scotland, Wales and what the UK House of Commons is going to do. They've set up a dedicated petitions committee; it's a standing committee of the assembly. Petitions don't go to the House, so they're not tabled the way we do here. They go directly to the committee, paper petitions and e-petitions. The committee reviews them and decides, "Okay, what are we going to do?" They could maybe invite whoever started the petition to come in and talk to them about the issue. Sometimes they'll decide to refer it to another standing committee to look into. Sometimes they'll call in a government representative to address the issue that's raised in the petition and have a brief hearing. They've gone to schools. There's a petition in Scotland, I think, on bullying, so they went to a school in Glasgow and organized a big symposium thing.

It makes the whole petition process much more open. Sometimes just talking to the committee by phone, a petitioner will just feel, "Oh, well, at least they listened." Even if their problem isn't solved, at least they feel they got the ear. It depends on how you want your petitions to work afterwards: Just continue as is or do you want to broaden the focus and make something of them?

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

**Mr. Granville Anderson:** Peter, maybe you're talking something like what Britain did with their petitions. They have a certain transfer—I think it's 100,000 and it gets debated in the House. That's where you were going with this, I take it.

**Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn:** Well, precisely. It's nice to simply eliminate killing some trees to do petitions, but it doesn't necessarily add any value to the public that they've signed it electronically versus a paper petition. I think it's a bigger question.

**Ms. Joanne McNair:** As Mr. Anderson stated, the UK government's petition process that started in 2011 had that reward threshold, where, if you got over 100,000 signatures, there was potential for a debate in the House, which got terribly misreported in the press. Everybody figured that if you got 100,000 signatures, your petition was definitely going to be debated in the House, so there was a lot of disappointment when they realized that wasn't necessarily the case. But yes, they are keeping that with the UK House of Commons ones, but the UK House of Commons said they will—I don't know if

they're keeping the threshold necessarily, but because they're setting up a dedicated petitions committee, they will have the ability to refer a petition for debate directly, if they decide. But any MP in the UK can take the topic of a petition, regardless of the number of signatures, and go make a presentation to the Backbench Business Committee and say, "We should have a debate on this topic." So that's an option.

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

**Mr. Chris Ballard:** I may have missed it here or it may have been in a previous report, but does the Canadian House of Commons have a similar threshold, that 100,000?

**Ms. Joanne McNair:** No. Mr. Kennedy Stewart brought forward the motion, and his plan was that if it hit, I think, 5,000—it was a lower threshold, I think—he wanted them to have a take-note debate after the House's regular sitting hours, which he said the Speaker would organize, and which nobody seemed very keen on doing at all—

**Mr. Chris Ballard:** I don't know why.

**Ms. Joanne McNair:** —so they dropped that from their final reports.

**Mr. Chris Ballard:** Okay. Thank you. Just one question: Off the top of your head, do you happen to recall the MLA in the Northwest Territories who moved their—it doesn't matter if you don't know off the top of your head. I'm just interested in—

**Ms. Joanne McNair:** It is the MLA for Yellowknife, I believe.

**Mr. Chris Ballard:** For Yellowknife?

**Ms. Joanne McNair:** I don't remember his name.

**Mr. Chris Ballard:** Okay.

**The Chair (Mr. Toby Barrett):** Any further comments or questions?

As discussed, the committee does have a number of action steps before it. Further to that, I would just read in part the motion that was proposed by Mr. Balkissoon and was carried on March 25:

"(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," and I think it's been pointed out that that would be 12 noon tomorrow.

"(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," which I think has been accomplished.

We have that 12 o'clock deadline. The committee is charged with the responsibility to create a report. I don't know whether there's any comments on this process or

where we go from here? Seeing no comments, we're adjourned.

*The committee adjourned at 1341.*





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