



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

# **Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs**

---

PROC • NUMBER 077 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

---

**EVIDENCE**

**Tuesday, November 7, 2017**

—  
**Chair**

**The Honourable Larry Bagnell**



## Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

Tuesday, November 7, 2017

• (1210)

[English]

**The Chair (Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.)):** Order.

Welcome back to the 77th meeting of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. For members' information, we are now in public.

Members will recall PROC's 33rd report in the previous session of Parliament, which was concurred in by the House on March 11, 2015, and called for the committee to conduct a review of the electronic petition system after it had been in place for two years.

In order to assist us with this review, we are joined by Charles Robert, Clerk of the House of Commons, and André Gagnon, deputy clerk, procedure. Thank you for being here. It's your first visit to the House.

Basically, before we make these rules for electronic petitions permanent in the Standing Orders, we want to see how the first two-year trial period worked and if there were any problems or any suggested changes to the procedures we have in place. We've asked you and we've asked any of the parties to bring forward any issues they had with the system. We look forward to your opening comments.

**Mr. Charles Robert (Clerk of the House of Commons):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for the invitation to address the committee in its review of the House of Commons e-petition system.

To provide some context, I will begin with a brief summary of the current process. Essentially an e-petitioner creates an account, provides some basic personal information, and then drafts the petition using a standardized template provided on the e-petitions website.

Next, the e-petitioner must identify at least five supporters and choose a member of Parliament to act as the sponsor of the petition. Members have 30 days to respond. If they refuse to be the sponsor or if no response is received within the 30 days, the petitioner may select another member. If five members have declined to sponsor the petition, it would not be allowed to proceed.

[Translation]

Once a member is a sponsor, the petition is reviewed for conformity, translated, and is then open for signatures for 120 days on the website. Those that garner fewer than 500 signatures are simply archived on the site, while those with 500 signatures or more

may be presented in the House once the sponsor receives a certificate containing the text of the petition and the total number of signatures.

The process of presenting the e-petition to the House is identical to that for paper petitions, although only government responses to petitions are posted on the website.

[English]

The e-petitions site has generated significant interest. In the last year it has accounted for roughly one-third of all traffic on the House of Commons website, with approximately 2.5 million visits to the e-petitions site from over 3,000 different communities. Of these, 40% were redirected from social media sites, and about two-thirds of visits occurred on mobile devices. This shows that the social media sharing tools and the mobile responsiveness of the site were important aspects of its design.

[Translation]

During this time, 1,343 e-petitions have been created, 400 or 30% of which have been published on the site, collectively garnering over 1.1 million signatures. The primary reasons for which petitions are not published are that the draft is simply not completed by the petitioner or the petition is withdrawn before reaching the publication stage. It is quite rare for e-petitions to be found inadmissible given the guidelines established by the committee and outlined in the Standing Orders and the templates and user guides available on the site.

[English]

Among the 400 published e-petitions, 70% have reached the required minimum of 500 signatures. In addition, the site has proven to be quite secure, allowing for strong protections for the personal information that is gathered.

That being said, with certain modifications, including increased flexibility, this process and system could be made even more efficient. For example, the 120-day signature deadline prevents petitions that reach the 500-signature threshold quickly—the average is nine days—from being presented earlier. If fewer than five sponsors respond, or if some are ineligible, then the petition cannot proceed. The wording of a petition is reviewed only after a member has agreed to sponsor it, making it difficult to finalize the language of the petition.

[Translation]

Finally, differences remain between the rules to certify paper and electronic petitions.

For example, the threshold for signatures is 25 for paper petitions but 500 for electronic ones. Other requirements, such as the size of the paper on which they are submitted, still exist for paper petitions only.

[English]

That efficiencies can be found does not detract from the overall success of our e-petition system. In fact, it has positioned us to respond to this committee recommendation for a uniform and accessible electronic format for government responses to both e-petitions and paper petitions. I can assure the committee that the appropriate consultations with the Privy Council Office have already begun.

[Translation]

One of the main considerations has been whether it would be possible to envisage a paperless system for all responses to petitions, and whether it could serve as the basis for a broader system of electronic sessional papers. Such a system could one day allow for other types of documents which are tabled in the House, such as answers to written questions, to be filed electronically and published more widely than is currently the case.

I wish to thank you, Mr. Chair, for this opportunity. Mr. Gagnon and I would be pleased to respond to any questions that members may have.

•(1215)

[English]

**The Chair:** Can I just confirm that you said that the wording is finalized after the person finds a sponsor, so that an MP could be sponsoring something and wouldn't know what the final wording is?

**Mr. André Gagnon (Deputy Clerk, Procedure):** The validation of the petition itself is done after a sponsor has been found, but the sponsor would see the text that is submitted.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Reid.

**Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC):** Thank you.

To follow up on that point, is this purely for grammatical problems, translation, and that kind of thing, as opposed to anything that relates to the substance of the petition?

**Mr. André Gagnon:** The substance is also looked at—for instance, if the petition deals with a matter that has to do with provincial jurisdiction instead of a federal jurisdiction or if the language used is not respectful.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** If, let's say, someone wanted to put forward a petition asking Parliament to take a stand on Quebec's recent Bill 62 relating to receipt of provincial government services with your face covered, would that be ruled inadmissible?

**Mr. André Gagnon:** The question at that time would be to determine if it is part of the jurisdiction of the members of Parliament or government, if it is advisable for them, and if it is permitted for them to do such a thing.

**Mr. Charles Robert:** I think the complexity of the question also relates to the fact that it might involve a charter issue, and that has broader applications than simply the question of federal-provincial jurisdiction.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Just to follow that, if you don't mind, this relates to another discussion we've had in the past over allowing or disallowing private members' bills. I've always taken the view that we should be as expansive as possible. If a private member's bill, like a government bill, crosses a jurisdictional line should it be passed, it would eventually, to the degree that it is ruled ultra vires, be ruled unconstitutional by the courts. That's the rule for the courts and not for us. I would take a similar approach here.

Surely we have both a moral right and a moral obligation to be prepared to take positions on any issue, regardless of jurisdictional boundary. We don't have the right constitutionally to act upon such issues, but we have the right and the obligation to have intelligent thoughts on them, particularly as it is entirely conceivable, as happened in the past, that something that was formerly the jurisdiction of one level of government would be transferred by means of an amendment to the other level, because we ultimately felt that was the right thing to do.

Let's think about this. Let's say someone puts forward a petition saying that some item of jurisdiction ought to be transferred from the provinces to the federal government. Let's say it's related to the whole rollout of marijuana. The provinces get to decide the age, and the idea is that it should be federal. If they had a petition on that, would you regard it as being permissible or impermissible?

**Mr. André Gagnon:** In fact, if the petition were to ask Parliament or ask the government to initiate discussions with their provincial counterparts, that would certainly be acceptable, in the sense that it is under the jurisdiction of the government to initiate discussions on separation of powers between provincial and federal jurisdictions.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Is it okay if I—

**The Chair:** I see where you're going.

If it's okay with the committee, I'm going to do this informally, as we did with the last section, as long as it works okay.

Okay, go ahead.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** I don't want to monopolize. I just have a different direction to go with this. Is that okay?

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** The traditional paper petition system, which has existed almost since time immemorial, certainly since the 1200s, presupposes that one's right to anonymity is forfeited when one signs a petition. The undersigned people have signed on, but it's on paper. Originally it went to London; now the petition comes to Ottawa. It is not readily available electronically to others, who are far removed. I think we all sense there's something different with an electronically collected signature that would be as readily available to, say, Vladimir Putin or the plutocrats who run China as it would be to their member of Parliament and anybody else going to the clerk's office to examine the records.

I think, but I actually don't know, that I'm expressing views that everybody shares here, but I think we all probably feel most comfortable with that information remaining well captured and behind some kind of impenetrable wall where you can confirm that the same person hasn't signed a petition 3,000 times on the one hand, but on the other hand, the aforementioned individuals don't get to see who signed.

I'll just ask the question. Given that we've seen numerous leaks, the paradise papers being the latest of them, are there any further security measures that you think are appropriate? Are there any concerns in this regard that you think we need to pay extra attention to?

•(1220)

**Mr. André Gagnon:** Mr. Reid, this precise question was one that was very much of interest for the previous committee that agreed to put in place the system of e-petitions, and I would say it was probably one of the most important questions that came up in trying to build an e-petition system. The way it is built today has made us very proud to say that all of the information that has been gathered has been gathered in a way that respects all of the high standards regarding privacy of information, and we also apply a policy of erasing all of that information in a timely manner. We do that after, not before, an individual who has signed an e-petition has received a response from the House of Commons indicating that there was a government response to the petition.

As you can imagine, we keep that information, but that information is only available to House of Commons authority and not to members or to anyone outside.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Effectively, then, there's a certain window during which the petition is live. You can still get more signatures. Then there's a window after that during which the government can respond, and when the response occurs, it's sent out to everybody who signed it, and at some point shortly after that, the data is deleted.

**Mr. André Gagnon:** In a regular fashion, during the year, we erase a lot of the information we have received, yes.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Simms is next, and then Mr. Kennedy.

**Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.):** I was not on PROC, but I was critic in the last Parliament, and I vehemently, viciously supported this when it came to the House from Mr. Stewart over there. I hope to get his comments later, if that's—

**Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP):** He's next after you.

**Mr. Scott Simms:** Great.

I have a couple of quick questions.

I see your point about 25 names versus 500 names. That's quite a discrepancy. I'm not sure if this is a question for you or him at this point. I want to clarify because, on the record, I think that's a bit excessive. Not achieving the 500 within that 120-day period means it's unsuccessful, right, for presentation?

**Mr. Charles Robert:** Yes, but at the same time, as was pointed out, it seems to be easily managed, and you can do it quite often in nine days.

**Mr. Scott Simms:** I see, but you cannot do that.... That's right, you said that earlier. You cannot present it to the House, even if you achieve the 500 within that period. All right. That's a very good point.

On the privacy issue, if I go around my riding and put together a petition, or someone I know does it, I can get access to all the information, and so on and so forth. Does the sponsor of this petition get access to the information as to who has signed?

**Mr. André Gagnon:** When you mention sponsor, do you mean the member of Parliament who is sponsoring the petition?

**Mr. Scott Simms:** No, I'm sorry. I'm using the wrong terminology.

Well, it's actually both, either the member of Parliament or the person organizing the petition. Thank you for that.

•(1225)

**Mr. André Gagnon:** If we refer to the petitioner, that is the person who organizes the petition. That person would have access only to the names of the supporters. The five supporters they need to identify, but that's the information they give out themselves. They don't have access at all to the, let's say, 2,000 signatories to the petition. They would not have access to that.

**Mr. Scott Simms:** They don't have access to the names or anything.

**Mr. André Gagnon:** The only thing they would have is the information on the website as of now, which is to indicate how many signatories come from each of the provinces and territories. That's it.

**Mr. Scott Simms:** That is it.

**Mr. André Gagnon:** Yes.

As for the member of Parliament who is the eventual sponsor of a petition, that person gets the basic information of the petitioner, the person who initiates it. As you can imagine, in some cases the member of Parliament would like to get in contact and talk on the phone with this individual to see what the motivations are behind that, the story behind all of those things, and to get more information. However, that's the only information provided to the sponsor.

**Mr. Scott Simms:** That is the e-petitioner information only.

**Mr. André Gagnon:** Yes.

**Mr. Scott Simms:** That's all I have for now, because I'm interested to hear what Mr. Stewart has to say.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Stewart.

**Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby South, NDP):** Thank you very much. It's a great pleasure to be part of the e-petitions odyssey as it continues along.

I remember my wife suggesting this idea to me way back when I drew the lottery number for the private member's bill and was supported, of course, by Mr. Christopherson, Mr. Simms, and eventually the whole Parliament. It's really neat to see what happened after all that.

That 1.1 million Canadians have signed electronic petitions and that it accounts for a third of the traffic on the website is a great success. It has a lot to do with the work that happened at the PROC committee. When you're a proponent of such ideas, sometimes you're keen or overstretched. I think PROC did a good job in reeling in my expectations. The clerks did such a good job of making sure that the security concerns were met. It has been dealt with in such a professional manner. In fact, I've had many jurisdictions contact me to ask what the lessons are, because they want to put this in place. I think it's a good example right around the world.

Initially, the ideas came from the U.K. and the United States. When you look at the U.K. example, you see that it started off a lot like us. It had e-petitions that didn't really have a prize at the end, other than a response, but eventually, as the petitioning system developed, more and more people started signing.

If you're looking at the figures, it's 1.1 million signatories, but most of those have come within the last few months anyway. We've had one petition recently that had 130,000 signatures, one that had 70,000, and one that had 50,000, all on different issues and all from different parties, so it's a good cross-partisan thing.

What was found in the U.K. was that this was a self-training system: you signed an e-petition for the first time and you got an email back saying that this was the response from the government, and then you began to think about how this thing works, and then you started your own. That's what we're seeing: a ramping up of participation and traffic. It is similar to what happened in the U.K.

What happened in the U.K. was that signatures rose to 400,000 or 500,000, eventually crossing the million threshold. The government began to wonder, "What do we do now?" What will happen when a million Canadians—it will happen at some point—sign an electronic petition? Will a response that's emailed back be enough? Is that enough when one thirty-fifth of your country signs something?

The answer provided was that if an electronic petition crosses a certain threshold, then it triggers either a study by a committee or a debate in the House of Commons. That would be like a non-binding take-note debate. In fact, the U.K. found great satisfaction with that, because there were many things rippling under the currents of society in the U.K. that weren't being addressed in Parliament, so this debate allowed it to address those issues.

If we're thinking about making changes, I definitely think we should keep this, because it seems to be working well. The concerns expressed in PROC earlier have been met. It has been well shepherded by the clerks, who have paid a lot of attention to it. We could consider the next step, which is what would an e-petition of 100,000 or 500,000 signatures trigger? Would there be something else other than a response back?

I would suggest something like a take-note debate. That was in my original super-keen proposal, but now that we've had a very wise decision to have a test run to show that the data is all protected, that Canadians are interested, that there is international interest, and that most people seem very happy with it, could we move to the next point where there is...not a reward, but some kind of acknowledgement that there's a significant issue within Canadian society that Canadians are engaging in?

That's perhaps the challenge...not a challenge, but a suggestion I would make to the committee. Is there perhaps any light that could be shed on it if we moved to that stage or that addition to these changes to the Standing Orders?

• (1230)

**Mr. Charles Robert:** I think it's a very attractive idea. It helps to encourage the whole notion that we live increasingly with the digital world, with the ambition of enhancing our participatory democracy.

One of the real differences, which goes to Mr. Simms's question about the level of support required, is that when you're doing this on paper, you're actually doing it very physically, using your time, and you're geographically constrained. You have to take it to the shopping centre and hope that people will sign it. Once you launch it onto the website, it's actually nationwide and it's accessible 24-7.

I remember one MP from way back when, in the old days, who remarked how his life was changing dramatically because he was getting tons of correspondence from people but could no longer rely on knowing that they were his constituents. They were people from across the country who had complaints to raise with the member, or issues to raise, and they wanted them addressed.

With petitions, clearly, if citizens in vast numbers want to participate, that's something that I suppose Parliament would want to take note of. The idea of having a further debate to have an exchange of views among the membership of the House would not necessarily be a bad thing, to acknowledge that in fact the signing of these petitions in vast numbers made a difference in terms of the agenda of the House.

**Mr. Kennedy Stewart:** Could I add one other point?

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mr. Kennedy Stewart:** Looking through the data, what I found really exciting was the number of signatures that were coming from the north, from Nunavut, the Northwest Territories, and the Yukon. It's almost impossible for an MP to go to remote communities to deliver or to collect paper petitions. Electronic petitioning has allowed remote and northern communities to participate in a way that they've never done before. Again, that's an unintended side effect, but it's something that's very good to see.

Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** I'm neutral, but that's a great comment.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** What is the threshold in the U.K.?

**Mr. Kennedy Stewart:** It's 100,000.

**The Chair:** Mr. Graham is next.

**Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.):** Thanks, Chair. I only have a couple of quick questions. They're more for Mr. Stewart than the Clerk.

You talked about the process in the United Kingdom forcing a debate. This ties back to earlier studies of PROC. Is that debate in the secondary debating chamber?

**Mr. Kennedy Stewart:** It can be in either one, I think, but that's where they usually take place.

**Mr. David de Burgh Graham:** It would go to the second chamber. Okay.

**Mr. Kennedy Stewart:** They're sorted by a committee first; they're not a direct.... My earlier suggestion was that it automatically trigger a debate, but in fact in the U.K. they're sorted by a backbench committee first, which we could also talk about in another session.

**Mr. David de Burgh Graham:** Fair enough.

My only other question is this: of the one-point-something million people who have signed this petition, do we know how many are repeat customers? Is it 1.1 million people or 1.1 million signatures from 300,000 people?

**Mr. André Gagnon:** I'm sorry. I'm not sure I understand.

**Mr. David de Burgh Graham:** You said that there are over a million signatures, right?

**Mr. André Gagnon:** Yes.

**Mr. David de Burgh Graham:** Is it the same 100,000 people signing over and over again, or is it really a million people who have signed?

**Mr. Charles Robert:** You can't sign the same petition twice.

**Mr. David de Burgh Graham:** No, but you can sign all the different petitions.

**Mr. Charles Robert:** Well, anyone can do that.

**Mr. David de Burgh Graham:** My point is, is it the same people who are signing petitions every time, or are we constantly bringing new people into the process? Do we have any idea?

**Mr. André Gagnon:** I don't think we would have the tools now to answer that question.

**Mr. David de Burgh Graham:** All right. Thanks.

**The Chair:** Are there other comments? I actually have a comment...Ruby, go ahead.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.):** You were stating that you can't sign the same petition twice. Are you certain of that? Has anyone ever tried something like that? Has there been suspicious activity? Have there been any hacks into the system? You said you had a secure system. I'm coming from another committee that was—

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** —talking purely about technology, so my mind is there right now. I'm just wondering how secure it is, whether there have been some threats, and how you've dealt with those kinks, if there have been any.

• (1235)

**Mr. André Gagnon:** If you want to talk about the threats, if there were any, the threats were exactly the same ones as for the rest of the websites. That would answer that part.

In terms of being able to sign the same petition twice, we have systems in place to identify either the email address or the IP address. As you will remember, this committee decided to propose that there shouldn't be any IP addresses from the Government or

Parliament of Canada, and to also make sure that there wouldn't be any email addresses from the government or Parliament.

Moreover, when you have duplicates, if it's a regular citizen and the same citizen tries to sign twice, we will get that in our analysis of the data.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** Today people have multiple devices and multiple email addresses. We all do. We all probably do. We're all sitting around this table—

**Mr. André Gagnon:** That's where you need to find a balance between the tools you have and the information you gather, in terms of making sure that those electronic signatures are valid. Clearly, if you go through both processes, the paper and electronic process, you could probably end up concluding that the electronic process is much more sophisticated and authentic than the paper petitions were. As you can imagine, sometimes the information there is very hard to demonstrate.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** Don't get me wrong, because I do think the benefits outweigh some of these issues. Overall, I simply wanted to get an understanding.

You think the e-petition program has been successful, from your perspective, and if anything were to be amended, it would be this particular rule. You shouldn't have to wait 120 days, because if you gathered the required number of signatures, you should be able to proceed with the process.

**Mr. André Gagnon:** That certainly has come out. A lot of members, as you're probably aware, try to present petitions regarding a bill that will be debated in the House for second reading. If there are petitions coming to the House at that time, being tabled in the House, and your e-petition is stuck in that 120 days, you won't be able to table that petition with good timing.

Yes, this 120-day maximum could be re-evaluated so that members could present the petition earlier in that process. That could be an item.

We have found that it has been cumbersome for some citizens not to gather supporters but to write in the information and all those things. Is the number of supporters still good at five? Should it be fewer? Should it be only one, or should it be no supporters at all? What could be looked at is the validation of the petition. The process we have right now is that the petition is validated at the end of the process, before it goes online. It's at that time that we sometimes find mistakes or find that adjustments need to be made. If significant adjustments need to be made, the person needs to contact all of their supporters, because it's essentially not the same petition that's being proposed.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** It must be embarrassing for the member to be putting their name on something and supporting it, and then—

**Mr. André Gagnon:** The good thing about it is that at that point in the process, it's not yet public. It is still a discussion.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** I have one final question.

What was the thought process behind not allowing the member who supports the petition to be able to see all the signatories? What's the idea behind that? In a paper petition, you would be able to see everybody who is signing on. You can see what region they come from. Maybe a lot of them are your constituents.

Why do we not have access to that information?

**Mr. André Gagnon:** First, there is more information gathered for e-petitions, since we have to send the information back to the different signatories. There is information there regarding email address, the actual address of the individual, and the phone number. There's a lot of information that you usually don't find on paper petitions.

• (1240)

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** No, but does—

**Mr. André Gagnon:** The numbers are also significant.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** Maybe I'm confused. I thought I heard you say that the member who supports it doesn't get that information, that the member only gets the petitioner's information. The member doesn't know anybody else who signed it.

**Mr. André Gagnon:** Exactly. That's the case. The decision not to make that information public was the decision of this committee.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** It was the decision of this committee. That's what I wanted to know.

**Mr. André Gagnon:** That was adopted by the House afterwards.

**Mr. Kennedy Stewart:** It wouldn't have gone through if it was a data collection exercise available to any party, and I think Mr. Reid can probably confirm that.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** That was the worry.

**Mr. Kennedy Stewart:** It was more to protect the citizens from having their data go everywhere.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** Yes, but in paper petitions their data is everywhere.

**Mr. Kennedy Stewart:** Yes, that's true. There are fewer signatures, though.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** Yes.

**The Chair:** There's less information. There's no phone number.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Christopherson.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** Thanks, Chair. My question is to both you and to our witnesses.

On page 4 of the written presentation, at the beginning of the meeting, it was said, and I quote,

That being said, with certain modifications, including increased flexibility, this process and system could be made more efficient.

That suggests to me that there may be a host of recommendations that would be coming. How are we going to do that, Chair? Is there a second meeting? Are we going to ask them for the recommendations?

You guys know I don't play games. That would also provide a forum and an opportunity for Mr. Stewart to make his good arguments about looking at the idea of a next step, i.e., a trigger point. We can consider that. It seemed to me from the way I read this that there would likely be some detailed recommendations, should we ask for them. I guess I'm seeking from the witnesses and yourself, Chair, how much of my assumption is right or wrong.

**Mr. André Gagnon:** We're certainly at your disposal if you need to have more details than what we've already mentioned. I think the different items that I and the Clerk mentioned clearly serve as a basis for the committee if it wants to modify or increase the number of participants in e-petitions while maintaining the integrity of these petitions.

**The Chair:** Mr. Christopherson's question was whether there are more things you're going to recommend, other than what's in your opening comments.

**Mr. André Gagnon:** The—

**Mr. David Christopherson:** Correct me if I'm wrong, but what I heard was that if we ask for them, we will receive detailed recommendations from the staff. I think that sends it over to you. Is it your thinking, then, that we would ask them for that and schedule a meeting and make it a little bit open-ended to provide some opportunity for Mr. Stewart to make his arguments about going forward, whether we decide to or not, and allow him the opportunity in this Parliament to make that case?

I'm in your hands, Chair, seeking your guidance as to how you see us moving forward.

**The Chair:** Are there any thoughts from committee members?

Go ahead, Mr. Bittle.

**Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.):** I have no issue with this. Let's get as much information as we can. We discussed it, and we clarified that there is no pressing deadline on this issue, that the rules will carry forward, so let's hear what the recommendations are. Since there is no timetable, this might be a good one- or two-day study in the new year.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** I like that. What we could do, building on that idea, is ask the staff if they would provide that to us, and as soon as the clerk receives it, you could bring it to us as a matter of business, and then we could schedule that meeting.

You're right, Mr. Bittle, that there's no real deadline, and we do have some other things that do, but we still don't want to miss the opportunity during this Parliament to do a review.

Again, if we ask the staff, through you, Chair, on our behalf, to generate those recommendations, when they're received by the clerk, they would go to you. You would bring them to us as a matter of business, and then we would schedule a meeting to delve into those recommendations and afford a chance to anyone else who wanted to make any amendments, in particular Mr. Stewart, since it's his idea we're building on.

That's just a thought, Chair.

**The Chair:** Can you consider yourself asked?

**Mr. Charles Robert:** That was my take.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** We won't put it in writing, but we'll look forward to further recommendations.



**Mr. André Gagnon:** I wouldn't use the word "recommendations". From our perspective, it would probably be more like issues you would want to explore, and that would bring you to a decision, or not, on the different—

• (1245)

**The Chair:** Okay.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** Mr. Robert, is that because you don't want to presume to be telling...? I'm just curious why you wouldn't—

**Mr. Charles Robert:** Indeed, this House is your House. We're here as your servants.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** If we ask you, as our servants, to generate recommendations—

**Mr. Charles Robert:** We would be obliged to put them in that language.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** I leave it with you, Chair.

**An hon. member:** We'll recommend some issues.

**Some hon members:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** Okay, that's all done, but before we leave this topic, are there any other comments relating to petitions?

I have one, actually.

There seems to be a bit of a dichotomy, of not parallel processes—and I'm not saying it's good or bad—between the physical petition and the electronic one. It may just be wording, but on a physical petition the member of Parliament is the presenter. They're not allowed to have an opinion. They just present it. However, when you use the word "sponsor", it gives the impression that you actually support the petition, that you are sponsoring a petition that you'd like to see go ahead. To me, those are two different processes for the same thing, a petition. I'm not saying that's good or bad, but I would prefer if they might be similar.

Are there any comments on that?

**Mr. André Gagnon:** If you remember, Mr. Chair, it was part of the discussion the last time it was studied, and if I remember well, the guidelines that we provided and prepared clearly state that the sponsor is not the supporter of a petition. He supports the idea that citizens should be able to petition Parliament.

Then again, maybe the word could be changed.

**Mr. Charles Robert:** It actually does raise the issue about whether or not you can refuse to be the one who actually brings forward the petition. If you're just basically a presenter, you're actually fulfilling a kind of mechanical process, but I think you're quite right, Mr. Chair, in reading in the word "sponsor" that it's something more than being simply just the mechanical presenter.

**The Chair:** Could I ask the committee what they think about changing the word "sponsor" to "presenter" on electronic petitions? It would be my preference.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** Will you make that your top recommendation?

**The Chair:** Okay. Let's include that in our next discussion.

Is there anything else?

Mr. Clerk, as this is your first time here and you might see us a lot —

**Mr. Charles Robert:** I hope so.

**The Chair:** —do you want to offer any welcoming remarks to our committee? We welcome you to the House.

**Mr. Charles Robert:** I remember vividly my time before you in June. I thought then I was given quite a warm welcome.

I appreciate my opportunity to appear before you today, and I look forward to those occasions in the future when I will again have a chance to bring whatever intelligence and experience I have to the work of this fantastic House and this committee to bear.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. We'll see you Thursday.

**Mr. Charles Robert:** I guess.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We'll suspend for a minute and then go into committee business.

• (1245)

(Pause)

• (1250)

**The Chair:** We'll start with this item.

We asked the minister to send a letter on what she was looking for with regard to the leaders' debates commissioner. She sent it, so people have that. It's as much an information item as anything else. I haven't read it, because we just got it.

I don't know if anyone wants to comment on that or if we could leave it as an information item.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** We'll leave it and then discuss it in public on, say, Thursday.

**The Chair:** Okay. That's this Thursday.

By Thursday of constituency week, everyone is bringing in their witness list.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Is the deadline on Thursday 4 p.m. or 5 p.m.?

**The Chair:** It's at 5 p.m.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** It's 5 p.m. on Thursday, November 16.

**The Chair:** Yes.

The second item is really quick. Maybe we'll just make this a standard procedure.

There's a group from Ghana coming November 28 to 30. With other parliaments, we've set up an informal meeting outside PROC time when any member who wants to come can do so. Unless I hear otherwise, or there's nothing controversial, maybe we'll just do that when we get requests, if that's okay with the committee members. I'll just inform you that it's coming, and if someone has an issue, we can bring that up at committee.

Ms. Malcolmson, I wasn't at the subcommittee, but there are people here who were. On your private member's bill, administration said it should be non-votable because it was similar to a government bill, Bill C-64. She has the right within five days to appear before the committee or send written reasons stating why she disagrees. Five days would elapse the Monday after we get back, so we'd have the Monday after we get back. Basically we need to schedule time either this week or on the Monday we get back when she could present to committee, and committee could make a decision.

Go ahead, Mr. Graham.

**Mr. David de Burgh Graham:** I suggest, so we don't force ourselves to have an extra meeting, that we try to append it to the end of the meeting on Thursday, from 1:00 to 1:30 or something like that.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** I want to be clear. Are we talking about the consideration of her request or about holding the meeting?

**The Chair:** We are talking about the timing of when we do the consideration of her request. Oh, she's asked to come before committee.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Then we're just talking about the timing of when she can come.

**Mr. David de Burgh Graham:** I'm still thinking of Thursday, at the end.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** I just wanted to make sure we weren't having a meeting to plan a meeting. We're going to give her her rights; the question is just when we're going to do that.

**Mr. David de Burgh Graham:** We're planning the planning meeting now, so we don't need to plan the planning meeting. We're good.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** There we go. We're almost talking plain.

**Mr. David de Burgh Graham:** I was saying that it should be on Thursday at the end of the meeting we already have scheduled, so at one o'clock we could enter into this subject.

**The Chair:** Would it be half an hour?

**Mr. David de Burgh Graham:** I would imagine that would take care of it.

**The Chair:** It would be this Thursday.

**Mr. David de Burgh Graham:** This Thursday, yes, two days from now. Otherwise we have to schedule another meeting between now and—

**Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC):** We're talking about a time to have a meeting. Why don't we just do that right now?

**Mr. David de Burgh Graham:** It's because she has to come too.  
• (1255)

**The Chair:** For Thursday's schedule, the first hour is supplementary estimates. The first half hour is on the House of Commons and the second half hour is on PPS, because that's totally separate from the House of Commons budget. Then, in the second hour, the first half hour is on PPS management related to the present labour situation, and the second hour is on the three unions.

We're pretty booked up on Thursday, so our only options are basically to add half an hour to that meeting at one o'clock, as David is suggesting, or to have a special meeting the Monday after we return from constituency week.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** By unanimous consent, the House could do anything. If Sheila agreed....

**Mr. David de Burgh Graham:** The House, not us.

**The Chair:** That's what he said: the House.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** I said the House, but we can make that recommendation. If we're unanimous, we could recommend to the House that they agree, especially if we have agreement from Sheila. I don't want to delay this. Obviously, it's my colleague, but if it's a matter of a day or two and this works better, I'm sure she would be accommodating. She's a very reasonable person.

To do the extension on Thursday would be the easiest, but there is the option of getting the House to lift the five days, with the agreement of Sheila.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** It's easier, rather than getting into all of this.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** I agree. I think Thursday is easier. I'm just offering what the alternative could be.

**The Chair:** Is there anyone opposed to extending Thursday's meeting by half an hour and having Ms. Malcolmson come? Then we could make a decision after she leaves.

**Some hon. members:** No.

**The Chair:** Okay, we'll consider that done.

Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.







Published under the authority of the Speaker of  
the House of Commons

---

### SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

---

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the *Copyright Act*. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a Committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the *Copyright Act*.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its Committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

---

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <http://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité  
du Président de la Chambre des communes

---

### PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

---

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

---

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante : <http://www.noscommunes.ca>