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Chair

The Honourable Shawn Murphy

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● (1530)

[*English*]

The Chair (Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.)): I'd like at this time to call the meeting to order.

Bienvenue à tous.

First of all, I want to wish everyone a happy new year and all the best in 2011.

And before we start the meeting, colleagues, what I'd like to do is introduce our new committee clerk. We have with us Chad Mariage. He has come from the Canada-U.S. Inter-Parliamentary Group. He previously was a clerk in one of the other committees. We wish Chad all the best as he takes on these new duties.

[*Applause*]

The Chair: Colleagues, this is a continuation of our ongoing study into open government.

The committee is very pleased to have before us today Mr. David Eaves. He's a public policy entrepreneur, open government activist, and negotiator.

He works with the Harvard Negotiation Project and is a fellow at the Centre for Studies on Democracy and Diversity at Queen's University. He has advised a number of governments, mainly municipal, and of course was very involved with the Government of Australia in their open government concept. In my opinion, he is one of the foremost experts—if not the foremost—in this area here in Canada. The committee is very pleased to have him before us.

We understand that Mr. Eaves has a ten-minute opening comment. I'm going to turn the floor over to him and then we'll go to questions from committee members.

Again, Mr. Eaves, welcome to the committee.

Mr. David Eaves (As an Individual): Thank you so much.

I thank the committee for inviting me to come and speak with you today.

I want to break down what I'm going to do to be as helpful as possible. I have three big chunks that I think I want to dive into. The first is that I want to just talk a little bit about where I think open government is, what it is, and how we can define it, and try to give the committee a little bit of a framework to help shape their thinking and the recommendations they may make.

I then want to talk a little about the state we're currently in and where I think things are, as well as what the size of the opportunity is that's in front of us.

Finally, maybe I will make just one or two specific recommendations that I think might be helpful. Then I'll wind down and allow for questions, because I think that's actually where a lot of the meat is going to be.

The Chair: Could I ask you to perhaps slow down a little? It's just that our translation may have difficulty keeping up.

Mr. David Eaves: Sorry about that. That's a regular problem with me.

I'd like to start by talking about the terms “open government” and “open data”, because I think there's a fair amount of confusion. I have noticed that this committee itself has been using those two terms almost interchangeably, and I think that's actually a mistake. I think these are actually two very different things and I want to break them apart.

The notion of open government is the overarching umbrella term. I won't dive in too deeply, because I think it means lots of different things to lots of different people, but I think there are three different pieces that make up open government, in our interest at least, and I want to talk about each one of those.

The first piece is open data. Open data refers to facts, the actual things that you would refer to as being numbers, or perhaps a map. They're generally numbers, and for people who are new to the open data and the open government world, I would really like to talk about open data as being something you would open in an Excel spreadsheet. So generally there are not a lot of words. Generally it's what we call “machine readable”, which means your Excel spreadsheet can open it up and you can look at it. So a budget, for example, would be a great example of open data. A map is a fantastic example of open data.

I want to separate that very clearly from a second piece, which is open information. Open information would be a report that has been written about data or about the state of the country. It could be about anything. Open information is the type of thing you would normally want to ATIP, the type of thing you would read, such as a report written by the government. Open information and open data are actually quite different. Open information is what we call unstructured data. It's words, it's vocabulary. Open data is structured. It looks like numbers and it's usually confusing to most of us.

The final piece is open processes. Open processes are the decision-making tools of government. This could range from a referendum, to this committee, to a consultation, and it's how open you make the decision-making within government.

The reason I want to break these three things out is because I actually think there are very different options available to us for each one of these types of categories, and I would hate for this committee to confuse “open information” with “open data” and make decisions that apply to open information, because that's a much more restricted realm we're dealing with there. When it comes to open data, I think the doors are wide open, and that is the category where I really want to focus my comments.

In the last four or five years, there has been an explosion in the amount of data that governments are willing to share with their citizens. So in the United States you have the launch of something called Data.gov, which now I think has something over 200,000 different data sets that the U.S. government shares freely with its citizens. Anybody can go to the website. Anybody can download this information. The British government has launched data.gov.uk, which has several thousands if not hundreds of thousands of data sets now as well, where you can go and download any information the government has that has been put up on that website.

I advised the mayor of Vancouver.... Two years ago we passed an open motion and we launched an open data portal for the City of Vancouver. You'll now see that there are somewhere in the range of about 160 data sets the city shares with citizens that they can use to write reports, to make software applications, or to simply help rethink how city services are conducted.

The reason I think this matters is right now we're kind of stuck in a world where we deal with all information as if it is an atypical request. So everything has to go through ATIP. And you have to understand that I come from a generation of people who are growing up using Google, and the average length of a Google search is somewhere in the realm of about 30 milliseconds. The average length of time it takes to complete an ATIP request is somewhere in the range of four months. If you ask anybody under the age of 30 what they think of access to their government, the simple response is it's broken. We have a system that has been in place for 20, 30, 40 years that may have looked good when it was first initiated, but today, to anybody who's used to living in a digital era, simply appears broken.

The reason I wanted to subdivide these into three different problems is that I recognize that the open process and the open information categories are tricky things to deal with, and there are a lot of competing interests, but I think in the realm of open data we can make a number of very quick and very significant wins.

● (1535)

We can architect a system that works literally for all citizens, and not just for a small group of journalists or for a small group of very interested people who are willing to hang out and wait for months in order to get a piece of government information. I think we can do a whole lot better.

I want to talk a little bit about the core principle about why we should be doing better. I think this gets lost in all the conversation about access to information, about privacy, about government secrecy. When it comes to raw data, the information the government collects about this country, about its citizens, is a public asset. It doesn't look like a road, it doesn't hang like a bridge, it's not a building in which public servants work, but it is as much a public asset as the building we're sitting in right now. With virtually every public asset that we have as a government, we go out of our way to make it as usable and accessible to Canadians as we conceivably can, because we know that those assets make for a stronger economy and they make for a stronger country.

Yet suddenly, when it comes to data, we actually go out of our way to not share this public asset. We choose not to let Canadians understand how their government works, and we choose to not let Canadians use that information to strengthen their companies, strengthen their families, to make their country better. It's a problem I don't understand.

The small number of times when we actually do decide to make data accessible, there are very few times when we make it free. Instead, we actually charge for it. We've taken economics and we've turned it completely on its head, because when you charge for data there's an economic argument why this makes no sense, and there's a moral argument why this makes no sense. The moral argument for why it makes no sense is what you have effectively done is you've taken an activity that all taxpayers have subsidized and you are now only allowing the wealthiest to gain access to that information. That might make sense if that asset were limited in its use: like there are only so many of us who can drive on a road, and every time we drive on that road we make that road worse, so I can understand you want to toll the road because you want to capture some of the revenue from the people who are actually using that asset so you can pay to keep it up to date.

The problem with data is that if Mrs. Freeman uses that data, it doesn't suddenly become less valuable to me. If Mr. Murphy uses that data, it doesn't become less valuable to me. It's just as valuable as it was before. So here in government economics we take all of the assets that actually erode, like our roads, and we very rarely toll them—we allow people to use them for free—and we take all the assets that never erode and could be reused infinitely, and we actually charge for them.

I think one of the biggest crimes we have in this country at the moment is that we charge for an enormous amount of StatsCan's data. Here is information about how communities function, about how healthy people are, about who they are as Canadians, and we make that information hard to access.

The other piece is we're creating barriers to entry to all sorts of new and interesting, potentially disruptive, companies. When you begin to look at the information that's getting released out there, it's starting to do some very interesting things. We're still very early on, but when you think of the companies that have emerged in the digital economy, most of those companies emerged because they have become profoundly good at organizing and leveraging and making use of data. You think of a company like Google. All Google does is organize, offer up, and make use of data. Who knows what company could emerge in Canada if the Canadian government made that information available, and what new services people might imagine, what efficiencies could be gained. I'm going to talk about that in a little bit.

What are some of the opportunities in front of us? What are some of the reasons why I think we should be thinking about open data and making the information the government has more accessible to the public, especially the data? I think for government there are three or four or five reasons that really come to mind.

The first is, we could reduce ATIP requests. Here we have an enormous cost where we have people rifling through documents trying to figure out what can be shared and what can't be shared. I think there's a whole bunch of data that we could frankly just share, and we would reduce the cost of having to fill that out. Here I understand that even MPs would find this useful.

● (1540)

My understanding is that most MPs have kind of a running access-to-information request where they want to know how much money the federal government spent in their ridings every quarter or every year or every month. One could imagine that rather than having to make that request over and over again, if the government simply made that data available on a website you could simply download it. Rather than having to wait days, possibly weeks, or even months to get information, you would have it as fast as your Internet connection. Not only would you have it, but everybody who lives in your riding would have it. Everybody who has a business in your riding would have it. Every citizen in the country could gain access to it.

The second reason I think open data is interesting for us to engage in is because it has another cost driver, or it kind of reduces cost in government. When you look at open data portals around the world, it is not uncommon to see that the biggest users of open data portals are government employees. Right now we have all these public servants all across Ottawa sitting on information that they'd actually love to share with one another, which would allow for more effective policy to be made, and they have no mechanism to easily do that.

When you create an open data portal where you share information with the public, you have actually also created a portal where you share that data with public servants. For example, when I talked to the guy who runs the open data portal in Washington, D.C., in the city, I asked him who the biggest user was. He said that was public servants, because for years they had wanted to gain access to what the crime rates were in a region, or what the budget was over there, or what pollution was doing over in a region, and they had to go through five different people in order to get that. Now they can simply download it.

The biggest opportunity is for finding cost savings. This is what the Tories have realized in the U.K. The Conservative government in the United Kingdom now shares actual spending data down to the 25,000-pound level with the public. In some ministries they share it down to the 500-pound level. They have literally invited the public to come and take a look at their books and to help them find where the waste is.

If you don't think that could matter here, I have one brief story I'd like to share with you. A couple of years ago a friend of mine was asked by a colleague to assess the charities in the greater Toronto area. They went to the Canada Revenue Agency, which eventually gave them a spread sheet of all the information about charities in the Toronto area. They were working away on this information, and on a lark they decided one day to sort these charities by the number of tax receipts issued. When they did that, something astounding happened. The United Way is the single largest charity in the Toronto area. It generally raises about $100 million a year. Yet the United Way only placed third on this list. There were two larger charities that had issued somewhere in the range of $160 million and the other one had issued somewhere in the range of $230 million in tax receipts. In fact, six of the top fifteen charities on their list they had never heard of.

Once you began to crunch the numbers and once you began to dive deeper to look at the charities, it became very obvious that these charities were actually not charities. Some of them were tax evasion schemes and some were engaged in fraud. And when you looked at what these charities had collected over a five-year period, the total amount of forgone tax revenues for the Canadian government and the cost to Canadian taxpayers was $3.2 billion. This is an enormous sum of money for us.

If the CRA's data had actually been made open and had been made available, I could imagine two things. One is that someone somewhere probably would have created a graph that would have shown different charities in the Toronto area and would have shown a charity that had gone from $60,000 in charitable receipts one year to $20 million in the next year, to $60 million in the year after that, to $120 million, then to $240 million. And someone somewhere would have said “I either need to hire that executive director, because they are running the most amazing charity in Canada, or something serious is going on”. I actually think if they had made that data public and someone had created that site, it might have prevented that charity from even emerging in the first place, because the simple scrutiny of the public being able to see them would have prevented that type of scam from emerging.

For me, the opportunity around government is an enormous amount of cost saving and also an opportunity to kind of monitor what we're doing and to see the problems as they are emerging, and finally to take the government services we have and augment them.

● (1545)

Someone has tried to do that with just what you guys do here in the House of Commons. I think you interviewed Michael Mulley, who is a friend of mine in Montreal. He has created the openparliament.ca website. He's taking data that you create in your own Parliament, and he's put it on a website that is far more accessible than the parliamentary website. In fact, I know public servants in Ottawa now who use that website to track what their ministers are saying and doing so that they can stay on top of what the government's agenda is and what the debates are.

These are the types of services that we can make more efficient.

The other reason why I think we should be doing open data is that it actually strengthens our economy. When I think of the billions of dollars that were spent on strengthening the Canadian economy coming out of the recession, I am saddened to think about how little of it was spent on the type of infrastructure that is going to be so powerful in the 21st century, which is better data. Why didn't we simply make all of StatsCan's data publicly available?

If you think of some of the big examples of how data has transformed the Canadian economy.... I have a few quick examples for you. The first is weather. The Canadian government collects weather information and shares it. In the United States, the U.S. government does the same thing. It is estimated that in the United States the economy generated by open weather information is roughly in the range of about $2 billion.

Just think about it. Think of all the logistics firms that are now giving advice on when to move goods based on the weather information they have that's been made available to them freely by their government. Think of all the individual decisions made by commuters about whether or not they're going to take the bus or whether they're going to drive, and all of the oil that gets saved by people who feel “actually, I can ride my bike today” or “I can take the bus” or “I'm not going to bring that umbrella” or “I'm going to dress more appropriately”—all the productivity hours that are gained there.

The amount of wealth generated by weather data is almost incomprehensible. That is a single data set that this government creates and shares. If we begin to imagine what is possible with the hundreds of thousands of data sets that you have at your disposal, I can think of an economy that is much more resilient, much more vibrant than the one we have now.

Another example is GPS data. I think if we're really honest with ourselves, GPS data was created so that we could deploy nuclear warheads with enormous precision on people we don't like. Tim O'Reilly says that nobody sat around while developing GPS data saying “GPS data will be really interesting when people have cellphones so that they can tell everybody where they are or they can log into Google maps and figure out how not to get lost.” Think of the billions of barrels of oil every year that are not expended because people no longer get lost. They can simply figure out where they are because of a GPS device. This is the power of open data.

What I really want to challenge you guys to think about is as you're making recommendations and as you're thinking about what the future of government is, I want you to understand that there is a huge opportunity in the data that this government sits on. If you share it, there is the citizenry out there that wants to make use of it to better understand how the government works, to hold you to account—I'll be honest—and to build the economy of the next century.

What we're really trying to figure out is that if we are going to have a knowledge-based economy, we're going to need a knowledge-based government that is going to want to engage with a knowledge-based citizenry. They already exist. They're already trained and skilled. They are already thinking about the stuff. They're just sitting around and waiting for someone to give them some materials to make that economy a reality.

I've talked for long enough; I'll stop there. I'd love to hear your questions and to answer them as best I can.

● (1550)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Eaves.

We're going to the first round of questions.

Dr. Bennett, you have seven minutes.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Thanks very much.

I think I want to give the seven minutes back to you, David, to keep going.

You alluded to the information piece. The data sets we get in terms of that. On the information piece, where do you draw the line? When could the default position just be that it's open and government just selects a few things that they feel are public security or whatever?

On the decision-making piece, which was the third one, I would just like to know how that would work. How can you do the open processes piece? Other than grants and contributions or those sorts of things, what would that look like?

I guess the last thing would be your advice to this committee in terms of how we go forward and who we should be talking to and how you think we would do a proper piece of work.

Mr. David Eaves: I have a couple of thoughts. First, around open information and the division between the two, I think what the British have done is incredibly interesting. The British are now contemplating setting up a public data corporation that will house the regularly collected data that the government uses. It's a very interesting model. Basically, they're going to try to centralize the actual data they collect. I think it's a model this government should be looking at. It's certainly the model that's used by the city of Washington, D.C., and it's the reason they've been able to move so quickly.

That's where I would define “data”. It's the information that this government chooses to regularly collect about the country. There might be data that on the offhand, every once in a while, someone commissions—you know, a report, when they want to know something. I think we should share that as well. But I actually think that at the heart of it there's a core set of data that we regularly collect. That is a public asset. Frankly, our tax dollars paid for it, and I'd like to know why you're not sharing it with me.

On the second piece, around information, I want to be really clear with the committee. I recognize the importance of the government's need to have a certain degree of privacy when developing policies and ideas. I do not think that under all circumstances it is wise for every idea to be shared with the public as it's being formulated. There are ideas that are controversial, there are ideas that need to be explored, there are ideas that need to be nurtured, and they deserve to have the privacy of a government in order to do that. If I were going to make some recommendations, one recommendation I might make is that I would radically reduce the length of time between when a document is made versus when it's made public. The second is I would insist that any document now that is being released, where it exists in a digital form, be released in that digital form. So if you happen to have it in a Word document, please release it in a Word document. Don't print it out and send it to me.

One of the most powerful things about digital media is that they're searchable. When you dump 3,000 printed-out documents onto me, you are effectively not releasing those documents to me. Am I really going to go through 3,000 different pieces of paper and find the relevant piece of information? When a citizen asks for a piece of information and you send them printouts, you're effectively telling them, “We are denying your access to information”, and I think you are actually disrespecting them in a really profound way. So I would want to make that recommendation.

I would also love for this committee to rethink the rules under which information is released, and even how parliamentary privilege works. Right now, for example, when the video of this committee is released, no one's going to be allowed to use that video to do anything they want. People can rebroadcast that video, but for example if somebody wants to make fun of me and take this video and match it up with a song, my understanding is that right now their rights are actually quite limited in doing that. They certainly can't do it with any of you. In the United States there's *The Daily Show*, and they regularly show the House of Representatives and the Senate and make fun of them, but it's a way of educating people. That's the satire that's so important. You can't do any of that in Canada. So there are these restrictions on how data can be used.

And then, finally, when it comes to processes, there I actually have less to say. I think a lot of the thinking around what open processes look like today is built around the current way we share information. If we shared a lot more information and a lot more data with the public, the types of processes we'd want would also change dramatically.

For example, if this government chose to make its budget open, and simply released the Excel spreadsheet of the budget and said “Everybody in the world, go and analyze it and you tell us where the problems are”, I think you'd have the people who came and talked to you much better informed. This committee would work in a very different way, because rather than re-educating the people who are coming to present to you, or having them tell you things that are incorrect because they didn't understand the 3,000 pieces of paper they had to go through, the system would be much faster and the way you'd want to engage people would begin to change.

So I'm hesitant to go into that place, because I think that world's going to evolve, depending on what we do in the other two places.

● (1555)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: And in terms of the work of the committee?

Mr. David Eaves: I'd love for you to look at the Australian government's Government 2.0 task force, and look at the recommendations they made and the way they tackled the problem. Actually, a fairly short and concise document that makes ten very clear recommendations would be very powerful. One of the things I love about the work you're doing is that a lot of it doesn't actually require the House of Commons to have a big vote or for legislation to change; it can simply be changed if people in authority decide that they want to change it.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: And in terms of our doing an e-consultation, do you have some advice as to how we would find the people who would be interested in it, how we would make sure the traffic comes to give us advice?

Mr. David Eaves: If you want to do an e-consultation, that's great. My only advice to you, if you do an e-consultation, is to make sure that the input of the people you contact gets used in any document you create.

The British did a big e-consultation about how to make government better. Hundreds and hundreds of submissions were made. Then the government turned around and said, “Yes, we're doing all of them already”. I'm not sure that this answer satisfied a lot of people. So now everybody says that it's hard for people to get mobilized by these types of issues in government. I say I am not surprised. If you don't do any of the things they want, why should they take the time and energy? The most important thing in any kind of consultation, whether it's in person or online, is to make sure you really engage and respect.

● (1600)

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Bennett.

We're now going to Madame Freeman.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Freeman, you have seven minutes.

Mrs. Carole Freeman (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ): Good afternoon, Mr. Eaves. I want to thank you for your presentation, which was extremely interesting.

I also wish to thank you for the letter you sent us in order to prepare us for this meeting, in which you pointed out a number of elements. Among others, you presented to us four elements. First, we should know...

Do you want to wait for the interpretation?

Mr. David Eaves: I can understand you, but it's very difficult, as the volume is not high enough.

Mrs. Carole Freeman: I will wait for you to put the earpiece in.

This is actually relevant, since we will discuss bilingualism.

Mr. David Eaves: My apologies. I am not very tech-savvy, as you can see.

Mrs. Carole Freeman: This technology is very complicated.

Mr. David Eaves: It seems to be too complicated for me.

Mrs. Carole Freeman: It's so outdated that it's become complicated. It should come with an instruction manual.

I want to thank you for your presentation and for the letter you sent us to prepare us for this meeting with you.

In that letter, you list certain recommendations. In your opinion, first, we need to know what exactly is going on right now in the federal government, in various fields, and to meet with the chief information officer. We are meeting with Ms. Charette next week.

However, the newspapers revealed today that she has already begun working on a portal and on other things. Perhaps she has made even more progress and will surprise us next week by announcing that her department has moved into the digital age.You will be totally amazed. All kidding aside, we will at least get an idea of where things stand.

Second, you were somewhat hesitant and you seemed to think that our committee would perhaps delay the evolution process. So, you suggested a taskforce—

Mr. David Eaves: No—

Mrs. Carole Freeman: Hold on, I haven't finished.

You suggested putting together a taskforce that would be composed of both elected officials, in other words, parliamentarians—whom you refer to as partisans—and technical and strategic experts, in order to make progress in this field on a federal level.

Could you provide us with more details on the subject, for starters?

Then, I would like to discuss access to information and bilingualism.

I will have additional questions, but let's start with these two.

Mr. David Eaves: I will try to answer you in French, but I will switch to English if I want to explain more complicated matters better.

Mrs. Carole Freeman: No problem.

Mr. David Eaves: It's not that I want you to believe otherwise, but you could use the taskforce as a model on how to address these issues.

In Australia, this group did not consist of only government employees. People like me, officials and industry representatives were invited to participate. They were asked about what they needed, what they wanted to do and what kind of future they envisaged for the Australian government. This process provided a lot of people with the opportunity to get involved and contribute to the conversation.

We have a very smart group gathered here, but it's made up entirely of public servants. I am very interested in seeing how we could find a way to get outside people involved in this taskforce. That's what I'm thinking.

I don't want to create a new taskforce that will be separate from you. If that were the case, it would take even longer to formulate suggestions and take action.

● (1605)

Mrs. Carole Freeman: You talked to us about models used in Great Britain and Australia. Now, you are proposing a "Canadian" model, but it goes without saying that the political will to develop all this must come from the top. That's the first necessary requirement.

What would the ideal model you would suggest for Canada look like? Would it be a mix of the British and Australian models?

[*English*]

Mr. David Eaves: What I would love to see is this group model itself a little bit after the Australian task force to make similar recommendations. Then I would love to see the government look at those recommendations and figure out how to fit them into their agenda. I think there is an enormous opportunity.

One of the things that makes me most excited about the open-data agenda is how much appeal it should have across the political spectrum. In the United Kingdom, you have a Conservative-led coalition government that is using open data very strategically to try to rethink how government operates, how it spends money, and how efficient and effective it is. Meanwhile, you have governments at the local level here in Canada that have a much more social agenda. They are trying to think about discovering the types of challenges in our communities. Also, they're trying to rethink how we deliver government services to make them more effective.

For me, the model that is most exciting is one that has a strong committee like this one making some very clear recommendations that could have some pan-partisan appeal and a government, given its ideological roots, that could probably grab some of those recommendations and run with them.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Freeman: Thank you.

I will now move on to a different topic to ensure that you—

Mr. David Eaves: You wanted to talk about bilingualism...

Mrs. Carole Freeman: I'm just getting to it. We met with the Information Commissioner, Ms. Legault, who talked about four or five issues related to establishing access to information within a transparent government. In her fourth point, she talked about difficulties we could encounter, such as privacy, security, copyright and official languages.

We will be meeting with the commissioner of official languages soon. Nevertheless, in one of your articles, you explain how we can avoid costs or other hurdles limiting access to information. You suggest translations by Google or similar tools. Could you elaborate on this thought? I would like to submit this process to Mr. Fraser to determine whether it's feasible.

By the way, I find Google Translate to be rather trying. These types of translation tools would need to be greatly improved before being able to translate a text into proper French.

Explain to me how you would address the bilingualism issue, that is, the official languages issue, in access to information.

[*English*]

Mr. David Eaves: I'm going to speak in English, just because when it comes to Google stuff, I really want to make sure that I get it right.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Freeman: That's one of the official languages.

[*English*]

Mr. David Eaves: The article you are referring to is an article I was very despondent to read. An RCMP detachment in British Columbia was forced to pull down I think it was 2,000 old press releases, because they weren't available in both official languages. They had previously been using Google Translate to translate the English releases into French. I'm floored by the fact that what we have functionally done is made our government more opaque. So now no one in either English or French can ever see these documents, right? This is a terrible outcome.

At the same time, I am a product of bilingualism.

[*Translation*]

My French is less than satisfactory, but I can understand and speak a little.

[*English*]

So then we've said, okay, you can't use Google Translate. The danger is that you're looking at Google Translate as it exists now. That's right. Google Translate 12 months ago was far worse, and Google Translate 12 months from now is going to be significantly better.

Look at what Google did with spell check. In a very short period of time, they built the most effective spell checking system in the world, simply because everybody was constantly updating it for them. They were able to draw on millions and millions and millions of users. They are doing the exact same thing with Google Translate. So the rate of improvement of Google Translate is logarithmic. It's probably getting better faster and faster.

We've actually extricated ourselves from a system just as it's about to get phenomenally better. If we actually want to make Google Translate better still, someone should call Google and say that this is a system that gets better when you can compare documents. There is one organization in the world that has an enormous quantity of documents in both English and French, and that's the Government of Canada.

If we really want to make Google Translate very effective tomorrow, someone should call Google and say, “Why don't you take all of our documents that we have in both English and French and put them into your computers? It will dramatically improve the effectiveness.”

I think it also has a nice piece as part of it, which is that Canadian French and Canadian English would then become even more predominant within the Google ecosystem. That aside, if we want to make Google Translate better, it's in our power. At least we could ask Google. In fact, we probably don't have to ask. Someone could just create a software program that fed both into their systems without their desire, and we would make Google Translate significantly better.

● (1610)

The Chair: Madame Freeman—

Mr. David Eaves: But I think we have a shared interest, in that I want documents to be available in both languages. Most importantly, I want documents to be available in at least one language, and if a document is only available in French, I want to know, because then at least I can ask to translate it.

I think the huge opportunity around data is that most data don't need to be translated. You don't need to translate an Excel spreadsheet, except for maybe the headers across the top. So when I think of the places where we can move most quickly, one of the reasons data comes to mind is that it's the easiest place to go.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Freeman: I would like to end by saying that, in a digital world, we could translate these documents into several languages, such as Spanish. This could be done.

Mr. David Eaves: I think this will become a reality in the very near future.

Mrs. Carole Freeman: I think so too.

Thank you.

I had other questions, but unfortunately, my time is up.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Freeman.

[*English*]

Mr. Siksay, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Eaves, for your testimony today. It has been very helpful, as have your writing, your blog, and all kinds of other things as well.

I wanted to ask you first off.... Not to spend a lot of time on this, but you describe yourself as a public policy entrepreneur. Can you say a little bit about how you understand that and how it relates to the discussion we're having today?

Mr. David Eaves: Mostly I try to find places where I think there is an opportunity to make significant leaps in the way we engage in solving a problem—usually one that has a kind of public policy angle—and I try to write, think, and wherever possible act in order to do that.

For example, even here in the open data space, people on the committee may not know, but along with some colleagues I created the data portal for the Canadian government. Since you didn't have one, I said, I'll create one for you. So you can go to datadotgc.ca; I'm obviously not allowed to own a “.gc.ca” website, as only Government of Canada officials can do that. I created that website, and then several colleagues and I just kind of mapped where all the data was already.

Because you actually already share. I mean, the exciting thing about what you guys are doing is that there's already a policy infrastructure to share data in the federal government. So I was like, why don't we just go find it all, bring it into one site, and then we've created the open data portal for you? I think that site actually helped push the government and helped public servants. I think it brought this to the fore here. It has pushed the government to start thinking about this stuff.

So as an entrepreneur, I think I've been able to push the agenda by defining high-leverage places like that.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Now, I know some of it is out of the goodness of your heart, but you're trying to make some money doing this. How does a public policy entrepreneur make money doing this in this kind of process? Because clearly you're talking about people earning a living, making money, and contributing to an economy by doing this. As somebody who's doing that, how does that happen?

Mr. David Eaves: If the question is about how David Eaves makes his money, David Eaves makes his money through a combination of negotiation and consulting. I advise Fortune 500 companies and some other groups. I advise them—

Mr. Bill Siksay: I didn't really mean for you to explain that—

Mr. David Eaves: —and I do a lot of public speaking. But one of the things is do I hope there are going to be companies that are going to emerge out of this space? Absolutely. Am I someone who would think about launching such a company? If the right opportunity came up, I definitely would, so I wouldn't want to be seen as totally impartial.

Mr. Bill Siksay: What other kinds of job titles or job descriptions would people have who are interested in using this kind of thing? Who is interested in doing this and taking this information...?

Mr. David Eaves: Just to show you how significant the issue of data is, whether it's from government or anywhere, two or three weeks ago I was at LinkedIn in San Francisco, at their head offices, for a presentation. This guy from LinkedIn had this great chart and showed the number of people who had analytics in their job title, graphed over time. It started off infinitesimally small, and now we're into skyrocketing growth. It's just taking off.

You have to understand that our entire economy is being digitized. The moment you say that, well...it's going to digitize how? Well, into some form of data. So I would actually be wandering around and looking: okay, what are the companies that are making use of data? What are the companies that are figuring out ways to make themselves more efficient and more effective?

It's everything from people at Natural Resources Canada who are using federal government data around where our resources are in this country to figure out how they can be more effective and how they can harm the environment less, to people over at RIM who are figuring out how to create applications that make lives more useful.... I think there will be a number of interesting companies and a number of interesting uses that will arise.

Every jurisdiction is going to have a different one. In Vancouver, there's a group I'm involved in—and maybe we'll do something more interesting with it—and in Vancouver the garbage day changes every time there's a statutory holiday, because they don't want you to go two weeks without getting your garbage picked up. That means your garbage day might be Monday one month, but then it might be Wednesday the following month, and obviously people have a hard time keeping track of that.

All the government does is give you a printout at the beginning of the year with a map of what zone you live in and what your garbage schedule looks like. Because they made that data open, we put that data into Google Maps, so you can just go to a website called VanTrash and click on the zone, and it tells you what your schedule is. But then you can also download that schedule into your iPhone or your BlackBerry, which currently the government can't do, or if you give us your e-mail address, we'll e-mail you the day before garbage day to remind you. That's a very, very small type.... And maybe that could be a company, right?

That's a very, very small example, but I want you to begin to think about it. What are all of the services that we offer? What is all the information we have? What are all the ways it can be helpful for people? It's going to be baked into our economy to make our lives more efficient and more effective, and I think there the opportunity is not insignificant.

● (1615)

Mr. Bill Siksay: Right now Luke and Kevin, who are doing the VanTrash site, are sort of begging for donations to keep the site going. It's not an economically viable thing for them at this point.

Mr. David Eaves: I've been working with them very closely. Come back to us in about two months and we'll have a different answer for you.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Okay.

I wanted to ask just a quick question about the Australians' 2.0 commission. Just to be clear, that wasn't a parliamentary committee. It was a task force established by government with non-political people, basically—

Mr. David Eaves: That's correct.

Mr. Bill Siksay: —and with a mandate to investigate all of this. So it's very different from what we're doing here.

Mr. David Eaves: Absolutely.

Mr. Bill Siksay: So when you talk about political will, this is something our committee could deal with. The technicalities of the Government 2.0 commission are sort of outside of our scope, probably.

Mr. David Eaves: Yes, but if you look at the types of recommendations that committee made—or that task force made—I think they are very applicable to the types of issues you were looking into. And I think there are a number of recommendations in there that you might look to as models.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Okay.

You talked about how there are restrictions the House of Commons and Parliament put on the use of the information that's developed here, or made here, and you contrasted that with what Americans are doing. I know you've talked about what the White House does. There's a very sharp contrast to that. Can you say a little bit about how the White House approaches this?

Mr. David Eaves: The Americans have a wonderful system where all government information that is created is, by default, public domain. It has no licence. There are no restrictions, so you can use it to do anything you want. You can change it. You can build an entire business around it. You can turn it into satire. There's no limit on the creativity that's available to them.

What I love about this—and as someone who believes in the rights of citizens—is that what the Americans have managed to evade, at least when it comes to their government information, is a permission culture.

In Canada we have permission culture. If you want to use Canadian government information, okay, but you better talk to us first or at least read the fine print about what you're allowed and what you're not allowed to do. You have a creative idea, you have a piece of art, you have a company, you want to do all those things? Make sure you check the fine print.

In the United States no permission is required. If I have a creative idea, I can go and try it out. I can fail or I can succeed, but it's up to me. That makes sense, because my tax dollars already paid for all this information.

Mr. Bill Siksay: How long has that system been in place?

Mr. David Eaves: From the very beginning.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Okay. So they've had a long experience with—

Mr. David Eaves: Yes, and this is one of the reasons you need to look at this so closely. People will say that if we lift crown copyright, who knows what will happen? To our south, we've had a neighbour who's never had crown copyright, and they have done, I don't know, relatively well economically and politically. So someone needs to explain to me what the risk is.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Siksay.

Mr. Poilievre, seven minutes.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC): Thank you very much for being with us today, Mr. Eaves.

I read that you're a public policy entrepreneur and open government activist, negotiation expert. You've been involved in a study into democracy and diversity at Queen's University. On September 29, 2009, you submitted the view that there are three laws to open government. I want you to help us dissect them a little bit more.

The first rule is that if it can't be spidered or indexed, it does not exist. Perhaps you could help us with the nomenclature a little bit. Start with spidered.

● (1620)

Mr. David Eaves: I want to focus the conversation again. Those were the three laws of open data, not open government.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Open data, sorry. Open data.

Mr. David Eaves: No, it's okay. I just want to make.... I feel it's very important that this committee has a very strong framework for understanding this problem.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Okay.

Mr. David Eaves: So spidered and indexed means the data can be found. Most of us now look for information by using a search engine on the Internet, whether that's Yahoo! or Google or Microsoft Bing. We use one of these to go and find information.

There's a reason why those search engines know where all the information is: they do what we call “spidering”. They have little things that kind of float around the Internet and they go and find where the information is so they can then point you to it when you look for a relevant term.

If you happen to have data that you say you're willing to share with the world, but you have it on a server that's not connected to the Internet or you don't allow Google or Microsoft or Yahoo! to spider and index, in my opinion you don't have open data. If it's open but nobody can find it, it's really not that open. So that's the first rule.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Okay.

If it isn’t available in an open and machine-readable format.... I think the first clause of that statement is self-evident, but how do you define machine-readable? Do you mean it would have to be readable by your average person's computer or MacBook that a Canadian would have sitting in their living room?

Mr. David Eaves: Yes, that's exactly it.

This piece of paper is not a machine-readable document. And a PDF, which is very often the publication vehicle of choice for most governments, I would argue is not a machine-readable document. You open it in a machine, but very often you can't copy the text out of it—or even if you can, it copies in a very messy way. I want the data in a format in which I can reuse it.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Okay. Is PDF your only concern, or...?

Mr. David Eaves: No. I don't think it's in the interest of this committee to get into the specifics of the file formats one should publish in, but I think there are a lot of good practices out there. For example, if you look at the City of Vancouver's open data portal, very frequently they will share data sets in several different types, in several different formats. That way the user can choose the one that most fits their need. It means that you can use it in formats that are broadly more open, but if you want a format that's more closed you can do that too.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Just so that we delineate the line between machine-readable and non-machine-readable, is there some sort of definition that you can provide beyond the notion that PDF is not, but other forms are?

Mr. David Eaves: I think the short of it is whether I can play with the data, because if I can't play with it, then it's not open.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: The third one was if a legal framework doesn't allow it to be reproduced. Are you referring there to copyright, to government copyright?

Mr. David Eaves: Yes. Sometimes it's copyright, sometimes it's a licensing agreement. For example, this used to be true in Vancouver before we wrote the open motion. There was information that was shared on the city's website, so there was data that was available, but they actually had a disclaimer that says you can look at this, but don't dare use it to do anything. Don't use it in your company, don't use it in your non-profit, don't use it to do any of these things. So it's not particularly helpful for me if you share data with me and then tell me I can look at the data, play with it, and do amazing things with it, but I can't share it with anybody. The moment you say that, then what am I supposed to do?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: That does sound like a copyright issue.

Mr. David Eaves: Yes. So copyright would be one form of restriction that might apply to a data set.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Okay.

Mr. David Eaves: That's what makes the Americans so interesting. There's no licence, at least at the federal level, for that data. It is in the public domain.

● (1625)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Because they consider it a public asset?

Mr. David Eaves: That's right.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Okay.

Does that absence of copyright apply to foreigners, or does it just apply to American citizens?

Mr. David Eaves: I believe it's for anybody.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Anybody in the world?

Mr. David Eaves: Yes. Anybody in the world can go to Data.gov and download a data set.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: I would just go back to the first two rules: indexation, spidering—if I'm inventing a word—and machine readability. Can you give us a tangible idea of what this would provide for the average Canadian who doesn't spend a lot of time on this? In a very tangible sense they sit down at their computer, they want to know something about the way the government operates, spends money, allocates resources, etc. Tell that person how your vision would allow them to do that. Would they start by going to a website, then type a search term in a box, and hit "Enter"? If you don't mind, give a very clear, simplistic version of how this would affect the daily life of a consumer of information interested in looking into the Government of Canada.

Mr. David Eaves: I want to be clear. I don't think that if we start sharing information tomorrow, millions of Canadians are going to show up and start downloading this data. I actually think that would be a terrible metric to use.

The way we need to measure this isn't by the number of people who downloaded a given data set, but by the economic value and by the democratic engagement that it spurs. You might only have a single person who downloads the data set but does something quite interesting with it.

With VanTrash, the example I talked earlier about, the garbage reminder service, the only people who ever downloaded the data set from the city were Luke Closs and Kevin Jones. It was one download, but they created a service that 3,000 people now use and that they derive regular and daily benefit from, because they no longer forget to take the garbage out.

In the U.K., people have taken the budget data and have made it presentable in all sorts of different ways so that people can now look at their budget and understand it for the first time. So you have tens of thousands, if not millions, of Britons who are showing up and looking at their government's budget and understanding how it works for the very first time.

So again, there might have only been a single download, but you have an enormous increase in the number of people who engage and understand how the government works.

There is, however, a longer-term piece that I want you to think about. While today the number of people who will actually download and use this data directly is relatively small, they will have a much, much larger audience. We're entering a world where data and information and computers are becoming central to our lives, and more and more people are going to become literate in using and understanding data and in writing software. The example I always use is that we didn't wait until the whole world could read and then we built a library and said "Come and read". No, we built libraries before 90% of the people in the world knew how to read. We built them because we knew that we had to provide material so people could learn how to read.

Nothing would make me more excited than for there to be a Canadian data portal so that high school students, university students, graduate students, and ordinary citizens would have data sets about their country, about who they are, about their own narratives, that they can use to learn how to become more computer literate and how to become more data literate. This is, I think, the library of the 21st century that we need to be building.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Poilievre.

We're now going to start the second round, five minutes each.

Mr. McCallum.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Thank you.

As an economist, I find this very interesting. As a politician, there's a certain political element that I'd like to ask you about, which I don't think we've really discussed very much, because in an important sense, information is power, and there are lots of kinds of information that governments in general and this government in particular don't want others to get hold of. To give you two examples, the parliamentary budget officer has had a running battle with the Department of Finance for several years, and the government tries to deprive him of information. Under your system, he could get it instantly with a flick of a switch, and the government might not like that. Here's a second example. The opposition accused the government in its infrastructure program of favouring Conservative-held or minister-held ridings. The government denied it. If all the information were freely available instantly, we could click on the switch and prove it, if it were true.

We tend to think this government is particularly secretive, but every government will have some information it would rather keep to itself and not share. So I guess my question to you is how you overcame this issue. How did Australia and the U.K., both of which seem to have made major strides in providing much more open information, overcome this kind of political impediment?

● (1630)

Mr. David Eaves: Sorry, I can't speak to Australia because I haven't seen as much of what they've done with the open data, but I was in London at the announcement when the British government announced that it was going to release all spending data. Again, this is not budget. This is actual spending data, down to the 25,000-pound level.

Hon. John McCallum: By riding? By constituency?

Mr. David Eaves: No, by ministry.

Hon. John McCallum: Oh.

Mr. David Eaves: So any bill any ministry ever paid over 25,000 pounds was going to be made available to the public.

Hon. John McCallum: But not geographically by a subset—

Mr. David Eaves: Not geographically. But you can take that data and look at where that money is being spent, because you see the bills, so you can see where the post office is, and things like that, and you can begin to digest geographically where it ends up.

I remember a Conservative minister stood up and said, “I know that people are going to find things out that we're not happy about, and I also know that it's going to make us better”. That was about it. I'm not trying to pretend that there wasn't.... There was enormous political will. I think the British have the advantage of being in a budget situation where they know they need all the help they can get, so they're willing to try to do something that I think is very innovative in order to try to save themselves hundreds of millions of pounds.

I agree that every government's going to have some incentives to not share information. My hope is that when governments choose not to share this information—forget about the parliamentary budget officer—with ordinary Canadians, they are in fact disrespecting our right to access what our government does. I'm not trying to say that past governments or this government are doing this on purpose. I think what has happened is that things have changed. The technology now exists for us to do radically more, and our governments need to adapt and they need to figure out that the end user of this data is no longer a journalist, no longer a researcher; it's the ordinary citizen.

Hon. John McCallum: So are you saying that we have to call on this government's better nature or sense of altruism?

Mr. David Eaves: I do think we need to call on its better nature, but I think we also need to call on its desire for fiscal responsibility, its desire for economic development, and its desire for democratic engagement.

Hon. John McCallum: On the economic side, Carolyn Bennett mentioned the number six billion to eight billion pounds of benefit in the U.K. Is that correct? What is the nature of that number? If it's that many pounds for the U.K., it might be that many dollars for Canada.

Mr. David Eaves: Yes. I think that number was generated.... I won't say I'm intimately familiar with the methodology that produced that survey, but I believe that was a kind of combination of improved efficiencies within government and new businesses and efficiencies that would be created in the private sector because of better access to data.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: You're creating new companies.

Hon. John McCallum: Thank you very much.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: You're creating new companies in the digital economy.

Mr. David Eaves: Yes.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McCallum.

Ms. Davidson, five minutes, please.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Thanks, Mr. Eaves, for being with us today. Certainly it's been an interesting presentation that you've given to us.

You started out saying that anyone under 30 would probably think our system is broken. When you look around this room, maybe we need to have some younger people sitting at this table too for this particular exercise. I certainly am not an expert in technicalities when it comes to the Internet and to these types of things, but it's certainly been an interesting learning experience.

One thing sort of along the lines that the last questioner was asking was on the economic end of it. You said that it strengthens the economy through better data access. Then you used an example of billions of gallons of oil that can be saved because people are using GPS and are not getting lost any more. How do jurisdictions quantify or identify something like that?

Mr. David Eaves: That's a good question. I don't have a good answer for you in the short term. Can you directly attribute a savings to the release of a given data set? That's going to be a very tough challenge.

What I think you are going to be able to see, over time—and I think again we're very early days—is certain economies that have access to more information about their economy and the communities they serve, and because they have more access to information, they are going to become more efficient and they are going to grow faster.

Data is like the plankton of our ecosystem, of the economy in the 21 century. So if you starve that system of plankton or another system has more of it, they're going to thrive more. I think there will be some very simple examples we'll be able to look at.

There might be some specific ones. When I look at Vancouver, and I look at some of the stuff that's been done, there's a local architecture firm, Bing Thom Architects, that has taken open data from the city's portal and has written a number of reports. It's looked at what rising sea levels will do to the city of Vancouver and the costs it will have on building infrastructure. Those reports are very powerful for city hall staff and for councillors. I don't know how many free consulting services we've received from Bing Thom Architects so far, but I've got to believe it's somewhere north of $100,000 to $200,000. So that's real value that's generated for the city and for the citizens.

Can I quantify that en masse? It would be a very difficult challenge.

● (1635)

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Well, I think it is definitely extremely important that this information become available. Certainly I think the people on this side of the table are supportive of open data and open government.

When we first started talking about this exercise, one of things we started out talking about was proactive disclosure, and then it changed into open government. I think you've indicated there are certainly a lot of differences. Could you elaborate on that a little bit more?

Mr. David Eaves: With open data, we take the information the government is collecting—again, it doesn't have privacy or security implications—and we simply share it with the public, I would argue, as we receive it.

Proactive disclosure, for me, applies less to data and more to information. It's saying "Okay, we've written some reports. We've made an analysis. We have a proposed policy, and we're going to release that before the alloted time we're allowed to keep it secret runs out or in anticipation of a public debate that we think needs to happen." So for me, proactive disclosure is disclosing things in advance of when you need to, or just aggressively disclosing information. I would love to see more proactive disclosure as well. I just want to keep it separate from the open data debate, which I think doesn't have the same constraints on it that open information does.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: When you talk about the open data distribution, is there any issue with the integrity of the information that gets posted? Are people able to do whatever with that information, and is that a concern in any of the jurisdictions that have done it, that some of the integrity is not being maintained?

Mr. David Eaves: The answer is yes. I want to be very clear: On an open data portal, such as the City of Vancouver has...no one can go and change the data the City of Vancouver has.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: So what do you do with it that can be changed?

Mr. David Eaves: They can take the data, and then they can change the data they have on themselves and then share that, but the fidelity of that data is maintained, because anybody who looks at something that's created with it will simply go back to the original and compare them and say "Why did you change these things?"

There's another thing I've noticed. Frequently I get this question from government officials who are worried that people are going to change the data. I'll be honest with you: when I talk to developers and researchers out there, they're not concerned about changing the data; they're actually really concerned about your data being accurate. When a Google map is incorrect because the information the government gave Google isn't correct, or when you have spending projections and someone makes a typo in a spending projection document, people don't get mad at the government, they get mad at the company that created the application or that offers the service. So they want to make sure that it's as accurate as possible.

I think people are much more worried about government's data being accurate—and I think we should be—than they are about people changing the data and doing something with it, because when they do, we'll still be able to check on them.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Davidson.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Thi Lac, you have five minutes.

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thaï Thi Lac (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to begin by wishing everyone here a happy new year.

Sir, thank you for sharing your views with us. They're very interesting.

I'm going to ask you questions on some of the information from the open letter you wrote to us, dated December 8, 2010. I want to focus on the second point you raised. Do you know what I'm talking about?

● (1640)

[*English*]

Mr. David Eaves: I'm trying to remember the full letter. I wrote it, so I feel as though I'll remember it fairly quickly.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thaï Thi Lac: In the second point, you talk about "transform[ing] the Committee into a government 2.0 taskforce—similar to the Australian effort."

However, you say the following: "Frankly, my favourite approach in this space has been the British."

What would you prefer?

[*English*]

Mr. David Eaves: I'd love to see this government take an aggressive position toward open data, to stand up and say "Regardless of what this committee is doing, tomorrow we are going to create an open data portal. We are going to put these data sets up on it, and then when the committee makes its report, we will look at it and adjust our strategy accordingly and take the best of their ideas and incorporate them." I see there is nothing that prevents us from doing that.

My big fear is that we're going to sit around and wait till we have the perfect answer and that we're never going to have a perfect answer. We're going to have good answers. Actually, we already have them, so let's move forward with those today and make them better as we discover more things tomorrow.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thaï Thi Lac: I might have another question in view of your answer.

You say that the British approach is better than the Australian one. Could you give us some examples?

[*English*]

Mr. David Eaves: I think I'm referring to the British example again, where rather than wait for a task force committee to make recommendations, they have chosen to move forward and implement a very aggressive open data strategy without the input from a task force. But then as people have made recommendations, they of course corrected it and adjusted it and made it better.

So my preference is that model, that the government move forward. But short of that, I would love to see this committee look at the task force and see what lessons it can draw from the Australian task force and make itself better and stronger.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thaï Thi Lac: In the second point, the following is stated:

> [...] the Committee should copy the best parts of the Australian taskforce. [...] Rather than non-partisan, I would suggest that a Canadian taskforce should be pan-partisan—which the committee already is.

I would like you to explain to us what you mean by this statement.

[*English*]

Mr. David Eaves: What I'd love to see is if this committee wanted to model itself after the task force, to think about whether it could include non-parliamentarians on it and to find a group of Canadians who are pan-partisan, who are genuinely interested in figuring out how to best share the data the government has and how to make government as open as possible, given the constraints, and to invite them to sit in on the process and to participate.

I think there's an enormous amount of expertise in this country, and it would be sad to me if they weren't leveraged simply because they weren't able to sit on this committee as elected officials but they were at your disposal to be used whenever necessary.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thaï Thi Lac: I want to make sure that I understand your definition of the word “pan-partisan”. My definition is possibly different from yours. I would like you to give me your definition of this term.

[*English*]

Mr. David Eaves: I think you can go one of two ways. You could have people who have made open declarations of their party affiliations. But I think more interesting to me is there are a lot of Canadians out there who really don't identify with any political party but who are deeply interested in their government being as open as possible and being a platform for innovation and improved services. I'd be looking to figure out who those Canadians are. I'm actually pretty sure that if this committee put its head to it, it could identify three to four people who are like that.

Sorry, just as an ironic side note, nobody asked, but the French version of that document you're reading actually went through Google Translate and never was edited after that fact. So even this committee already is using Google Translate to read its documents.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thaï Thi Lac: Okay, thanks.

[*English*]

The Chair: I should correct the last answer, I think. My understanding was that the document was translated by the Library of Parliament.

● (1645)

Mr. David Eaves: Maybe it was. We can investigate more closely.

The Chair: Mr. Siksay, five minutes.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Eaves, I wanted to come back to something. You mentioned that the British had proposed to centralize data in a central organization, a public data corporation you called it. Can you say a little more about that and maybe say how that's different from our Statistics Canada?

Mr. David Eaves: Yes. Statistics Canada only has data that it collects, that it hosts. I think what the British are intending to do is significantly more radical than that, which is to say they want to look at data that any ministry collects and to centralize it and manage it from one agency. That's a much grander vision than what StatsCan does. It's actually a grander vision than what I'm aware of any government doing at the moment, but I do think it has real benefits.

One of the big benefits is that it's going to standardize the way we collect and manage information and data. And the second benefit is it's going to make it much easier to share that data with the public. Again, that's what the Washington, D.C., did. Their IT department began to slowly, over time, through bilateral negotiations, host the data that different departments were collecting and they actually host a huge amount of data now. One of the reasons they were able to share it so quickly was because it was located in one place. They could just flick a switch and start sharing with the public.

Mr. Bill Siksay: So do the British plan on rolling their equivalent of Stats Canada into this?

Mr. David Eaves: I cannot comment. I don't know. My understanding is that this corporation is still just a proposal, it's not actually policy.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Okay.

Now, I know you've also written on your blog, and maybe in other places, about your concern around the long-form census, and how.... Can you say something about how you see that affecting the overall open data project?

Mr. David Eaves: I'm not sure that the long-form.... I mean, I've been quite vocal about the long-form census, but I'm not really sure it falls under the purview of this committee or around the debate around open data.

What I would say is that the information collected by StatsCan is enormously valuable to not just the government but also a huge number of non-profits and companies. We need to be thinking about that data as an asset for making our economy stronger, our social sector stronger, and making our government more effective and more efficient. When we choose to limit the amount of information that we collect, we limit all of those sectors and how effective they can be.

So I think that's something that needs to have some real debate. Mostly, though, whether the long-form census data is included or not, more importantly, I think, we need to think about how we're going to get StatsCan data shared with the public in open formats—for free, because they've already paid for it.

Mr. Bill Siksay: But you would agree that if there's any restriction on the kind of data that's collected by StatsCan, or any lessening of that, that this is an issue around what government data is available to be shared with people and used by—

Mr. David Eaves: Yes. You know, if you apply any licence that restricts the use of data, then you have to expect that people are not going to use that data in the most creative or most innovative way. So there's a penalty that you pay whenever you do that. I just don't understand why you would ever limit the use of a public asset like that, especially one that is completely reusable.

Mr. Bill Siksay: You say that one of the key aspects of this needs to be that the data is provided free to Canadians, to businesses, to use, that there be no charge for that. Does that amount to a subsidy to businesses for using a resource that Canadians have paid for, that Canadians have put together?

Mr. David Eaves: I'd actually argue that right now it's the inverse, that ordinary Canadians are subsidizing corporations. The only reason StatsCan is able to collect this data is that it has access to the citizens' tax base and it can use that to finance the collection of the census and larger data statistics. Then it turns around and sells those to those who can afford it. So right now we have your and my tax dollars paying to collect data that then gets sold and that you and I may not actually be able to afford to be able to buy.

So there are two things here. One, it means that any citizen who has an interesting new business idea now has a barrier to entry that their larger competitors can afford; they simply pay and keep them out. More importantly, it's....

Sorry, did someone just say it's not that expensive?

I think if you're a start-up, every cost is an expensive cost. If you're a non-profit, any dollar that you're spending on StatsCan data is a dollar that you're not spending on housing someone or on figuring out how to deliver a service more efficiently. If you're a city, every dollar you're spending on StatsCan data is money that you're not spending on helping citizens' lives get better.

We can debate whether the cost is relevant or not, but the really disturbing thing about the cost is that almost all academic research data out there shows that the amount of money you raise by charging for data.... The only thing it pays for is the system for charging for data. There's almost no money to be made in charging for data.

So what we really have is a system that simply feeds itself. We're charging for data to pay for people who can charge people for paying for data. We're not actually making a huge amount of money off of this. What we really have is citizens who are subsidizing the wealthier actors in our economy.

The Chair: Thank you, Bill.

● (1650)

Mr. Bill Siksay: I guess I'm done.

The Chair: Ms. Davidson, you wanted a turn?

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Yes, just briefly.

The Chair: Go ahead, then. You have five minutes.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Thank you.

I have a further question about the machine-readable format you were talking about. You were saying that the PDF form that a lot of our government data is available in could be a concern when it comes to machine-readable. Are we looking at huge costs or considerable expenses to redevelop the form in which we now provide this information?

As well, in the letter you sent to us, you said that starting in January the parliamentary website would begin releasing Hansard in XML. Is that a major change, or is that something that's fairly easily done?

Mr. David Eaves: I have two responses to that. First, I was told that Parliament would start releasing Hansard in XML; I actually haven't been to that website in the last couple of days, but as far as I can tell, it still hasn't. That's a little bit of a disappointment for those of us who were looking forward to that.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Wouldn't today be the first day, though?

Mr. David Eaves: Maybe. That's why—

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: I mean, today is the first day that the House has sat—

Mr. David Eaves: I haven't actually been to the website, so if it's happened, I don't want to upset our good friends who I know are working to try to make this happen.

Will there be a cost? I don't want to sit here and say there wouldn't be a cost, because that would be untrue. But here are the two other ways I think you need to be thinking about this. One of these is going to become a little bit larger, so I'll stop if this gets too boring for people.

The first is that at some point you are going to have to upgrade the systems that are collecting this data anyways. If you're not collecting this data in a format that can be shared, then you're restricting use just within the government.

One of the things I like about open data portals is that once you make the data available to me, you've made the data functionally available to anybody, no matter where they are, whether they're in government, whether they're in the non-profit or whether they're in the for-profit sector. So that in itself should drive some efficiencies. It should help cover any cost there is in that transition. But eventually you're going to have to make that expense anyway. At some point you are going to replace the system and you're going to have to spend that money.

So maybe we don't get all the data tomorrow, but we have a plan in place so that as we transition systems we also make sure they can always export the data in a machine-readable format that the public can use.

But the second part of this—and the one that I think is more interesting from a government expenditure perspective—is that once you have data in open formats, you really change the dynamic of the relationship that you have with a lot of IT vendors. Many IT vendors purposely create data in formats that are very, very closed—in fact so closed that they are the only company that knows how to use that data and can write software for that data. As a result, the Government of Canada is now stuck using that vendor until that vendor goes out of business or until it decides it's going to make a very painful transition out of that kind of data format and data structure.

One of the really powerful opportunities around open data is that it will open up the marketplace for competition in the IT sector in government. Other players now will be able to look and say, "Wow, if that's the data that you're collecting, we could actually collect that data for you using a system that would be much cheaper and we can share with the public in these ways that are much more interesting."

So I think we can begin to change our relationship with the vendors and try to shrink some of the enormous contracts that we give out in the IT space.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Davidson.

We're going to conclude with Mr. McCallum.

Hon. John McCallum: Thank you.

On Australia and the U.K., you did make a recommendation on process in the sense of expanding this committee to include some experts. But I'm interested in the substance of what they've done in Australia or the U.K. You know the Canadian system of the degree to which information is available and not available to the public. So in what ways have either Australia or the U.K. changed their system to be more information friendly than Canada is today?

Mr. David Eaves: Both governments have launched open data portals. So there is data.gov.uk, which has tens of thousands of data sets on it, everything from real spending data to information about all of the local councils. They have a connection with the local councils, and all the budgets for local councils I believe are supposed to be going up there soon as well.

● (1655)

Hon. John McCallum: So that's right now?

Mr. David Eaves: That site I believe is almost two years old.

Hon. John McCallum: Okay.

Mr. David Eaves: The Australian site is a little bit newer and doesn't have quite as much data, but it has been launched.

And they've also tackled the licensing regime around data. So here you have parliamentary democracies like ours that have crown copyright, and they've worked very hard to rethink what the licences are for the information and for the data they release.

For example, the Australians, when they released their most recent budget, I believe released it under our creative commons licence—not a copyright licence—so people could use the information in the budget more openly and do whatever they wanted with it. I thought that was really interesting and innovative.

And the British I think are working on a whole new licensing regime for everything they publish, which is very, very liberal. It allows for basically any type of reuse.

Hon. John McCallum: Well, I remember the U.S. too.... When we were comparing Canadian and U.S. fiscal stimulus plans, one could go to a U.S. website and get very detailed information that certainly did not exist in Canada.

So would you say Australia, the U.K., and the U.S. are way ahead of us right now?

Mr. David Eaves: Yes. We are—

Hon. John McCallum: Including the U.S.?

Mr. David Eaves: Yes. We are falling further and further behind, and I would say significantly behind, because the moment you decide to do this, there's a runway that you have to go down in order to even just get to the place where you can launch.

I think the British site is now two years old. The Americans' site is definitely two years old. It's not like we are two years behind them; we need to be thinking more along the lines that we are four years behind them.

Hon. John McCallum: Okay.

So what about the open information? You've talked about portals containing data for those three countries. What about comparing their access to information with ours?

Mr. David Eaves: I won't claim to know the American and the British access to information systems as well as I could to be able to really make a strong comparison. All I know is that—

Hon. John McCallum: Australia?

Mr. David Eaves: Nor the Australian. All I will say is that the amount of time that one has to wait for an access to information request to be completed in Canada is so long that I would argue the system is broken and we need to radically rethink how we're doing this. This is one of the reasons why I think open data is interesting. When you look at the U.S., there has been some evidence that open data portals have actually reduced the number of what we would call ATIP requests, therefore taking some of the pressure off that system.

Hon. John McCallum: Thank you.

Carolyn.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: David, I understand that in the mid-eighties they brought in cost recovery at Stats Canada, but I understand that they don't really make a lot of money from it. Is it $6 million or something like that?

Mr. David Eaves: It's very hard to pin down how much money Stats Canada actually makes from the data it sells on its website.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Selling an intricate analysis for a company, we think they should pay for that—

Mr. David Eaves: Absolutely.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: But the real data, if it was up and free, you're saying that would really contribute to our economy.

Mr. David Eaves: Right. My understanding is that Stats Canada makes the bulk of its money from very customized surveys for specific players, or in writing reports for the government. The raw data itself does not generate a significant amount of revenue for them. So really it's just an impediment to people in other sectors making use of it in interesting ways.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: At the Public Health Agency, obviously the FCM and the municipalities were pretty upset at having to pay for data, as municipal governments, but we were able to provide the map generator project, where they could actually at least put that data in and get maps out of it, in terms of GIS mapping of social determinants of health and all those sorts of things. That's just an example of all the things you could do as government to make it easy for people to see the data, or whatever we used to say—if a picture is worth a thousand words, a map is worth a thousand pictures.

Mr. David Eaves: Right.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: There's a whole bunch of ways whereby government could actually be helping citizens understand how their money is being spent, and the results they're getting from it.

Mr. David Eaves: And the innovative services that we could be rolling out.

One of the things that struck me—and maybe they're doing this, but from what I could tell from their website, they're not—is I believe it's Agriculture Canada that has a widget that shows you products that have been recalled, and you can put this in your blog or you can go to their website and look at it. I've got to be honest with you: I can't really think of anybody who's going to Agriculture Canada's website to check to see what products have been recalled. People just don't do that, and nobody's even going to be putting a widget in their blog so that you can keep up to date.

Much more interesting to me would be if that data were available through—I don't want to get too technical—something we call an API, so that people can go and ping that database and find out what actually has been recalled. If you did that, then supermarkets could build it into their systems. So if somebody accidentally stocks something, the moment it gets barcoded, it would ring because the product has been recalled. People now with their iPhones can actually use the camera to scan a barcode to find out how much something costs and where it's cheaper. You could get a message right then saying the product has been recalled.

So you could build it into all these systems and we could begin to talk about the reduction in health care costs that might reveal, and the efficiencies in distribution so goods actually just get dumped the moment they're there, they don't get shipped all over the place and then we discover that they're actually going to get recalled.

So here is a system where the federal government has data that is enormously interesting to the public and enormously interesting to industry, and yet shares it in this very closed way, where you can only use it on their terms. If they just had an API into it, then all of a sudden we could do much more interesting things.

● (1700)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Dr. Bennett.

That concludes the final round of questioning, Mr. Eaves. On behalf of the committee, I want to thank you for your appearance here today. Your testimony was very interesting and very informative. You've given us a lot of food for thought.

We have another committee item we have to deal with before we leave, but do you have any closing comments or remarks you want to leave the committee with?

Mr. David Eaves: Mostly I would say that while I understand that this topic appears rather technical, there is a growing group of people, a kind of movement out there who are deeply interested in the information data that government has, and the businesses that can be built around it, the way that democratic engagement can be done with it. I think it's a loud and growing group. So I urge this committee to think very carefully about its recommendations and try to be as aggressive as possible, because they will not stop in their demands.

Most importantly, I want to make the committee know that I am available any time they want, if they have further questions or need advice or help. I will make myself available at a moment's notice.

The Chair: Well, thank you for your wisdom.

Mr. David Eaves: Thank you.

The Chair: Okay, we're going to move right ahead to dealing with the report of the steering committee held earlier today. That document has been circulated. The steering committee had a fairly extensive agenda today. I'll just highlight the main items for the benefit of the committee. There are five.

First, we have the witness schedule for open government, or open data. That witness list has been circulated to all members of the committee.

Second, this committee previously consented to an e-consultation regarding the open government study, and the Library of Parliament was instructed to go to the market and invite bids for it. It did, and there were no bids received. There were about 20 companies that downloaded our RFP, but there were only three legitimate companies that would be in this type of business. The steering committee is recommending that we go back to these three bidders, meet with all of them, and come back with one recommendation.

Third, we need the clerk to draft a letter on behalf of the committee to the government, encouraging it to move forward with the open government initiative. Further, we need the committee to write a second letter to the Speaker of the House recommending that the Board of Internal Economy study the possibility of an open Parliament initiative. This is in line with some of the issues that Mr. Eaves raised this afternoon: we ourselves should be moving on some of these issues faster than we are right now.

Fourth, the steering committee felt it wise that the clerk draft a letter for further review by the steering committee to the Speaker of the House recommending that the Board of Internal Economy study the possibility of additional resources, or additional capacity, for future e-consultation processes. We think this is something that various House committees will be doing more of in the future, and we believe the capacity should be there within Parliament.

Lastly, we received an order of reference regarding the five-year review of the Lobbying Act, and we would tentatively start that on March 23, 2011.

That is a summary of the minutes of the steering committee. The chair would entertain a motion for their approval.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: So moved.

The Chair: Mr. Calandra, you have a point you want to raise?

● (1705)

Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC): Yes. I noticed that the motion with respect to CBC is not scheduled until March 21, and I can only imagine how excited CBC is to come before the committee and start moving on this. I'm wondering if there's an opportunity for us to push that forward and perhaps even schedule it sometime within the next couple of weeks. March 21 is a heck of a long time, and it's something that's important to me. I've received a lot of feedback on this, and I'd like to start on it as soon as possible.

The Chair: I'll speak to that, and then I'll ask the clerk if he has anything to add. We tried to get it on earlier and there was a lot of negotiation on the matter. They weren't as excited as perhaps you suggested. But anyway, they are coming on March 21. We tried different dates prior to that, but the CBC and the Information Commissioner weren't available on a lot of those dates. The earliest date that we could accommodate both of them was March 21.

Mr. Paul Calandra: Can you elaborate on the negotiation? Who are we negotiating with? I think we passed a motion and I'm not sure who we'd be negotiating with.

The Chair: I'll take you through what we generally do. First of all, we reflect on people having certain schedules, but we make sure they understand that we want them to come. We get that push-back from all the departments, too. We want a certain person and they'll send a junior person. There's always that push-back from departments and agencies. In this case, we wanted both individuals here. We thought it was important that both the Information Commissioner and the senior executive of CBC be present for this hearing. We pushed for that. That was our premise, and this was the real date. It wasn't only the CBC—it was also the Information Commissioner who wasn't available on a lot of the dates.

Do you have anything to add, Chad?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Chad Mariage): No, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Paul Calandra: Could I then also add, if we're talking about March 21, I just want it on the record that I'd like this to be brought forward sooner than March 21. This is of such importance, and I would hope that the president of the CBC would find a little time in his schedule to accommodate parliamentarians, who are providing over $1 billion to the CBC. I would ask the clerk to actually inquire again about his ability to come and meet with parliamentarians.

I know they report on issues of accountability quite aggressively and with some thirst, so I can only imagine that when you're talking about their accountability and their ability to report to Canadians how their money is being spent, they would be very excited to come here and explain to Canadians how that is spent. So I'm wondering if you could direct the clerk for me, Mr. Chair—I know you've done a lot of work on this—to inquire again about the availability of CBC personnel. Also, one meeting I don't think will satisfy what I want to get out of this. We're going to need a bit more time with that.

When you approached the CBC, did they give you any additional dates on which he was available? Or was it just that one date that he was available? Can we start with other individuals within the CBC? What other options do we have?

March 21 is a long time away. We passed this motion before Christmas, and you're talking three months before we move down the road of even opening this up. And by this schedule, you've only given it one day. When you approached the president, how many days did he give you, opportunities, or was that the only day? Was he eager and excited to come on that one day? When you say “negotiation”, was this...?

● (1710)

The Clerk: From my perspective, Mr. Chair, we offered February 16 as the initial day. Unfortunately, the president of the CBC, at that point, was previously engaged at another event that he'd committed to long ago. In talking with the chair after, we proposed another day, at which point they informed us that unfortunately the legal counsel wasn't available at the time.

So, again, through the chair, communicating with the CBC, we were able to come to March 21 as a date that suited them. This suited the Information Commissioner's office as well.

That's the way I proceeded, as soon as I could find a date that suited both of them. Without any other direction from the committee, that's the way the chair and I proceeded to schedule the witnesses.

Mr. Paul Calandra: I appreciate that, and I know you've worked hard on it.

I would implore the chair, then, that if he and the clerk could try again to impress upon the CBC that it's a date that's convenient for parliamentarians and for the people of Canada, not the president's schedule or the legal counsel's schedule....

It's $1 billion that we're talking about here, and there are a lot of questions that have been raised. I would think they would be a little bit more accommodating when Parliament has asked them to come before the committee. Especially in light of the fact that they've certainly shown that enthusiasm when it comes to how parliamentarians do their job, I would think they would take that same enthusiasm to appear here as soon as possible.

March 21, for me, is completely unacceptable. I would hope that we would find some space, especially when you're talking about $1 billion and especially when you're talking about the type of feedback I've received since then. I think they have to appear here before then.

I would implore you, Mr. Chair, to try again to impress upon them how important it is that they actually come here and do that, and also perhaps entertain some additional witnesses that I would like to bring forward. I would like us to consider even more days than the one that we've brought.

The Chair: We can explore that, Mr. Calandra. It probably won't change, but we'll certainly go back to the.... There are two or three issues. Not only are there the president and the chief executive officer of CBC, but there is also the Information Commissioner. The committee felt that it is important to have both of them there.

Secondly, we are booked with confirmed witnesses for the next couple of weeks, at least. We can certainly go back and explore that and see if there is any possible earlier date, and we'll get back to you on that point. I should say that this issue arises not only with CBC, but it arises with most other departments too. We have to accommodate. We do it within reason, and there is invariably push-back to come to any parliamentary committee.

When I was on the public accounts committee, we always insisted on the deputy minister. Well, the deputy minister invariably didn't want to come, so we had to push that. A lot of times we used the s-word, “summons,” and that got their attention finally. They got used to that, and then they eventually came. There is a balance there that we try to reach.

Some of these officers of Parliament are busy too, but that leads to another issue I have some concerns with. They are officers of Parliament—they're accountable to Parliament, they're responsible to Parliament, and they should be able to appear before Parliament in a reasonably.... We can't demand that they come next Wednesday or next Thursday, but if we give them two dates within a three-week period, they should be prepared to come.

We'll go back to that; we'll explore that.

Mr. Albrecht, do you have comment on this?

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I certainly concur with my colleague's sentiments regarding CBC, both on the timing of requesting that they appear earlier and on the number of sessions we may need.

I'd like to just speak to items 2 and 4 of the report as they relate to the e-consultation, on the process. I have two concerns that actually were heightened by the witness's remarks today in terms of the length of time and this potential slowing down of the process.

I see item 2 as adding additional time to the process. It's made worse by the fact that we're potentially investing a lot of dollars in a consultation process that, with the technology we have available to us today, should be able to be done for far less, whether it's a website that we create or a Facebook account. We talked about alternatives earlier. I just don't want to see us as a committee authorize hundreds of thousands of dollars for an e-consultation process that will, first of all, slow down the process, and cost a lot money.

I'm not convinced that we need to do a lot of additional research. We have many governments that have already implemented this system. I know that we need some Canadian-specific input, and we want to welcome that; we don't want to shut the door on that. But I don't think we need to reinvent the wheel and go through this whole process again, adding time and an inordinate amount of cost.

I'm concerned on those two points, Mr. Chair.

● (1715)

The Chair: Ms. Bennett wants to speak, but I think your point.... It's a good point, Mr. Albrecht, but one of the points you did make—and this is covered in item 4—is that the House itself should have more capacity to do this type of initiative, rather than go to the external marketplace. This is the point we're raising in item 4.

Ms. Bennett, do you have a comment on that?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I think I've said before that for a study on open government it's very important that we have the capacity to go to Canadians who want the data, and particularly the people in the David Eaves cohort who are eagerly anticipating it. In order for us to get it right we need to hear from them so we can write the best possible report reflecting the needs of Canadians. A website just doesn't do that.

There is a methodology that works, and I think it's imperative that Canada and our Parliament set a standard for how we do a modern version of consulting Canadians, rather than just the traditional way of bringing witnesses before this committee. We did one in 2002. It was extremely effective, with a 90% success rate in terms of people saying they would do it again because they knew they'd been heard. I think we've almost lost a decade in being able to get Parliament relevant to Canadians.

So I don't think we can settle for less. We need to do a proper piece of work in this, consulting with Canadians. It will be a pilot and an experiment. As the fourth item shows, we hope to eventually be able to bring that capacity within the House of Commons and Library of Parliament, as far as the content for the sites.

I would ask any of you to look at the study we did on the future of CPP disability at the disability subcommittee of the HRSD committee, as well as Michael Kirby's excellent report on mental health. Kirby's report and our report ended up as good as they were because we found interesting, exciting people with real value-added, who we never would have met if it hadn't been for this e-consultation.

The Chair: I should also point that this is just the next step in the process. Whatever comes from the meetings will come back to the committee. This is not an authorization to spend money.

Okay, we will vote on the minutes as circulated.

(Motion agreed to) [See *Minutes of Proceedings*]

The Chair: Seeing nothing further to come before the committee, I will adjourn the meeting.

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