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Chair

The Honourable Shawn Murphy

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● (1530)

[*English*]

The Chair (Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.)): I will now call the meeting to order.

On behalf of all members of the committee, I want to welcome our witnesses here today.

This meeting is in continuance of our ongoing study into open government, and the committee is very pleased to have three witnesses with us today.

The first witness is Mr. David Hume. Mr. Hume is the executive director of citizen engagement for the British Columbia provincial government. However, I should point out that he's appearing today as an individual in his own right.

The second witness is Mr. David Wallace. Mr. Wallace is the chief information officer for the City of Toronto. As we all know, the City of Toronto has been doing some interesting things on open government.

Mr. Wallace is not in his seat, as you can see. We understand that his flight has been delayed, so hopefully he will be joining us in the session.

The third and final witness is Mr. Vincent Gogolek. Mr. Gogolek is the executive director of the British Columbia Freedom of Information and Privacy Association.

Again, welcome.

We're going to start with opening remarks from all three individuals. Perhaps we'll start with you first, Mr. Hume.

Mr. David Hume (As an Individual): Thank you very much.

The Chair: Just before you start, Mr. Hume, I want to point out to the members of the committee that Mr. Wallace, whom I have already introduced, has arrived.

Welcome, Mr. Wallace.

Mr. Hume.

Mr. David Hume: Thank you very much to the committee for having me. It's a great chance, actually, to be of service today, so I hope my remarks to you are helpful.

In my day job, I'm a public servant with the British Columbia public service, as the chair mentioned. My focus there is on citizen engagement in policy development and service improvement. But I would like to make clear to the committee that while my remarks are certainly shaped by that experience, today I am on my own time. I took some vacation to come out, and I'm speaking for myself, so the views expressed here are my own and do not reflect the views of British Columbia.

With that disclaimer, let me briefly lay out what I'd like to cover today.

First is why open government matters, not just as a democratic principle but as a strategy of public management; an example of how open strategies, based on open government approaches, can help solve public problems in new ways; the importance of thinking beyond provision of data and information to working to engage people with data and information; and a short word about the requirements of political leadership around open government.

One thing we need to recognize is that the skills of governing in the 21st century are very different from those needed in the 20th century. We face two significant and basically unavoidable problems in government in Canada, as does the rest of the world: we are mostly broke, and our demographics dictate that our public sector workforce is likely to be shrinking dramatically very soon. So if we have little money and very few people, how are we going to get good things done for the country?

My basic answer to that question is that governments will need to learn to collaborate. Whereas before they could afford to be top down—“we think it, we decide it, we do it” kinds of organizations—today governments find themselves grappling with highly complex issues that they cannot solve alone. Challenges such as poverty and climate change cannot be legislated out of existence; nor can healthy communities and safe streets simply be created, as much as we want them. Instead, these problems require coordinated and collaborative action from many actors, including individuals, for us to make progress.

This theme has lately been taken up by political leadership in the U.S. and the U.K. One version of this theme is President Obama's campaign tagline, “Yes we can”. Another version has come from Prime Minister David Cameron of the United Kingdom, who said during the launch of his campaign:

> We can deal with our debts. We can mend our broken society. We can restore faith in our shattered political system. But only if millions of people are fired up and inspired to play a part in [their]...future.

Taken in this context, open government, and particularly open data, becomes more than a discussion about transparency and democracy. It can be seen as a strategy to empower the public to collaborate with government and with one another to understand and accomplish goals. It's about effectiveness as much as it is about principle.

I recognize that this is a broad statement, and some folks may think it's a bit of a wild claim, but my recent experience demonstrates that such an approach is possible.

A project that I was involved with in my work in B.C., called Apps for Climate Action, was a contest for web and software developers to take freely available government data and apply their ingenuity to creating web and mobile applications that help people understand and deal with the impacts of climate change. The contest produced 16 qualified entries, some of which I would say were frankly brilliant. And the contest helped B.C.'s Climate Action Secretariat make the most of new technology, create media interest, and reach out to a whole new demographic of people to inspire them to get busy around taking action on climate.

The important thing I want to point out is that while it was coordinated by the provincial government, the contest was sponsored by businesses and not-for-profits that had an interest in open data and climate action. The $40,000 in cash and prizes that we raised for the contest entrants came from sponsors. We also received “in kind” contributions from sponsors. For example, the contest website was developed by a small web company based in Vancouver, contest entrants had access to usability experts from a Vancouver firm to help make their apps more user-friendly, the Vancouver Aquarium hosted the awards ceremony, and David Eaves, who spoke to you earlier this week, also donated his time and advice.

We made the sponsorships work not by doing a classic procurement whereby government commissions specific solutions to specific problems. Instead, B.C. issued an opportunity notice that described the problem we were trying to solve, signalled the kinds of resources we were looking for to help us, and then invited those who were interested in helping us achieve the goal to apply. Basically, we were open to working with anyone who wanted to work with us, and the response was really excellent and significant. Really, what we wound up with were groups that were passionate about climate action and were prepared to meaningfully commit their resources, with us at the province, to help create a great contest.

● (1535)

As I hope is clear, the result of being open—this is connecting back to open government—to other ideas and resources meant the provincial government could accomplish far more than it ever could accomplish on its own.

There have been a series of open, data-based apps contests around the world, and they have their strengths and weaknesses. Many have been far better structured and have enjoyed more success than the one I was involved with. I commend Apps for Ottawa and Apps for Edmonton, which were two recent contests in Canada, as examples of how open data can be used to engage the public. Those were both, I think, wild successes.

But for me the lesson of the contest was how effective data-driven collaboration can be and how many resources are out there for governments to leverage, provided they know how to ask.

I spent a lot of time at public events promoting the contest, showing people data, brainstorming with programmers and non-programmers, looking for patterns that could spark a prize-winning idea. The conversations with members of the public were amazing. There was passion, positivity, focus, creativity, and analysis. There was a true creative ethos, and participants were looking to themselves to take the next steps on the part of the problem that meant the most to them. They weren't waiting for government to offer solutions; they were looking to create and implement their own. It was an awesome citizenship, let me tell you, and there is a lot of it out there.

This brings me to the gap that I see in many open government strategies, particularly around open data. It's not enough to simply publish data or information. Work needs to be done to focus people on it, build community around ideas and analysis, see how it applies to real problems, and set the norms of responsible use of this valuable public resource. Otherwise, the data may not meet its full potential.

In my view, this is the new definition and challenge of public policy work for public servants: to find ways to benefit from the insight and expertise of those outside government's walls prepared to work on it together in a shared agenda, because, returning to the theme of demographics and finances, we're going to need those people in the very near future.

We're seeing early signals of this approach internationally. The U. S., for example, has appointed what's called an open data evangelist to reach out to communities, schools, educational institutions, and others. It is building partnerships with educational institutions to build more capacity for data literacy in the United States.

New Zealand is integrating open data into its public consultations, particularly around technical subjects, to encourage a common basis of analysis for those who provide submissions.

While I can't authoritatively say how well these experiments are working, I do know that they are important. Should you recommend open data to the government, I believe you should also recommend that resources to encourage engagement with the public come along with it.

Since this is a political venue, I want to say one quick thing about the importance of matching open government and political leadership in Canada. I'm hopeful that our leaders, you, begin to see the power and possibilities of using mechanisms of open government to collaborate more deeply with the public; that instead of simply offering solutions to win votes, political leaders can see how effective and necessary asking the right questions is to bring the right people together so that lasting solutions to the big problems that challenge us—health care, climate change, to name two—can be meaningfully addressed.

This means that our leaders challenge groups and individuals to take responsibility for problems and commit their own resources to solving them. It also means that all concerned are accountable for delivering their piece of the puzzle. Government has a part, but isn't necessarily on the hook for delivering the whole.

Open government, and in particular open data, offers a way of working towards this possibility because of the collaborative capacity it creates. Open data can become a platform for collaboration between government and the public, and I hope we as a country can seize it.

As the committee continues its work, I'm looking forward to seeing how you draw on the remarkable reservoir of Canadian expertise in thinking about governance and public engagement. Many of the ideas you've heard from me are inspired by people like Don Lenihan of the Public Policy Forum and Thomas Homer-Dixon of the University of Waterloo. I brought a list of other folks whom I can refer you to if you're interested, and we can get into the conversation.

In particular I would like to recommend colleagues in British Columbia to speak to you about British Columbia's Government 2.0 plan, which includes references to open data and open information. In particular, the deputy minister of the Ministry of Citizens' Services, Kim Henderson, and Allan Seckel, the head of the British Columbia public service, would be excellent spokespeople for the provincial government's direction in this area.

● (1540)

With that, I'll thank you very much. I'd like to conclude my remarks.

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

We're now going to go to Mr. Wallace.

Mr. Wallace, your opening comments.

Mr. David Wallace (Chief Information Officer, Information and Technology, City of Toronto): Good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity for speaking with you today. I'm very much looking forward to the discussion this afternoon.

I believe you received the brief that I sent forward, so I'm just going to centre on some select slides to emphasize the messaging and to actually build on what David has been talking about.

I think the key thing, from a municipal perspective, is that as the government closest to the people, we're in a lot of interactions with them, and we're seeing a lot of requirements and demands for opening up government, for making it more transparent, and basically for being able to track how we're doing from a performance perspective and making sure they have a voice in their local government. I believe that's potentially across all governments. We're seeing that right across Canada, around the world, as David was saying, and also right up through to the federal government in terms of some of our discussions, such as with Natural Resources Canada and some other very forward-thinking areas.

What we believe in our space is that in this local government, where we're the closest to the people, we're starting to see this very large transformation happen, and it's starting to gain momentum.

I'm going to select a few slides here to focus in on some of the work we've done and to hopefully put some information out there to get you to ask some questions and drill in further.

I'm partnering with my city clerk, Ulli Watkiss, who is the information lead in our city—as in most municipalities—and we're looking at it from both an information management and an IT perspective. We also work with the divisions who are the program deliverers.

In terms of the presentation material I have for you, the introduction introduces some of the challenges and some of the reasons why there's this new culture of open government that we see, open government as the default, which is really “that's the starting point” and we go from there.

I'd like to direct you to page 4, where you see the concept of “Toronto at your Service”. This is when Mayor Rob Ford, who was recently elected, came to power. He came to the first council meeting and laid out four specific priorities. The first one was to improve customer service, the second to make city hall more transparent and more accountable, the third to reduce the size of government and the cost of government, and the fourth to improve transportation.

Well, even the last one can benefit from open data. In fact, all of them can be done, improving customer service and efficiencies, because, again, the data is out there, everything from better scheduling from the TTC, when the next bus is coming—and we've had apps built on that data—right through to better customer online services to participating in enabled e-government. In all ways, open government and open data are enhancing what the mayor is aiming at in terms of priorities.

The next slides talk a little about some of the growth in this area and the number of transactions that show the web as an increasingly preferred channel. The telephone still is the top one, but very rapidly the gap is closing so that the web is becoming a very preferred channel. That's also indicating that 98% of Canadians have some type of Internet access, which means, again, that open data online can be very accessible.

I want to define open government and open data because I think there are so many different definitions. And it was included in your package, but I want to emphasize that it's more than just the data. It's this concept of open interaction and engagement, and civic engagement, and getting people to make deputations and being involved, whether it's online or in person, and then sharing that experience with others and benefiting from leveraging the unique decision-making capability of that wider space.

I think that's really important, because at the end of the day, what we see at the local level is that open government and open data increase the trust in government, and confidence, in particular in their most local government and the one they have the most dealings with. But we think in all governments that's the case.

On the next page you'll see that we have a system called the Toronto meeting management information system. Now this is a really important system, because if you go, and the link is there, you can see that everything about the city government is online—all the agendas, all of the reports, everything is there—and also the data about it. I think there are links in here that you can explore that with.

One of the elements about this in our strategy is the basis of both proactive and routine disclosure. Proactive is where we put the data or the information online, and routine disclosure is where we can quickly get the information there in terms of a normal request. This has reduced our freedom of information requests by half; therefore, the cost of government goes down, people's responsiveness to the information goes up, and again, trust goes up and improves consultation.

● (1545)

We've also been talking to Dr. Ann Cavoukian, who I believe is either coming or has been here. She talks a lot about privacy by design. Designing it in a system like this ensures that people have access to their government.

We also support it with checklists, information, and advice, both from the city clerks on a policy perspective and from ourselves and IT from a technology perspective.

The next few slides talk about our election system and some of our key developments online, in terms of just shooting through the roof in terms of access to online services.

In slide 11 we talk about the value chain of open data. Open data requires work, but it is work based on what you do every day. It doesn't add to your tasks or add extra resources. We believe it's part of what we do every day. What I mean by that is we have systems there to help us with our professional program delivery. We have information systems there to help with the delivery of government process and to improve the citizen's situation.

We live by three basic principles. We provide data that already exists; we don't go out and create new data just for the sake of opening up data. This is just part of what we do every day, and we put it up on the web. We offer both raw and aggregate data. And most importantly, we put it on a refresh basis and put the metadata or context around it so people know what the data means.

We also need to make sure of the source—that we can actually share it, that the right format is there, and that the proper governance is in place. You can see that we have lots of governance, but that is to make sure the right data is there and it is truly part of our strategic directions.

This value chain has been ongoing since 2009. It has been a very good process and has worked very well. We've had a lot of good response from the community.

On the next page you can see what we launched. I think you've heard of Mark Surman of Mozilla, the Firefox provider. He challenged the City of Toronto in 2008 to think like the web, look to the web, to look to people out there, look for help—government doesn't have to do it all itself—open up “crowdsource” and ask for help to sponsor the development of further uses of open data.

In that light, a community site was developed at the same time we launched this, called datato.org, or data Toronto. This was created by community people on their own time. It also spawned dataott.org, which is data Ottawa. Again, it involved community players putting the demand side, or part of the input, saying, “Here's data we're interested in. What do you think?” We've been working with them on other points of interest to get the data out on the web. That's been very helpful.

The next slide shows you a breakdown of the most popular data sites and downloads. Again, the critical success factors for open data are that it's relevant data, regularly refreshed, and in the proper context. Otherwise you don't know what you're getting. In the earlier uses of open data sites, part of the problem was data getting stale, and people didn't know what the data really stood for.

The other thing we do is open up and work with the Web 2.0 or Gov 2.0 perspective, saying, “What do you think of what we're doing?” We ask through Twitter and different means on our website and processes. We've had lots of different comments, which are included. Some of the feeds from Twitter are there.

We've also seen some great results. There are some application examples included in the slide presentation. One of the most interesting ones was around someone who created an iPhone app, so when you're walking to the bus stop you already know when your bus is going to get there. That's pretty exciting. There are other ones, like DineSafe, to make sure the restaurant you're going to is good.

The other side of it, just like in Ottawa, is 311. We have the largest in Canada and the second-largest in North America. With 311 you think of the telephone, but it also has a lot of self-service features now on the web. We're opening up the knowledge we capture and advice we give out to citizens. We put that up online so you can self-service that. We're also going to be putting up the request data very soon on our open data site.

We had over a million calls in the first year, and it just keeps building in popularity. It's a great connector out to the populace, as it is here in Ottawa.

● (1550)

You'll see in the presentation, again on the next slide, some of the feeds that come in, because through Twitter they also track how things are going.

The other thing I'd like to focus on—and again, the next few slides show some of what our web is doing—is next-generation open data. Just putting open data up there in raw form, in machine readable form, is very helpful. As David was saying, there are contests and different ways you can get developers to develop new and interesting applications, but not everyone is a developer. Not everyone has the capabilities to develop applications, or perhaps even wants to, but everyone does want to know about their city or their government and what's going on.

There is something now called a data blog. That means you have a variety of different data types, and if you want to look at a spreadsheet or a visualization of data or raw data that you want to download and develop an application with, those would all be available on the website. New York City has done this, and we're looking to do this for our 311. I know it's a little bit unclear on the slide there, but there are different examples there about visualization. We also want to get our budget data up there with a navigator, because budget data is some of the most complex data. We've actually been working with the open community through a "hackathon", which happened in December, through which people are building a navigator application so they can actually work through our budget data. That's going to get budget data out to the public more quickly, which is going to help in the debate around our rapidly changing budget situation.

With the next slide, I want to just finish up with what I mean by a transformation journey. This takes time, but it isn't a sequence of events. It's many things happening at different maturity levels at the same time. It's really understanding the citizens' needs, working with them, understanding, keeping the pulse on them, bringing the government close, anytime, anywhere, to people, and ensuring that you're continually listening and building their confidence by offering out more and more about the government through open data and open government.

You've heard from Chris Moore, I believe, and I believe Guy Michaud is coming. We've also been working with Vancouver through something called G4. If you're interested, we can share the recent report. The cover is shown in your presentation there. It's fairly deep, but it has a lot of good information. If you're interested, we can certainly share that with you. The key recommendations are noted on the slide speaking notes there, and these really focus in on what different municipalities can do in opening up their data even more. We believe there are some common areas of focus, such as licensing formats and sharing our experiences.

To conclude my speaking points, I will say that change will just continue to happen. Certainly it's happening in the City of Toronto, and I know it's happening here in Ottawa and at the provincial governments too. The challenges are not going to stop. They're going to continue to evolve. We believe by working through new thinking and by reaching out and working with the public itself and other levels of government within these important frameworks, we can make government better and more open and in fact more responsive.

Thank you very much. Those are my remarks.

● (1555)

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

We're going to hear from Mr. Vincent Gogolek right now.

Go ahead, please, Mr. Gogolek.

Mr. Vincent Gogolek (Executive Director, BC Freedom of Information and Privacy Association): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, members of the committee, for inviting us. I presume to provide a somewhat cautionary note amidst all the optimism.

We do applaud the committee for taking up the cause of open government, although we note that the very first episode of the BBC television series, *Yes Minister* was entitled "Open Government", and it featured this exchange between the two lead characters, Bernard Woolley and Sir Humphrey Appleby, whose equivalent would be deputy minister:

> Bernard Woolley: "But surely the citizens of a democracy have a right to know."
>
> Sir Humphrey Appleby: "No. They have a right to be ignorant. Knowledge only means complicity in guilt: ignorance has a certain dignity."

If Canadians and their elected representatives really do wish to have open government, it will be vital to keep the Sir Humphrey Applebys of this world away from the task of creating it. They will want to preserve the citizens' dignity at all costs.

FIPA supports the increasing push for routine electronic disclosure of information by governments and public bodies. Public debate and public policy development can also be helped by making more and better information available to everyone. What has come to be known as “open government”, the enhanced availability of data to the public by electronic means—

The Chair: Mr. Gogolek, can I interrupt just for a second? I think the translators may be having a little difficulty keeping up, so if you could just slow it down perhaps by about 20% or 30%, that would be great.

Mr. Vincent Gogolek: Ah. Okay.

What has come to be known as “open government”—the enhanced availability of data to the public through electronic means—will hopefully allow anyone interested in a subject area to be able to do better research, provide better input to public consultations, and improve their representations to government as a result.

This is a good thing, but it is not the only thing. And it does not mean that bringing in electronic open government will bring about a truly open government.

I've set out three ways that government information becomes public. I'll just skip through them quickly.

Because most, if not all, records now exist in electronic form, much more government information should be available on government websites. The access to information review task force report in 2001 set out a number of recommendations for improvement for the release of information. Recently a number of governments have gone down this road. The U.S., the U.K., Australia, and a number of sub-national governments, many of them municipalities, have undertaken this challenge.

There is no insurmountable challenge preventing the Government of Canada from moving forward with a similar initiative. Information Commissioner Legault has outlined several manageable concerns, some of which are common to open data schemes everywhere. Others, like the requirement of translation to meet official language requirements, legal and constitutional, are particular to this country and especially to the federal government.

In B.C., our Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act has been subject to three different committee reviews—there's a five-year review of the act—and each of the committees has recommended more routine release, more use of electronic data, and more routine disclosure by government. We have yet to see it.

The second method is access to information requests. If routine disclosure is the push from government out to its citizens and to the rest of us, access to information provides us, as citizens, with the ability to pull information from government. It's a complete code for making access requests. It also provides a process of review. It's a vital link in the chain of citizens’ ability to find out what their governments are doing, and it provides a balance between the rights of citizens to information and the legitimate requirements for confidentiality in certain clearly defined, limited circumstances. However, it was not intended as, nor should it be, the primary method of release. The primary method of release should be routine disclosure.

We won't go into the many deficiencies of the ATI system. This committee has gone through that. I will spare you a recap of it. We will come back to it, though, because the ATI system is vital for any true system of open government.

Finally, there's unauthorized unrequested release, which is basically what happens when there's no system, or it breaks down. It's leaks. WikiLeaks is an example. This is another way that information sometimes comes out.

In B.C. we also have a section in our act that puts an obligation on heads of public bodies to release information, even without a request, about a risk of significant harm to the environment or to the health or safety of the public or a group of people, or the disclosure of which, for any other reason, is clearly in the public interest.

I'd also like to take you through some potential pitfalls of open government. One is that open government, open data...essentially becomes electronic brochures. Government puts these up now, and what we have.... The risk is that government will just push favoured content out onto the web, that it will not be able to be manipulated by citizens, that it will not be in a very usable form.

There's probably no way around this. We have to have a certain measure of faith in our public servants and in our government that they will put out information that is...and will not unreasonably restrict the type of information being disseminated. However, that has not been the experience under ATI under different parties, different prime ministers, and different responsible ministers.

● (1600)

Without a way to compel disclosure, there is little reason to believe that the information that is routinely released will be much more than electronic brochures.

The reluctance of governments to allow broad disclosure of information they don’t favour releasing is very well understood, but a current instance in B.C., in which we are directly involved, provides an outstanding example.

We're involved in one of the longest-running FOI requests probably anywhere in this country. We're now into year seven of a contract between IBM and the provincial government. The government has taken us to court a number of times. They have invoked a number of exceptions. The exceptions have all been rejected. They're now off to court again.

Our ultimate point in this is that major government contracts should be readily available online for public scrutiny. The B.C. government has acknowledged the public interest in making contracts available by routinely posting public-private contracts online.

The government has not seen fit to put this contract up, despite the Information and Privacy Commissioner suggesting that this and similar contracts should be put online. The commissioner, Elizabeth Denham, has said, “Proactively releasing these contracts would save everyone considerable time, money and paperwork.”

At the end of the day we may have to put it up ourselves, pending the result of litigation or a change of heart by the government. This should serve as a cautionary example for anybody who thinks that open data is something that will come about easily.

Another potential pitfall is that by becoming entranced with the potential of open data—and there is real potential—we bypass the access to information system and ignore the serious problems it has. The current information commissioner and her predecessors have appeared before you and outlined many of these. This committee has looked at this in the past and made reports attempting to remedy this situation.

It also appears that the amount of information being released is on a downward path. According to the information commissioner, “During the past ten years, the number of cases where all information has been disclosed has decreased from 41% to 16%.”

Much is being made of the idea of putting documents released through ATI online for everyone to see, but there is little point in doing this if requesters are essentially unable to get that information because the system is so dysfunctional.

This leads me to the other question. It is something we have run into in B.C. that we call “trompe l'oeil transparency”. We're currently involved in a complaint involving BC Ferries, which is a government-owned corporation that runs the ferry service in British Columbia. It was put back under the FOI regime late last year as a result of an investigation by the province’s comptroller general, who thought this would be a way of improving governance.

Their policy states that any records released to requesters will immediately be posted on the BC Ferries website. The result is that requesters are deprived of the first use of the information they obtain, which in turn takes away much of requesters’ motivation for investing the time and resources in making FOI requests. To state it plainly, we have here a covert attempt to stifle FOI requests in the guise of the noble aim of allowing greater public access.

If you make it so that the information you get is essentially unusable or you're not able to use it as a reporter or however, there will be fewer and fewer requests that will be posted online.

It's not the first time a public body has tried to do this, but BC Ferries is the first one to make it official policy and to use it to actively discourage requests.

● (1605)

The policy works this way. Requesters are required to go through the normal processes for FOI requests. BC Ferries charges fees to the person requiring the information, to the maximum permissible in every case. Any released records are posted to the BC Ferries website. If information is requested electronically, the requester will receive it at the same time it is posted. If sent in hard copy, the records will be posted within 24 hours of their being mailed to the requester.

We have direct experience with this. We had stuff sent to us. We got it three days after it went up.

I'm just going to move it along here. I'd like to conclude by saying that FIPA's view is that we have to ensure that overdue moves toward routine release and the use of technology to make government information more widely available must also make this information usable for all Canadians.

Canadians must also have the ability to request specific information from their government and to receive that information in a reasonable time at no or minimal cost. This means creating a functional system for access to information.

No one wants to head toward a dystopia where governments push out electronically information that no one uses or trusts, while occasional dumps of WikiLeaks-type documents raise the issue of serious damage to legitimate state, business, or personal interests.

We hope that your work on open government will be a big step toward bringing about real openness in government.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gogolek.

We'll now go to the first round of questions. We're going to start with Dr. Bennett for seven minutes.

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

And thank you. This was very helpful. In particular, the interactive piece is of huge interest, this idea that you not only put the data up but also actually actively engage Canadians. When the Information Commissioner was here, she said that involving the public in any consultations was one of the five principles she felt were important.

As you know, we're hoping to incorporate that principle into the study, as we go forward with the e-consultation and ask citizens to help us with this, in terms of what they would want to see in a federal government open government policy. I would like to know how you would recommend we do that and whether you have any recommendations with regard to drilling down into civil society and into the places that have the expertise you've talked about, and in terms of young Canadians and using their enthusiasm and savvy to solve problems in this new collaborative way.

If you were us, what would you be doing?

● (1610)

Mr. David Hume: The key thing for me is it's never really good practice to do a consultation when you're not very clear on what you need to know from Canadians. As well, it's not a good idea to have a consultation in which information, background, and context for people aren't well developed, understood, and presented in ways that are accessible and usable.

You want to try to have a structuring conversation so that a lot of different perspectives can come forward—public service, advocacy groups, developers, software communities, and others—and try to show the spectrum of things that open government, open data as a piece of that in particular, could really mean for the country.

Within that, you can start to look at the big questions. When you begin to examine that you can present it to people in a way that's really simple for them to access, really clearly and quickly, if possible, but also in a way that offers an opportunity to draw them into deeper conversations, maybe face-to-face conversations in their communities, maybe in a way that offers them chances to bring groups of people together to talk to one another and to report back in creative ways, in different ways—not necessarily through text but through video, through audio, through other forms of presentation—to the committee what the possibilities are, what the concerns are, and these kinds of issues.

That would be a great place to start. Be clear about what the process means, what kind of information and what kinds of questions it really needs, where those will be going, how they will be used, and how you as a committee can report back to Canadians about what you've heard from them and how it's incorporated well into the process. That would be my advice.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Is there a best practice that you can think of? There could be a library on the website of things that people could read. Looking at David Eaves' reference to the Australian report, we see there are a number of things on a reading list we could put up to bring people up to speed. When we did the study in 2002-03 at the disability committee, we had three tools: an issue poll, a "tell us your story", and a "present your solution". Is there a process for developing open government that you really like? Toronto had a process. Maybe David can tell us a little about that. Maybe you could leave a reading list with the clerk, a process for best practices, together with names of people we could talk to. You mentioned Don Lenihan and Tad Homer Dixon. Maybe we could have a look at them.

Do you think the committee should consider a conference, a way of bringing people together to thrash things out? At that disability meeting, we brought some of the neat people we'd met online together to look at the draft report. This was the first time that had ever been done in Parliament.

Mr. David Hume: Beth Noveck was the director of the open government initiative in the White House. She has recently left the White House and is now a professor at New York University. She helped lead some significant consultations with the public about open data and transparency that fed into the structuring of the Obama administration's open government directive. This included conferences and online brain storming. So if she's available, I would definitely recommend that you get Beth up here. She's sort of a hero of mine. I'd love to watch her talk.

● (1615)

Mr. David Wallace: In Toronto, back in 2008, we didn't know the surprising power of Web 2.0, Gov 2.0. Open data was just starting to become a popular term, although proactive routine exposure nomenclature had been around for quite a long time.

We planned a summit, and I partnered with Sue Corke, one of their deputy city managers. We were trying to educate our people and get some insights from developers and community people, counsellors, and industry people. We also decided to open it up just to see if we could find out what this new Twitter thing could do. So we had about 300 people attend. At the end, there were over 1,200 people—900 online participating in a constant Twitter feed. We were taking more questions from out there than in the room. It opened our eyes to the amount of interest, to this two-way street of government. People actually wanted to be involved.

What came out of that was also a challenge from Marc Sermon and this "unconference" approach. In an unconference approach, you go in there with some structure, but not too much. You go in with a board of ideas and themes, and you work with a conference to build the program from the themes. You have breakout groups and discussions. So we had one of these. We call them "change camps". I think there were some up here. We had this at the MaRS Building in Toronto, which is a medical research area. We had an amazing number of people come out to chat, whiteboard, and work with us. We gained a lot.

And there was a lot more. There was also a mesh conference, the recent hackathon I mentioned. Each of these encounters opened us up not just to developers but to everyday people—children and teachers and community leaders who wanted to be involved. So it's a powerful forum. Don't overstructure it. Allow the messiness of Web 2.0, Gov 2.0, and open data to inform you, but have a clear purpose and get a clear report back on value. Don't overcomplicate the process itself. Let it grow and be evolving. That's what we found to be helpful, because it opened our eyes. We didn't come in with naturally formed restrictions. We came in wanting to learn, and we continue to look for that on our website and in different lines of business every day.

We can offer some reports. There are the people who spoke at those various meetings. Mark Kosinski is a good example in Toronto. He's a developer who helped found the datato.org site. There is David Eaves, of course. There are many different advocates, but they're just everyday people who want to be involved and prove things too.

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

Madame Freeman, vous avez sept minutes s'il vous plaît.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Freeman (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ): Thank you for being here today and for sharing your experience with us, Mr. Hume, Mr. Wallace and Mr. Gogolek. This is extremely interesting.

Mr. Hume, you have a public presentation about your integrated cyberdemocracy. It was one of your projects. It dealt with access to raw data and about interactive tools being used in policy development. It was really interesting. Now could you tell us about your experience, in New Zealand in particular. You went there to meet parliamentarians in order to look at how open data was being handled. I would like to hear any comments you have about it.

My next question goes to the three of you, Mr. Hume, Mr. Wallace and Mr. Gogolek. You are giving us the benefit of expertise that comes from your respective situations. Mr. Wallace's experience is municipal, and we have heard from a good number of people with that background. I think that the cities of Edmonton, Vancouver and Toronto are working together to improve their access and their methods. Cooperative work is being done with a view to providing more services, but it is at municipal level.

Mr. Hume, I know that you are here as an individual, but the fact remains that your experience is with provincial issues. That is very interesting. The issues are not the same. We understand very clearly how this can be used at municipal level. It is very accessible. Mr. Eaves, in fact, gave a comprehensive presentation on the practical aspects and the use to which this is being put municipally. I would like to hear your comments on what could be done provincially and federally, and to know where it all could lead. Of course, we always have to assume that there is the political will to make things like this a reality.

● (1620)

[*English*]

Mr. David Hume: Could I start with the New Zealand question first?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Freeman: Yes.

[*English*]

Mr. David Hume: When I went to New Zealand, I was there working as a consultant with the State Services Commission, which is sort of an oversight body, kind of close, I think, to what Treasury Board Secretariat is here. It focuses on public sector management. In particular I was working with the e-government program there in New Zealand. This was back in 2006.

At the time, they were advancing ideas, and one of the key streams in their e-government strategy as a public service was the idea of participation. A key gap that I think is clear in most jurisdictions is trying to understand how well members of Parliament actually manage to cope with all of the input they get from the public when the public does engage.

I'm highly sympathetic to members of Parliament with regard to the challenges they have with information management and the challenges they have in terms of hearing from the public and how they understand what comes in to them when people communicate with them. I remember sitting across the table from a cabinet minister who had just recently come from a television interview and had wound up with 6,000 e-mails in his inbox in the moments after his television interview. The question was, as a function of good governance, was that member and that minister really going to be able to listen when there was that much information?

I think for members of Parliament in particular, open data has a huge potential, not only in terms of your role of scrutiny of government, in your role of holding government to account, but also, I think, because good information management practices that are embedded in things like open data can make your jobs a lot easier if you can bring this data together.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Freeman: I appreciate what you are telling us, but my question was more specific. We understand what happens at municipal level in terms of services being provided to the public. At federal level, we would like to make available all the information and research funded by public agencies and public money. I know that we are going to have consultations in order to find out what people want. In a way, we could restrict access to the data, pick and choose from it, and provide the information that we want to provide. In your opinion, what kind of information should a transparent government have available at federal level?

[*English*]

Mr. David Hume: Is your question what sort of data should the federal government start with?

● (1625)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Freeman: Yes.

[*English*]

Mr. David Hume: My own sense of that is, certainly, you should start with whatever you're publishing already and bring that together. I would recommend you look closely at Statistics Canada data. That has some profound implications for how Canadians understand the nation. Data that I've seen say that most people are very interested in public safety issues, so understanding any data related to public safety I think would also be incredibly powerful and useful. Those are a few places to start.

I'll turn it over to my colleagues.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Vincent Gogolek: The federal government does not provide a lot of services directly to the public, apart from those provided to veterans and First Nations. But billions of tax dollars are transferred between levels of government, between federal and provincial levels and other bodies. Things like the amount of money, the objectives for it, and reports from the other governments on how federal funds have been used, and why, will all give us an idea of how well our federal system is working.

I leave that with you as an illustration of the kind of data that could be considered and could be put in a format that anyone interested, and the general public, could look at, consult and interpret in their own way.

Mrs. Carole Freeman: We can talk about access to raw data that we already have and that we bring to the attention of the public, but there are also the interactive tools that will let the public get involved in what might be called cyberdemocracy.

How do you see the move from one to the other?

Mr. Vincent Gogolek: I feel that Canadians have to be able to get involved. If we create an open government system, every Canadian has to have access to it. It is not just about finding a computer in a library and sitting down at it. It has to be in a useful form that people can use without a degree in computer science.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Freeman.

Mr. Siksay, for seven minutes.

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

I want to thank all of the presenters for what you've brought to the table this afternoon. It's all been very helpful.

Mr. Hume, I wanted to ask you a question. I understand there's great potential here and that it's sort of a new area, especially around open data.

I appreciated hearing about the Apps for Climate Action process and contest. I know Mr. Eaves talked the other day about the Vantrash application that was developed as well. And we've heard about other apps that have been developed.

I get that there's some use to those. Some of them are just kind of fun, some of them are kind of cool, and some of them don't strike me as major moves forward to solving major issues.

You talked about how this could be an opportunity for public collaboration in solving some major problems. Could you say more or give an example of where, on a larger public policy issue, there's been a significant change because of some use of open data?

Mr. David Hume: It's a tough one to answer because it is quite new.

I think what we're getting right now is people learning to understand that the resource is available. Especially for public servants, who are just beginning to work in this area, they've got some questions. They know it's useful, but there needs to be some innovation and creativity applied before we're really going to hit that mark.

I think the biggest challenge, and this is the most fundamental thing, is the switch from thinking that as governments we're in an industrial kind of business where we pull all the raw materials out and we shoot the car out the other end. I think we're going to increasingly need public servants who have the ability to think broadly and collaboratively to bring people together on an ongoing kind of basis so that there's energy and movement.

My experience in leading sessions using open data is that it creates a really profoundly focused kind of public discussion, in that you get people who, at certain points, would disagree on a particular issue, but when the data is in front of them that expresses a particular reality, they're much more inclined to engage each other in a really solutions-focused kind of way.

That's just what I've seen in working in sessions.

● (1630)

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Wallace, I saw you shaking your head, but I wonder if the budget visualization is sort of a next step in this kind of process. It's something that I haven't seen, so I wonder if you could say a little bit more about what that looks like and how that helps public policy development or how that helps a city come up with a better budget, that kind of thing.

Mr. David Wallace: I think that's a very good question. As David was saying, this is all new. In our budget world, we've always produced budget reports, usually in PDF; they're nice to look at, but you can't do much with them. If you wanted to use the data, you'd have to then be a programmer, scrape it and do some type of work, and then do a lot of work to actually then mash it up and work with it.

There are two sides of the visualization approach. One is to make the data very easy to use, so you can use the data from the budget to explore different ways and ask sensible questions about your local community or about your government. I know the federal government is a bit more arm's length, but there's a lot of important information—Statistics Canada, of course, budget information, and performance aspects, and so on—and there are large decisions being made with lots of money, taxpayers' money. At the municipal level, there's a lot of engagement around what's also happening in the local community.

Visualization is a way of seeing what's happening across the city in different wards—different kinds of requests, different kinds of variances, and different kinds of things happening in the different communities—and people can start to then grow together and work together to help solve those community issues. So visualization is a much easier way and allows sort of a ready-made way of helping you understand the data better, versus in the past, where you would have to be someone who would have to actually construct all that yourself.

One of the things we're hearing over the last few years, and more and more, is about the ability to mash it up and look at it very quickly, but with not a lot of computer science or detailed needs. If you think of teenagers and people doing school projects or people who want to be engaged at that age, where we want to bring young people in, if they have to have a computer science degree, that's not going to be very easy for them to be involved. What we've seen is young people involved from schools and new civic engagement links, because people can do it easily.

So the concept of getting the budget out there, because it is so fundamental, also allows people to see that the government is now delivering on its promises and being able to cut those costs or improve services and offer better services, perhaps better services from that direct input from the clients.

Mr. Bill Siksay: So you get better informed citizens because of this process. How does it change the decisions-maker's role?

Mr. David Wallace: Again, we're just starting in this space where there's this two-way street. I think what people are saying is, in our case, where are those efficiencies? Could there be more efficiencies? Maybe I've got an idea on some type of service delivery that we could do in the community that could help the strapped resources in the government. Maybe there's a way that my company, my service, my idea, my innovation, could augment what's already being done to provide an even better service. We saw this, interestingly enough, through the United Way and those kinds of community areas, where there were people right out in the streets working with homeless and so on, who were there all the time. They, in fact, supplied information back up to us, where our social workers could—there are only so many of them.... They actually gave us even more in-depth information about their communities. So there was that actual transfer of data back from these local efforts. Then they look at the budget and say, "Well, wait a minute, if we work with you, you could actually take that money and spread it around or do this and we could actually make services better."

So it helps engage people in the budget debate, not just from a finished product perspective, as David is saying—from an assembly line, let's look at the budget at the end—but during its formation. And because budget is always evolving, you have a say not just in the next one but even how the money is being spent right today.

That's the concept of making that budget data very available and very usable.

Mr. Bill Siksay: I'm struggling a little bit with the role of decision-makers, the councillors who are actually going to vote. You engage all these citizens in this process. You give them all this information. You're going to generate interest, obviously. You're going to generate a certain amount of opinion, not necessarily well-thought-out opinion, that kind of thing. How does an elected person sort through all of that? What resources do they get, do they need, to do that kind of work? Does it increase the pressure on those decision-makers? Does it change their job in some way because of this kind of process?

● (1635)

Mr. David Wallace: That's a very good question. There's no question that it opens up the doors, but they get many, many calls today in more traditional means, I'll call them, many, many e-mails, which they never actually get to. In this way, if people are more informed and can ask questions and be involved more, they can understand. Then in fact what happens is they actually are more informed and they actually can be in a better debate and assist with their local politician. What it means is that you get a more efficient exchange, a more informed exchange, versus someone who is just asking a blank question because they just don't understand the workings of government. They actually can be part of the process of government.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Siksay.

Mr. Albrecht, seven minutes.

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

I want to thank our witnesses for being here today. This has certainly been an engaging topic we've embarked on. I think there's pretty wide agreement that we need to move ahead with this as quickly as possible, but your input has certainly been valuable.

I want to focus most of my questions toward Mr. Wallace.

I certainly appreciate the summary you've given us here. Just working through some of the different apps that you've highlighted, whether it's restaurant inspection reports, transportation schedules, or even the visualization, I certainly see a lot of value in that. But I want to come back to page 6 of your presentation, primarily, where you focus on and use the term "open government". I think many of our witnesses have tried to help us understand there's a difference between open data and open government. You make a number of statements here that I'd just like to follow up on.

You say that open government is not just offering data sets on the web; it's much more than that. You talk about civic engagement and so on. Further down on that page, you talk about the full record of council and committee decisions being posted during the meetings. I'm wondering if you would have an idea as to how many people are actually tracking the meeting while it's going on.

In the final paragraph, you say that public participation in the decision-making process is increasing—and that has to be our end goal, public participation—and that the number of deputations at council has increased from 2,000 in 2007 to more than 4,100 in 2010.

My question sort of follows up on what Mr. Siksay was getting at in terms of the number of deputations: 4,100. Obviously, most of those were online, and possibly some of them were delegations appearing before council; I don't know if you would have numbers on that. How do you handle that volume?

Subsequent to that, how can we be sure that those deputations that are arriving...? First of all, are they read? Secondly, if they're read, are they absorbed? Is there any potential for action on them? Is there a staff member or multiple staff members assigned to deal with those things? There are a lot of questions surrounding that. Are we increasing expectations unrealistically and possibly shortchanging the process somewhere along the line?

I hope you can follow my line of thinking there.

Mr. David Wallace: Yes, I think I understand it. Let me know if I don't answer your question.

I don't think there's anything ever wrong with opening up the doors wider.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Right.

Mr. David Wallace: The fact is that at the municipal level there are many people who come and do deputations. They get five minutes and they make their point. They've been doing that since town hall meetings, and now, in the electronic age, we're engaging them through this meeting management system where they can put it through on e-mail. In the future, we're going to have perhaps even web chats, and who knows.

We have, in our clerk's area, ways of looking at the types of input coming in: what are the themes of the input, what are the areas of concern? There are many input elements, but there are many like areas of focus. One of the visualization techniques is that as you get and receive the information in, you can start to see what the patterns are and where the interest areas are. Then you can engage the public and drill further down and say, "Let's explore that topic. Let's talk about it. Perhaps we can have a focus session on that topic."

So what happens is that you get this much more two-way street. In the old days, you would come and say your peace. You'd say thank you very much, and it would be recorded. You'd take some element from it, I'm sure, because you'd get a sense of the feeling out there, but you'd never really get a sense of what exactly it meant to the larger issues.

If you can now start to get to where you can see the patterns and work with that, especially in an electronic way, then you can start to work intelligently with all that input. What knowledge-based systems can allow you to do—technology can help us here—is they can look for those patterns and point out, say, a couple of injunction points that perhaps the standing committee on planning and growth, or on economics or environment, really needs to explore further; maybe we need to look at some of the things that were in our capital plan, even though we're in the middle of the year, and say, "Wait a minute. Do we have the right investments or do we need to make some changes?" So you get a better pulse from citizens.

Now, at the federal level it's very challenging—you have a country to work with—but that's where your partners at the other levels of government can help. They can funnel up some of the issues. A good example is people who don't have identity. How do we give them benefits? How do we provide proper care to them? How does that work when the federal level says you must have identity to have a bank account, and yet you have challenges? So we're working on that problem, but we're working with our provincial level and our federal level to determine how we make sure that we can equally engage these people who don't really have a voice today.

So this is how we work with that. I think one of the most exciting things is that when you see that in 2007, the page views on the website in this area were zero, and now we have—

● (1640)

Mr. Harold Albrecht: How can that be?

Mr. David Wallace: We had just very basic information, so people never went there.

Quite frankly—

Mr. Harold Albrecht: So in 2007, the City of Toronto—

Mr. David Wallace: In that area, talking about meeting management and looking it up—

Mr. Harold Albrecht: On this one particular—

Mr. David Wallace: —on this one particular view.

And now, today, we have it available on BlackBerry. You can look at the calendar and have a two-way street semantic calendar. In other words, it's not just PDFs anymore of reports you could download and somehow work your way through. You have a very flexible way of getting in on what's going on in your government at that moment.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Do I still have some time?

The Chair: One minute.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: I understand the idea of assimilating the patterns and themes from the input. We have used the term "two-way street" often in our conversation today, and I think that's appropriate and important. What kind of feedback or response, then, do those 4,100...? Can they expect to receive a personal response to all of that as well?

Mr. David Wallace: I'll give you an example of where we actually used some Web 2.0 technology once we got a certain sense on Jarvis Street of what people were feeling about how the streetscape should change. There was a project going on to change how the streetscape was going to look—the removal of the centre lane and some changes to the way it was going to look, safety elements, and so on.

The transportation department decided to use Facebook to go out there and solicit information. Instead of having the same people coming to the same old meetings again and again—they even got to know them by first names—it actually opened up, especially to young people, a whole new space: "This is what I'd like to see on the street." So there was a lot of different information, but they were able to again open it up and get a lot better information.

As a result, they fed back directly, up on the site, the comments they were receiving. People took that and built on it further, and you got this collaborative spirit of shaping that street. At the end of the day, then, they fed it back and said, “Here's what we're now doing with the design. What do you think about that?” And then they got further designs, and by the time they actually got to doing it, it became very popular because people knew they were being listened to.

You can't just use traditional tools. You have to expand by using the Gov 2.0 or Web 2.0 tools as well, and go out to the people in their own environment and work with them directly.

I'll give you an example of firefighters who were having a real problem. They couldn't get new firefighters. But the real issue they were concerned about was misuse of information on the web that was being scraped. People were looking at the mean time for a fire truck to get to a site and it was incorrect. They said, “We want to go on Facebook and put the right data up, and we want to show that it's authorized.” So that's why they did it. But in the process of doing it, they said, “By the way, if you're interested in joining the Toronto Fire Department, here is a link”, and so on. All of a sudden, all these people became interested in being firefighters, where they just couldn't get anyone interested before. It had a completely different purpose because they were reaching out into the community.

So using the new techniques and new knowledge tools can help you deal with all that information. But it also allows the government, people, and politicians to make better decisions, I think, in the long term.

The Chair: That, colleagues, concludes the first round.

Before we go to the second round, there is one issue I want to explore briefly with you, Mr. Wallace. I believe you mentioned in your opening comments that since you went to a more open government format within the City of Toronto management, your access to information requests have dropped significantly. Did I hear you say that?

● (1645)

Mr. David Wallace: Yes.

The Chair: What percentage are we talking about?

Mr. David Wallace: About 50%.

The Chair: Do you have any idea of the savings in money? Can you give us a ballpark figure? I know you don't have the exact—

Mr. David Wallace: That's not that easy to calculate because you're talking about people's time, and so on. One of the things we've discovered.... Our city clerk, Ulli Watkiss, is probably best to answer this because her area deals with it. But from what I know in dealing with these kinds of complex areas—because in IT I have to delve through thousands of e-mails and different kinds of unstructured data to help answer requests sometimes—my staff spend thousands of hours. And all you need to look at is that they could be working on projects.

So we do have some numbers. I can get that information to you if you like.

The Chair: I think that would be beneficial if we could have that information.

Mr. David Wallace: There are definite time savings. When you look at a year where you had 4,100 and now you have 2,100 requests —just that amount—there are fewer of these ambiguous requests. Now they are more focused requests, and they're a lot easier and faster to answer.

Because people can find the regular information or the wider information from other means now, when they do come to you, they're very well prepared and it's easy to get that information to them. So even when you're answering FOI requests, it's more efficient when you do have to use that process.

But it's still a challenging process, and I think Vincent was very correct that there is still a lot of room to improve in that area. We believe that proactive and routine disclosure are a means, and the open data can really help, and it has helped us. There have definitely been productivity gains, and I can get you more information on that later.

The Chair: If you could, we'd appreciate that.

We're going to start the second round.

Five minutes, Mr. Bagnell.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Thank you.

Thank you all for coming.

I have a bunch of questions, so if we have really quick answers, I can get through them all.

The first one is very simple, though; it's really on basics. In Toronto do you list all the employees and their phone numbers? The Yukon government does that, and it's easy to find people, but in the federal government in that city there are some offices where they won't give out a phone number. You have to use a 1-800 number to Ottawa. I got a call yesterday from someone who was very frustrated that they couldn't phone their office in their hometown. They had to go to a 1-800 number. It was Revenue Canada.

Do you have all your staff and their phone numbers for most people who have a phone?

Mr. David Wallace: The entire organization chart and information is there, but we basically invite people through our 311 service to ask any question they want, and they hook up the people through that service. We used to have at least 40 different access points, different phone numbers if you had tax questions, water main breaks, or something, and it was very complex. We have found the 311 one-number access point has been a huge way....

Hon. Larry Bagnell: If someone had a pothole problem, is that where they'd call?

Mr. David Wallace: That's right. Instead of remembering that it was Fred I dealt with last time and I'd better go back to Fred to solve my problem, I just go through 311 and I get an answer. It's less to do with specific people and more to do with the service you're getting in terms of our level.

However, there are certainly areas of specific specialty and interest—the engineers and IT people and privacy lawyers. They are available. You can get access to that information. Again, that is something that is not difficult to get and it is easily accessible in terms of who to speak to, but what we have found is there is less to do with that now and more to do just through 311, and then it's an organized way of getting the information back to the power of servicing the public.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Vincent, you made a good point about it being great to have it there, but you need to figure out the accessibility of it. Ten years ago Industry Canada had a quarter of a million pages on its website. I worked in that area and I didn't even use the website because you wouldn't know where to find anything. The federal government, of course, is huge. That's only one out of 50 departments and agencies. So an important point, I assume, is how to navigate these things.

Mr. Vincent Gogolek: Yes. It has to be available, we think, to citizens. It can't just be the digerati. It can't just be people who are sophisticated users. It has to be available to citizens. It has to be in a format they are able to use.

I'm assuming that the 250,000 pages were all in 10-point courier type as well, for ease of reading.

● (1650)

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Along the same line, newspaper editors say you have to write a newspaper for grade 10 or grade 8 because that's the average Canadian citizen, which is a lot lower than people would think.

How many people do you think have the ability to navigate your various websites and have the education and the technical ability?

Mr. David Wallace: We have found that most people have a number of basic purposes for coming to the website. First of all, they have a service that they need to get done, they want to register this, or they want to do this, they want to do that. We tried it through the 301 self-service part of our website, to ask what was their request, what did they need—very simple.

Other people come because they need information. They want to find out about something happening in their community that is coming up. What we are working toward is a "My Toronto" capability, where everything you're interested in, you are always interested in, and when you go back in it's always there.

The third reason people are interested is that they want to be involved, as we said earlier, in their local government. They want to take part. They want to be involved in some of the decision-making and so on, and they want that to be in an interactive way, and as we said earlier, they want to see that their input made a difference. So the website that we're rapidly moving toward is organized in an easy-to-access point from that perspective and from the whole navigation perspective. What we did, believe it or not, is we went out to the libraries. We went out to donut shops. We went out to the guy in the street and we asked what he thought of the website. After a lot of noise we said, "Thank you very much", and then we said, "Put your comments online." We opened up a Web 2.0 perspective. We got lots of input, so we started evolving and making the website better.

We still have some work to do. We also have 50,000 static web pages to then bring into a dynamic content. We are actually working on that with some advanced tools in our business areas, and they are going to start putting the data in themselves versus having to go through communications people, which means it will be much faster to get relevant, up-to-date data. So together, the new tools and a better organized website itself, based on those three basic uses and listening to people on how to improve access, are helping to make navigation better and information on that website more relevant for their use.

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

Ms. Davidson, five minutes.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Thanks, Mr. Chair, and thanks very much to each of our presenters for being here this afternoon. Certainly, I think we're getting a good feel for your different perspectives as you envision open data and open government. It's been extremely interesting.

One of the things that I know we discuss and we wrestle with as a committee is how we are going to roll this out, how we are going to determine what needs to be in it, what's important to the Canadian public, how they should be able to interact with us as we go into this exercise and provide open data and open government processes. Is there a role to be played by the electronic world that we live in today, through Twitter and Facebook? Is that a viable way of getting information back to us from the public, do you think?

Could each of you comment on that?

Mr. David Hume: I would say the answer is yes, provided you're ready and willing to be able to capture that information, sort through it, and begin to work with it, and that you're also ready and willing to be engaged in conversations with people. Twitter and Facebook can be remarkable push technologies, but they can also be remarkable from the perspective of hearing back and forth and opening certain kinds of discussion. Twitter being Twitter, you only get 140 characters, so it's not necessarily going to be deep, but that's okay, because what it can do is you can use it as a really terrific pointing tool to focus people on a more discursive kind of content that might be housed on a website somewhere, or to point people to an event they can attend, highlight other kinds of resources that you are examining, point people to the ParlVU website, to let them know that these kinds of conversations are happening. So provided you understand your strategy in terms of the kinds of things you want to do for people and what kinds of conversations you want to lead, I think they can be remarkably helpful for you.

Mr. David Wallace: Believe it or not, we use Twitter in a number of ways. We have an Open_TO, a Twitter account where, as we listen to the community, we trial balloon out some ideas and types of data that we're thinking of putting out there and see what people think about that. It's a great way, as David is saying, of feeling the pulse and understanding it in short bursts, but you certainly get it quickly. You also get some very quick reactions, so you don't have to go through these long, drawn-out interplays. You know very quickly what's actually happening.

Another aspect, believe it or not, in our 311 Twitter area, is they're actually keeping their finger on the pulse for another reason. If they're starting to see a theme developing out on Twitter, they actually could go and say, “Wait a minute, let's go and put someone out there”—if there's graffiti or potholes or something. They could actually go out and fix it before a request comes in, in terms of a proactive service request. What that does is this. They have technology that says there were 3,000 people who asked for the same thing. Let's do it once.

So what Twitter does is it actually allows you to see what is happening out there, and you get a sense of it in terms of the day-to-day and minute-to-minute goings on in your local community. You could also expand that out, but I agree, you have to understand it. You have to start to understand the types of language and the way you can leverage it and use the different kinds of hashtags. There are different ways you could do it.

It's interesting. We worked with the University of Toronto on some ideas around perhaps putting some metadata around Twitter and tweets, to get a sense of what we could do to improve the depth of it. It's a very short burst. There are ways you can put links and all that so you can see what people are really getting to in a deeper sense. But is there a way to actually make the feed itself more intelligent? So there's some thinking going on in that space that could even improve it further.

In its current state, it's still incredibly useful. The themes and rooms out there, the discussions, are great to follow. As I said, we're using it in a number of ways, testing what we're doing out there, but also monitoring out there to see what's happening so we can proactively service the citizens.

● (1655)

Mr. Vincent Gogolek: I just have a very short comment. One is that you should not rely exclusively—I don't expect that you will—on Twitter and Facebook.

The other thing is to come back to a theme that Mr. Hume and Mr. Wallace raised earlier, which is that you constantly need to go back and see what people are saying and what new information they might want, changes they might want to see. So it's an ongoing process.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Davidson.

Madame Thi Lac.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thaï Thi Lac (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Gentlemen, thank you for being here today to share your expertise and your views. Thank you also for your interest in the committee's study on a more open federal government.

Since we started the discussions, we have heard a lot of comparisons with countries like Australia, the United States or Great Britain. But those are countries where only one language is spoken. In terms of opening up government, they do not have the major obstacle that Canada has with its two official languages. Those countries only use one language.

My first question goes to Mr. Wallace. When a member of the public asks you for a translation in an access to information request, how does it work? Do you give them the document in its original language? Does the city of Toronto translate it? If not, do people have to find a way of translating the document themselves?

[*English*]

Mr. David Wallace: At 311 we receive requests in 180 different languages. We have the capability for translation to receive requests for services. Because Toronto is such a multicultural city, we have further challenges than just two languages. We have at least 180 that we're working with, and different dialects and so on. We can receive requests in all those various languages, and we have professional translation services to support that. We also aim to deliver the request in the language in which it came, if it comes through the official process.

Some of the challenges include the website itself. On the website we allow for different translation capability through Google Translate, and so on. It's not perfect translation, but it's better than if you didn't have it. We put a disclaimer up so you understand that. We have found that it has generated more interest in different languages.

Absolutely, I agree that other countries with single languages may not have the same challenges that Canada has at the federal level, but at the municipal level, with the multitude of different levels of service we have to do in many different languages, we have to be prepared to work on all those perspectives.

So I would say that we don't have an official 180-language act. We don't have that in all our different documentation, all those different things. You have that challenge at this level in the two languages. But being able to receive it, understand the person in their language, and give the information back is a good start. The website will still be a challenge in searches and so on, in those languages in the pure electronic mode. But in assist mode, which 311 offers, or the FYI process offers, we see that working quite well.

That's how we deal with it today at the city.

● (1700)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thaï Thi Lac: Mr. Wallace, earlier, our Chair asked one of the questions that I wanted to ask about the 50% drop in requests you have received. He asked you that question in the context of saving money. What is your annual budget for access to information requests and for establishing a more open structure? What is the annual budget for the program?

[*English*]

Mr. David Wallace: Again, that's in the clerk's area. There's a group devoted to corporate information management service that also deals with records management and freedom of information requests. So there is a budget for the people who work there. That information is available online, but I will get it for you so you have that focused information. There are professionals who deal with that, and then there's the time of people in the program to source the information. There's more than just the budget for that area. There are the people who have to provide the information from the programs.

As I said earlier, we can estimate what those savings would be, based on past experience of how long it took and how much effort it took—and in the IT area, how much processing we have to do to find and search all of the e-mails, which in some cases go back years. So we do a lot of processing, and that takes away from our day-to-day work in servicing the public, and so on. The more data online, the less of this there is. Being more transparent means a lot of savings in many different ways, and better services. I can get you some estimates on that and the budget of the area that actually processes.

We don't expect that area to shrink, because they do a lot of different things. But the amount of coverage they can do.... Again, because the kinds of requests coming in are more focused now and they can get the rest of the information on the more general requests up on the open data and other parts of the web, it means that the professionals can deal with them more quickly because they're more focused. So there's another value—not only saving money—in giving better service.

I want to underline the value point that even though we're getting fewer, we're getting more focused requests. And that, by its very nature, improves the response we can give to the public. But as I said earlier, I can certainly supply the estimated savings from that and the budget information on how we do the processing today.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thaï Thi Lac: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Thaï Thi Lac.

Mr. Abbott, you have five minutes.

[*English*]

Hon. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Thank you, and again thank you to our witnesses.

There's one area we haven't touched on at all today. I'm thinking of the issue of public safety or security.

With the access to information, that information is available to the Toronto 17, or to other people who have very malicious intent for our society. What thought has been put into all of these offerings you've given us? They're excellent, but I haven't heard anything at all about the precautions that must be built in. Indeed, are there precautions built in?

● (1705)

Mr. David Wallace: Yes, there actually are a lot of precautions built in. That's a very good point.

For example, linear inventory is not provided. You can't see how many kilometres of piping or electrical or any of that information, which is never going to be allowed online. An engineer could apply through a proper process and be fully validated and so on, but that type of information—our utilities information, what's under the pavement—is not exposed on the open data perspective.

There is another type of information that most American cities are starting to think about putting up there and it's called crime data. In fact if you go to New York, you can actually see who is being accused and all kinds of stuff. From a privacy perspective, that is something we have worked through, and our civic engagement group has worked with the police. That's just not doable, and it's something that, from a Canadian perspective, is not acceptable.

What we do, though, is create what we call neighbourhood indicators, and they're based on various factors and different characteristics. You can get a reading in a neighbourhood of what's going on there, not just in terms of crime but other elements, economics and so on. It gives you, in a forum with all the information around it, what the experience is and what's happening, but the raw, detailed information that is in the police files and so on stays exactly there.

We've taken a tremendous amount of precautions. Once we were challenged in 2008 to do it, we took a year to prepare and really go through the details with our clerks, with our civic engagement, talking with the police, the community people, and so on, to really prepare and understand how we could do this. We also looked at examples that were out there.

Most information that's open is GIS information or maps, and that's because people want to know where something is. But it's also the easiest information to get out there. That's why you see the explosion on Google Maps and so on. But that only goes so far. People want to know what the characteristics are and what's really going on in their neighbourhood, and that's where these neighbourhood wellness indicators and other elements are helpful.

But they don't disclose public safety issues. On H1N1, all of the clinic information was up there, but obviously the health results and what was going on wasn't. So we work with our chief medical officer and all the different divisions and agencies to make sure, and they are the ones who pull the switch. They do the quality checklists. They're the ones who release the data. They get advice from clerks. They get advice from the information professionals. They talk to IT on the technical aspects, but they're the ones who say, "That data is ready to go."

That's why, through that very detailed and ongoing consultation, what is up there is right and it has the proper metadata, and we know it's serving the public in all the possible ways, along with making the government itself more transparent, but in a proper way, in a way that is fulfilling our obligation to the citizens.

Mr. Vincent Gogolek: I think it's also important to not try to reinvent the wheel. Under the Access to Information Act, we've looked at a number of important governmental and societal issues. In the instance of public safety, obviously we don't want organized crime to be able to put in an ATI request to the RCMP saying, "I want a list of all informants in the United Nations Gang." Well, clearly they wouldn't get that because the law would prevent that.

I would think that in putting similar considerations into the release of open data—and Mr. Wallace could perhaps comment on that—you would look at it through those same exemptions. Would this damage international relations? Would this violate privilege? Would it reveal a cabinet confidence? We don't have to go back and reinvent the wheel. We can look at it through the same perspective.

Hon. Jim Abbott: To answer your comments on security issues, I have the same question but with respect to the potential use of this volume of information, the ease of access for malicious purposes. I'm not thinking of security now; I'm thinking of personally malicious purposes.

What thought goes into what appears in this cache of information?

Mr. David Hume: One of the things you have to realize is that certainly when you're looking at data sets, personal privacy is alongside public safety. It's going to be one of the key things you're going to examine. This is common data management practice. So when we think about things like Statistics Canada or the Canada Revenue Agency and the level of granular detail they have available to them, they issue reports, but they're done in an aggregated way and there is a de-practice of anonymization around data sets that is possible and has been in place for many, many years because of privacy implications.

So that will be a key criterion in looking at new data sets that you would be publishing. But the good news on that front is that while they may be concentrated in specific areas that are already really sophisticated about data production and collection and publishing, those practices are really well known, well respected, and well understood.

● (1710)

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

We're now going to move to Mr. Siksay for five minutes.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Thank you, Chair.

I want to go to Mr. Gogolek and ask a number of questions. I really appreciate the fact that you drew us back to the importance of the ATI process when we're considering the broader perspectives on open government and open data. I like the "push and pull" metaphor that you used, because I think it's very important for us to remember that and to remember that it's not going to disappear even with the best possible model of open government or open data.

I wanted to ask you to go over the BC Ferries situation with me a little bit because I don't quite understand—or maybe I do, but I'll pretend I don't. It seems like a good thing that BC Ferries, when they have information that's to be disclosed, put it up on their website so that everybody can see it. But you point that out as a problem. Could you say a bit more about why that's a problem for your organization? And are there other examples of how that's proven to be a problem?

Mr. Vincent Gogolek: I'll try to go through it very briefly.

Our initial reaction was cautiously optimistic when we heard they were going to be putting requests up online because this is a good thing. The CAIRS system existed federally, and that, as I noted in my written brief, should be replaced. But as more and more details became available, it became increasingly obvious that the system was designed not so much to increase transparency as to really make things difficult for certain requesters.

We've started to see more and more information. BC Ferries does not just put the information up on the website. They also issue a news release telling other news media that, "*The Vancouver Sun* has just got this information. The province, the CBC, CTV, everybody else, you have it. Go to our website, and you'll have the same stuff they spent months going after."

They also still charge fees. They charge a lot of fees. We're just beginning some battles over fees.

So if you're the requester, you're having to jump through the hoops; you're having to pay money maybe; and at the end of the day, you don't get an extra minute to look at it.

The other thing is that, as FOI requests were coming out—because, of course, we immediately filed one on how they designed their system—one of the memos we found in the document dump, which they put up online and which we got three days later in paper form, said that officials of BC Ferries were looking at how they could proactively release some of the information that they knew they were going to be asked for.They could see the question about how much money the CEO of BC Ferries was making this year coming, but for whatever reason, there were a number of memos in which the people designing the website were saying, "So are we getting the content on this or what?" And then it mysteriously petered out. We may get that later after maybe another court case.

Clearly officials thought about this. They were looking at transparency. They were looking at proactive release, but with the system that's actually in place, you don't get that. You have to file a request. Officials have to go and approach the chair to try to find out what he made this year, instead of just putting it up, putting up his expenses, things like that.

Mr. Bill Siksay: There have been examples too of journalists who have made requests. BC Ferries has posted all of the information. Everybody's had access to it at the same moment. Other news organizations scoop the journalist who made the request but interpret or make a mistake in the data and kind of ruin the story or ruin the ability to make transparent the issue that was originally being explored. I think there's been that situation, and this has thwarted a full discussion or an appropriate discussion by the person who was actually knowledgeable in the area of the issue they were doing the research into.

● (1715)

Mr. Vincent Gogolek: And it's unfortunate, because, again, in terms of discussing public issues, normally somebody would put in an FOI or an ATI request because they were interested in an area and they needed more information to explain how it works.

If you create a system in which there is essentially a race for who can hit the button faster, it's like a TV game show: who can get their story out there quickly? I hate to pick on BC Ferries—actually, I don't hate to pick on BC Ferries—but if you get the information, and it's up online, and you have to get your story out there quickly, you tell BC Ferries, "You have 10 minutes to get me your side of the story or we're just going with what we have."

Mr. Bill Siksay: So should there be a timeline with this, so that the original requester gets it but there's a time lag before it's released later, or should it just be going to a CAIRS system where you know that somebody else has requested it?

Mr. Vincent Gogolek: There are competing issues, but there is a legal duty under the Access to Information Act and section 4 and section 6 of the B.C. act. The duty is to the requester, and I think it's something we're going to have to deal with.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Siksay.

Dr. Bennett, for up to five minutes, and then Mr. Albrecht.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I'd like your advice on the best practice on the ATIP piece. The federal government used to have a site where you could apply to ATIP electronically, but for some reason they took it down two years ago. As to developing a future site, Mr. Wallace, would you log each request as it goes up and then give the answer to the person who asked for it first, with some sort of lag before the rest of the world gets it?

I think there was a view that if you at least put it up there you could prevent 32,000 identical requests. Does the person who asked for it get the answer a little before everybody else gets it?

Mr. David Wallace: In our process, if we receive it through an e-mail, we don't put the result of that detailed FOI request up online. It goes back to the originator. When we're talking about open data and all that, these are the proactive disclosure, routine disclosure elements, or specific FOI requests. So we follow the existing process for that. They get their information back, and we don't just post it all back up online.

This follows the normal process. I won't say we want to reduce requests, because there are some good ones, but if we see many different requests for the same thing, then we might decide that the information might produce a competitive advantage or might have something personal in it, and we might take another look at that information and see why we had to process it through ATI before. Maybe it should just be open. Maybe it should be part of our routine disclosures. Each division has a routine disclosure plan to go back and look at their FOI requests and examine why we were doing certain things and whether we need to continue. Then we can decide to put it up on the website, or put it up in the open data for self-service. So the divisions, through their routine disclosures processes, are actually helping to reduce some requests. But if you get an FOI request, it goes through the traditional process.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Is there any other country in the world where you still have to put a cheque in the mail and send it by snail mail to get an ATIP?

Mr. David Hume: I have no idea.

What I'd recommend to you, though, is an innovative group of public sector web developers in the United Kingdom called mySociety, mySociety.org. They're a non-governmental organization that likes to do government-related things. They designed a site called WhatDoTheyKnow.com. If you're considering what a web presence for access to information requests might look like, I'd recommend you have a look at it. It shows what kinds of requests have come in. It lists successful requests. It makes requesting transparent. You have to understand, this is not a government site so it's not necessarily completely up-to-date, but the design elements are interesting and worth examining.

● (1720)

Mr. Vincent Gogolek: I think there has to be a balancing. We want information to be more publicly available and we want to reduce the number of redundant requests. But at the same time, as we've seen with BC Ferries and other organizations, they've either said they will put up media requests—not a really good indication that you're trying to be transparent—or they only put up the requests and they don't do anything else with respect to transparency. This is what I call trompe l'oeil transparency. They're just doing this in the hope that people will become frustrated and stop putting up requests so there will be a lot less for them to put up.

As to how long a delay should be, we'd have to talk about that. I would think that if we haven't heard back from the requester in whatever period of time, days, weeks, then we'll put it up, because what we're talking about here is longer-term transparency. This isn't any vital interest that it must go up within 24 hours.

I'm open to being persuaded otherwise, but....

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

Mr. Albrecht, for five minutes.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Thank you again, Mr. Chair.

On page 13, Mr. Wallace, you outline some of the different data sets that are requested and the frequency with which they're requested.

I know, Mr. Hume, you've had experience with federal governments, especially in New Zealand. Would you have any idea as to what data sets are most frequently requested from the federal government? Would there be possibly some similarities we could expect? Obviously we're going to get input from Canadians, but are there some commonalities that you might forecast that we could expect in terms of what data sets would be most frequently requested at a federal level?

Mr. David Hume: New Zealand is a national government, so certainly things like expenses, as well as.... In New Zealand, deputy ministers are called chief executives, so chief executives' expenses are requested. Statistical information is requested, locations, road information, trail information, things that relate to recreation....

Mr. Harold Albrecht: So national parks, that sort of thing?

Mr. David Hume: Yes, some of that, absolutely. If you go to data.govt.nz, you'll see the data catalogue for New Zealand, so that can give you some understanding of what it is they've made available and some of the more popular sets there.

Mr. David Wallace: If I could just add to that, one of the things—and it's noted, actually, on the slide a little bit earlier than that—is around who's voting on what. That is becoming a very important thing.

Now, if you're a member of Parliament, what they're voting on, that would be pretty easy to track. There are thousands of bills that go through a given term of government, but people are paying attention now. People are saying, what is happening with that issue? So in that way you get better—and we talk about that third purpose, which is better government itself through this. Then there are always things like expenses and so on that certainly are very popular.

But I think voting, information on large projects, stimulus, what's going on, what the status is of the deliverables on those different projects.... That's another thing, to say are they doing what they said they would do and are they completing things? So those are very popular things that I think any level of government should be releasing.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: I'll change direction, just for the last minute here.

At different times today, and with previous witnesses, there's been this term used that we have to provide the information in a format that the person can manipulate, and I understand that. PDFs are pretty rigid.

Is there not a concern, a potential, that someone could take that material, that information, and possibly change some of the data, especially if you're dealing with financial or statistical data, and give an impression of a particular issue that may be totally opposite to what the actual government data has?

And if that would happen, what kinds of checks and balances would there be in place for an average citizen who goes on a particular website and gets this picture and assumes it's accurate but may be misled? Or has that never been a problem in your experience?

● (1725)

Mr. David Hume: My view is that I think the thing to recognize is that the web as a tool really operates in a culture of scrutiny, and if you are presenting data that isn't the same as the government, which has the high-fidelity authoritative data set—

Mr. Harold Albrecht: It'll be obvious.

Mr. David Hume: —it's going to be obvious.

I think you have, certainly, from a question of reputation and especially if you're media and you decide that this is a.... For governments, things don't get bad until the media picks it up, right? If the media picks it up, they have their own processes of scrutiny, and they will check, I would expect—not being a member of the media—to be able to look at that and say is what they're saying legit or are they not. Is the person credible? There's going to be a big difference between somebody who has no training in statistics, for example, versus somebody who is a university professor or a chief statistician or so-and-so and the authority they get from their credentials.

So all that becomes part of the conversation around the data. That's not to say the government shouldn't be active if they see things that are misleading people and opening up that conversation and doing that check and being part of that cultural scrutiny. This is why this idea of engagement and setting norms around how data gets used is really important.

For the most part, I haven't seen anything yet. I'm not terribly worried about it, just because I know about this culture of scrutiny.

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

We're now going to Madam Freeman for two or three minutes. That will be it.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Freeman: For the federal government, I know that there are some restrictions on providing information in the legislation on protecting personal information and in the Copyright Act.

Do you have an opinion on how that could be managed at federal level? Have you had to deal with issues of that kind?

We only have two minutes. For copyright, I know that Mr. Gogolek has already…

Mr. Vincent Gogolek: The question of Crown copyright has caused problems for us. You heard Professor Geist talk about it too. The program does not let the federal government recover a lot of money. It is not really very useful for the government as a source of revenue, but there is a good deal of risk in trying to use it as a way to restrict protected information. The legislation on copyright is difficult and specialized. It is very difficult to defend oneself against a complaint, a request to recover money.

Mrs. Carole Freeman: Do you have any thoughts about the personal information contained in requested data?

Mr. Vincent Gogolek: It should be done according to the Access to Information Act; it is protected. You have the right to ask for your own information…

Mrs. Carole Freeman: Mr. Wallace, how do you handle it when you have to provide data? Is it complicated for you to block access to personal informations in the data you have to make available? How do you handle that?

[*English*]

Mr. David Wallace: We have developed a toolset, what we call a quality checklist, that the divisions have and go through. It gets very clearly down to what is personal information, what can be released, and what cannot. We could supply that to the committee. You could take a look at it, and if you have further questions on what the toolkit is all about, we'd be more than happy to answer them.

● (1730)

The Chair: Okay. That concludes the time we have allocated for this meeting, colleagues.

On behalf of everyone, I want to thank you for your attendance here today. This has been very informative, very interesting. But before we adjourn, I will allow you half a minute each, if you have any closing comments or remarks you want to address to the committee.

We will start with Mr. Gogolek.

Mr. Vincent Gogolek: What we've heard here today from our various perspectives is that when we're talking about open government, we're talking about information. It's more than raw data; it's information. We also recognize that in addition to receiving more information in a useful form from government, we have to be able to get information that we're not able to find.

Mr. David Wallace: I'd like to thank you also for the opportunity to come today. I have enjoyed the discussion.

The main point I'd like to leave you with, again, builds on the comment Vincent is speaking to, which is that opening up government is a two-way street. Look at the processes, simplify the processes, and engage the public in a collaborative spirit to help change. If you go through the deputations and the unconference and open it up, you'll actually improve the kind of data and the actual workings of the government itself.

There are a lot of good lessons learned across the various jurisdictions, and I encourage you to keep that going.

The Chair: Mr. Hume.

Mr. David Hume: I just want to say how delighted I am to have been part of the conversation today, and thank you very much for your attention.

I'd say that this is something that should be taken seriously, because the question of open government and the sharing of data and making government collaborative has a real imperative around how we will do government in Canada in the future. Our finances and our demographics tell us that we need to do things very differently, radically differently. And this is one piece of the puzzle that I hope we can embrace.

The Chair: Again, on behalf of everyone here, I do want to thank you all for your attendance and for the effort and time and energy you put into these presentations.

Thank you very much.

The meeting is now adjourned.

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