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—
Co-Chairs

Mr. Gagan Sikand

The Honourable Lucie Moncion

Standing Joint Committee on the Library of Parliament

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• (1205)

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion (Ontario, ISG)): Good afternoon and welcome to this meeting of the Standing Joint Committee on the Library of Parliament.

Today, we are pleased to have with us Philippe Dufresne, law clerk and parliamentary counsel, as well as Pierre Rodrigue, senior principal clerk at the parliamentary information directorate.

Before we get started, I'd like to ask the people around the table to introduce themselves.

My name is Lucie Moncion. I am a senator from Ontario and the joint chair of this committee.

[English]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Gagan Sikand (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.)): I'm the co-chair, Gagan Sikand, member of Parliament for Mississauga—Streetsville.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Good morning. I'm Dave Van Kesteren, member of Parliament for Chatham-Kent—Leamington. I'm a vice-chair.

[Translation]

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): My name is Guy Lauzon, and I'm the member for Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry.

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): My name is Anne Minh-Thu Quach, and I am the member for Salaberry—Suroît.

[English]

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): I'm David Graham, member for Laurentides—Labelle in Quebec.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): I'm Borys Wrzesnewskyj, member for Etobicoke Centre.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan (South Shore—St. Margarets, Lib.): I'm Bernadette Jordan, member for South Shore—St. Margarets in Nova Scotia.

Hon. Michael Duffy (Senator, Prince Edward Island (Cavendish), ISG): I'm Mike Duffy, senator from Prince Edward Island.

Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC): I'm Jim Eglinski, member of Parliament for Yellowhead, in central Alberta.

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): I'm Chandra Arya, member of Parliament for Nepean.

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): As I mentioned, joining us today are Mr. Dufresne and Mr. Rodrigue. They will be making statements, after which, we will move into questions and answers.

Please go ahead, gentlemen.

Mr. Pierre Rodrigue (Senior Principal Clerk): Good afternoon. Thank you, Senator.

Mr. Joint Chair, honourable senators and members of Parliament, we appreciate the invitation to address the committee today on the digitization of responses to written questions and the work already under way to make documents tabled in the House of Commons more readily available to parliamentarians and the public.

[English]

To set a bit of context, there are more than 2,300 sessional papers tabled in the House of Commons each year. These documents include annual reports from various departments and agencies and departmental performance reports, as well as government responses to committee reports, petitions and questions on the order paper, to name a few.

Every document tabled in the House of Commons is filed in the secretariat at the Journals branch. An identical copy is provided to the Library of Parliament for parliamentarians and their staff to consult at any time.

There has been a long-standing interest in improving access to sessional papers. Many sessional papers are made available online in the hours or days following the tabling, though there is not a central repository of all such documents. The type of document and the content owner determine how it is made available online.

For example, some departments and agencies prepare electronic versions of each of their documents and systematically publish them to a specific website. Estimates documents, budget documents and order in council appointments all fall into this category.

Documents produced by the House of Commons, such as committee reports and reports from interparliamentary delegations, are made available on the House of Commons and parliamentary websites as soon as possible following the tabling, often within a few minutes.

[*Translation*]

In the last Parliament, the 33rd report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs recommending the establishment of an electronic petition system was concurred in by the House and the solution was launched in December 2015.

Since then, government responses to electronic petitions are posted on the e-petitions website. The next logical step was to expand on this offering and to add paper petitions and their corresponding responses. Following very productive discussions with our colleagues from the Privy Council Office responsible for coordinating the government's responses to petitions, an initiative is currently under way.

We are confident that paper petitions will be included in the electronic petition system at the start of the next Parliament.

[*English*]

As the Clerk of the House indicated in his preliminary remarks to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs on May 8 of this year, the initiative will “be a useful pilot project toward greater use of electronic tabling and dissemination of sessional papers, including answers to written questions”.

This brings us to the most challenging category of documents, namely, government responses to written questions made orders for return. This category is of great interest to this committee and rightfully so. These responses account for approximately 21% of all sessional papers tabled in the House of Commons, compared to 25% for responses to petitions. The Library of Parliament does systematically publish these in an electronic format to an internal website available to parliamentarians and staff, usually within 24 to 48 hours of tabling. Library staff scan the paper copies tabled in the House to create a PDF document.

[*Translation*]

As the Parliamentary Librarian, Ms. L'Heureux, indicated—and I believe Ms. Lank mentioned it as well—at a previous meeting, one of the challenges with the electronic version produced by the Library of Parliament is that it is simply an image of the paper copy and it is not fully accessible to persons with visual disabilities. Issues surrounding accessibility are among the biggest challenges when it comes to the digitization and publishing process.

Responses to written questions are often more complex documents than responses to petitions. The latter are produced by a single department and are usually just a few paragraphs of plain text. Responses to written questions vary in length and format. Some are as simple as a response to a petition, but many come from multiple departments and include dozens or even hundreds of pages of text. These pages can contain lengthy tables, graphics or images, which are much more challenging to publish in an accessible format.

[*English*]

The House could, however, take inspiration from the success of the petitions model in tackling these challenges. Close collaboration with the Privy Council Office would of course be required in order to proceed, as well as with the Treasury Board Secretariat, which plays a leadership role in the area of information management, information technology initiatives and accessibility.

As the House of Commons does not create or own the content of the responses, the engagement of our partners in this process would be paramount to ensure its success, especially in relation to ensuring that the electronic versions are fully accessible to persons with visual disabilities.

The House administration continues to strive to provide parliamentarians, their staff and the public with timely access to parliamentary information of all kinds. We are proud of the progress we have made and the successful collaboration with the Privy Council Office to date, and we look forward to further improving the services we offer to parliamentarians and, indeed, to all Canadians.

Thank you for your interest in this topic and for the opportunity to speak about this subject.

I understand that Mr. Dufresne would like to say a few words.

• (1210)

[*Translation*]

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Mr. Dufresne, please go ahead.

Mr. Philippe Dufresne (Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel, House of Commons): Thank you.

Madam Joint Chair, members of the joint committee, I am pleased to be here, not just as a law clerk and parliamentary counsel for the House of Commons, but also as the inclusion and diversity champion at the House Administration. I look forward to answering your questions about the legal dimension of accessibility for persons with disabilities, a fundamental issue.

[*English*]

Indeed, accessibility for persons with disabilities with respect to documents and information is protected currently under the Canadian Human Rights Act and in proposed Bill C-81 on ensuring a barrier-free Canada, currently under study before the committee.

I will be happy to take any questions you may have on this important matter as it relates to the issues at hand.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Thank you, Mr. Dufresne.

The first person to ask a question will be Mr. Graham.

[*Translation*]

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: This is an issue I care deeply about.

I was actually the staffer who drafted the original motion calling for this. We were the third party at the time, and we wanted to see the responses to Order Paper questions made orders for returns.

Essentially, we were trying to obtain scanned documents such as Excel tables.

The issue was whether Parliament was equipped to receive electronic documents or only paper copies.

Mr. Pierre Rodrigue: Currently, written questions are all submitted in hard copy, and the process is pretty straightforward. Using the Order Paper and Notice Paper, the Privy Council usually forwards written questions to the appropriate departments or agencies, which come back to us with paper documents, sent by courier, that are eventually tabled in the House.

As for a system with the capacity to do that electronically, we already have the electronic petitions system, which could be used.

Unfortunately, the current system needs some work because there are still a few obstacles, even when an electronic copy is sent by email, as is currently the case with electronic petitions. The email comes in with a PDF document attached and it's posted on the website.

There's an accessibility issue because it's not fully accessible. We need our various systems to communicate with one another so we can send the data and create a fully accessible document. That's what we hope to do as part of the electronic petitions project, while including paper-based petitions. At some point, we'll have to find a solution for questions.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Let's say someone shows up at your office with a USB stick containing original responses in an Excel or Word document. Are you able to accept those answers under the current rules?

Mr. Pierre Rodrigue: It's funny you should ask because, just this morning, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs tabled a report on that very subject. It hasn't been concurred in yet, but, in the report, the committee recommends that it be possible to file documents electronically. I imagine the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons would simply say that a document was deemed tabled and would eventually be posted online.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Have you already discussed it with government officials to see if it's something they would be interested in?

Mr. Pierre Rodrigue: I am meeting with my colleagues from the U.K. in two weeks to discuss the matter, so we shall see.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): We will now move on to Ms. Quach.

•(1215)

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Thank you, Madam Joint Chair.

My questions are along the same lines as Mr. Graham's.

The problem, as I understand it, is that documents are converted to PDF files, so they can't be manipulated in the same way that Word or Excel files can. You just said that you would be looking into the issue.

There is supposed to be a pilot project involving electronic petitions. Could that also apply to ministerial responses? Is the project going well?

Mr. Pierre Rodrigue: When the clerk appeared before the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding the pilot project, he mentioned incorporating paper-based petitions into the electronic system. That's precisely what the Privy Council plans to do.

Now we need to find an accessibility solution for written questions before we can go any farther. That's where we are now.

There is indeed a pilot project, and we will try to use it.

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: You're meeting with your colleagues from the U.K. Are you aware of other parliaments that make their publications available to everyone? If so, do you know how they go about it?

Mr. Pierre Rodrigue: No. I must confess that the discussions around accessibility are still quite preliminary. It's really a technology challenge. We have to see whether a solution is out there to help us make the publications available. If not, we'll have to figure out what to do in the meantime as we look for a solution. We'll be talking with the people at the Treasury Board Secretariat, to be sure, because I think they can help us with the process.

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: The biggest problem is converting all the documents. Is that right?

I don't know much about it, and it mustn't be easy if it's not already done, but could the documents be sent in their original format and converted to PDF by the Library of Parliament?

Mr. Pierre Rodrigue: As I mentioned, written questions can be very lengthy. They can be hundreds of pages long and include graphics, images and tables. That's the problem.

Unfortunately, documents often come in the same day they are tabled, so it's impossible for us to make the necessary adjustments to make them accessible.

I think what the bill and the Privy Council are proposing is a system that would make documents accessible from the moment they are created. Doing the work to make them accessible prior to their being posted is almost akin to rebuilding the whole document, which we aren't able to do, unfortunately.

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: The rule requiring that documents be received the day they are tabled is a long-standing one. Is it something that could easily be changed? Is confidentiality a factor? In terms of the date on which documents must be received, what issues come into play?

Mr. Pierre Rodrigue: It's a rule that's long been established. I can't comment on that.

Clearly, if multiple departments and agencies have to prepare answers to written questions, it's a big job for the Privy Council to coordinate all that. I don't know whether it's possible to do it more quickly or in a more accessible format.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Thank you.

Senator Duffy, over to you.

[English]

Hon. Michael Duffy: My questions are really all supplementary to the ones that my colleagues have just raised.

My question is, how does the rest of government operate? The Canadian government is a big operation and they move tons of data around among various departments. Surely we're not in the age of taking a PDF and trying to take it apart and so on.

It's astounding to me that in the current age, this problem wasn't solved long ago, considering the various needs of various departments, not just Parliament.

Mr. Pierre Rodrigue: Senator, as an employee of the House administration, I certainly can't answer on behalf of the government. I'm not in a position to do that.

What I can say is that we have started discussions with the Privy Council as well as the Treasury Board Secretariat. They are looking into it. There's legislation before committee right now. I presume they're working on the strategy, its standards, and eventually maybe even regulations. I don't know.

That's all I can say at the moment on that.

Hon. Michael Duffy: Thank you.

• (1220)

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Mr. Van Kesteren.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: Thank you, Chair.

Along the senator's line of questions, and I want to go back to my colleague from the NDP who has stated it as well, are we taking steps to possibly look at other jurisdictions?

In every committee I've served on, that was always one of my first questions: What other jurisdictions have these challenges?

Mr. Rodrigue, you have answered some of that, but I'm just curious. If we are taking steps to possibly go, I would think Great Britain would be a prime example, the first one to come to mind. Are we taking steps to possibly see what they're doing?

Mr. Pierre Rodrigue: I'm meeting with my colleagues from the U.K. in a week or two, and I'll certainly be asking those questions to see what their challenges were and whether any solutions were brought forward. At the moment, I haven't had those discussions with them.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: Not yet. Okay.

I'm interested and will ask legal counsel about human rights complaints. I suppose it's a real possibility. Obviously, that hasn't happened yet.

What would happen if we were to receive a human rights complaint currently?

Mr. Philippe Dufresne: It does happen. There are human rights complaints filed from time to time, and they are dealt with. They are responded to.

The human rights process works in such a way that, at the initial stages, there's an attempt to resolve the matter. Those steps are taken. We have not had a complaint that has gone on to decision, but the issues are there, and the human rights principles, both in the Canadian Human Rights Act and in proposed Bill C-81, really go to the efforts that are made at the front end and at the back end to ensure the full participation of persons with disabilities in society.

It's obviously something that is taken very seriously by the House of Commons, the House of Commons administration and the government as well.

It is an area where there is a need for collaboration between the two institutions to ensure that the best way is found to ensure accessibility.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: I'm not quite sure I understand exactly what you're saying.

Are you suggesting that we have had human rights complaints but the response has been such that they've accepted that we don't have those capabilities yet, or could we possibly see a day where somebody who is, let's say, visually impaired would say, "That's not good enough; I expect to have this"?

Have we gotten to that point yet? If we did, what would we do?

Mr. Philippe Dufresne: What we want to do is avoid a situation where someone would file a complaint saying that it is not accessible enough and that they would be able to show that we haven't done enough as an institution.

In those types of situations, the processes will look at what the institution did. What efforts did it make? Did it turn its mind to accessibility? Did it explore the necessary solutions? Did it work with the partners to ensure a solution?

That is why, as my colleague is saying, we are looking at all those things when we make information available on our websites: Is it accessible? Is it accessible in a timely manner? If there are challenges to that accessibility, do we have the tools to get it done? If we don't, and this is one instance where the timeliness of the publication is a challenge, are we working with our partners in the government asking them to make those documents accessible at source so that when we receive them we're able to immediately publish in a way that is fully accessible?

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: Thank you.

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Mr. Iacono, you may go ahead.

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Joint Chair.

I know complaints are confidential, but could you shed some light on the types of complaints you receive? Are they issues that keep coming up? Do they involve the same thing? Do they all fit in a particular category? What steps have been taken to date to address the complaints? Have sound measures been put in place? Do you plan to take further action? Lastly, how can we help you address complaints properly?

• (1225)

Mr. Philippe Dufresne: I would say that measures have been taken to make documents that committees post on the Internet more accessible.

We've also let people know that the documents will be made available and that any problems with accessibility have to be reported to the clerks immediately. That way, the proper steps are taken to follow up, and we can fix problems, anticipate needs and make sure the information provided is accessible to persons with disabilities.

Mr. Pierre Rodrigue: Just to follow up on what my colleague said, I would add that, as of a few months ago, the House Administration began paying a bit more attention to the issue. We had some presentations. We are trying to raise awareness around accessibility. The managers of the various services attended presentations. We examined the publication process, and we identified problems, so we are in the midst of working on a training program to build expertise within the House. In fact, we'll be making a presentation to the diversity council in a week or two. It's an issue we are really working on.

As soon as Bill C-81 was introduced, we created an accessible version in Word and we even made the bill available in braille. That was the first time we did that, so we are beginning to take the right steps.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Very good.

The job of scanning parliamentary returns is a colossal one. Given the volume of documents, how can we do our part to help harmonize the process?

Mr. Pierre Rodrigue: That's not an easy question to answer. I almost want to say that you should keep asking about it, perhaps even invite us back for a progress report on where we are in our discussions with the departments. That might be a good idea. If not, you could give us some time to talk to the people we need to and look for the answers.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Thank you.

Mr. Graham, it is your turn.

[*English*]

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: This morning I was at the Standing Joint Committee on the Scrutiny of Regulations. I was unable to do both of these committees. At that committee, we dealt with things going back to 1994 that haven't been resolved yet.

This motion was passed in May 2014. I'm wondering if you can tell us if anything has been published to the general public of sessional papers or, because of accessibility issues, that has not happened at all, and we're still studying for the future.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Rodrigue: No. Parliamentary returns are currently broken down into 19 categories. Electronic petitions and parliamentary returns are posted on the website. Unfortunately, that represents only about 11.5% of parliamentary returns tied to petitions. For written questions, if the answer is simple and similar to what's provided for the petitions, it is published in the Debates of the House of Commons. The answer is provided and it's posted. The answers to questions made orders for returns are the problematic ones. They represent about 75% of responses to written questions. Unfortunately, they are not made available.

The other thing to keep in mind is that some of those documents are already available on departmental websites. We tend to focus our energy on those that are not available and put those on our site. We don't want to duplicate efforts and add documents that are already available elsewhere, at least for right now. Perhaps we should think about having a centralized website for all documents tabled in the House. We aren't there yet, however. Suffice it to say, numerous documents are nevertheless available on the websites of federal organizations. The Privy Council, for instance, publishes order in council appointments. Treasury Board posts documents related to the estimates. People can find all kinds of documents on various federal sites. The Library of Parliament makes a lot of information available, as well.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Responses to written questions are already available to us on the Library of Parliament's internal site, as you mentioned in your opening remarks. Have you considered making that site available to the public? Is there a reason why it can't be done?

Mr. Pierre Rodrigue: It's a matter of accessibility.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: So it all boils down to accessibility. There is no statutory or regulatory reason why it wouldn't be possible. Is that correct? It has to do with accessibility.

• (1230)

Mr. Pierre Rodrigue: Yes, exactly. The risk associated with making it available to the public is a consideration.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Are there any further questions?

Mr. Lauzon, you may go ahead.

[*English*]

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Thank you very much.

Gentlemen, it's good to see you here.

Pierre, you mentioned that the answers to the Order Paper questions are published in house.

Mr. Pierre Rodrigue: They are published in the Debates, in Hansard. It would be some of them, about 25% of them. Those are the simple ones, those that are not made orders for return.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Why only 25%?

Mr. Pierre Rodrigue: Those that are made orders for return are the long ones, complex ones and technical ones. Those are the ones that do present challenges in terms of accessibility. The other ones are shorter and are usually very similar to what you would get in terms of a response for a petition: a page or a page and a half. Those are published in the Debates every day, as soon as they're tabled.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: The orders for return are published internally but not externally.

Mr. Pierre Rodrigue: Exactly, by the Library of Parliament.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Why is that?

Mr. Pierre Rodrigue: Again, it's the whole issue of accessibility. If we do publish those on a public website, we risk having complaints filed through the Canadian Human Rights Commission, so we're being careful. We're trying to find a solution, and we're trying to make them accessible.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: How often do complaints happen?

Mr. Philippe Dufresne: Well, I think that we are looking to prevent complaints.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Are you trying to be more Catholic than the Pope?

Mr. Philippe Dufresne: Well, I think that we—

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Seriously, for the greater good, would it not make sense to maybe take a chance and see what happens?

Mr. Pierre Rodrigue: It's a balancing act. We want to be as transparent as we can be, and we want to make them accessible.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: If you keep it inside, it's not transparent.

Mr. Pierre Rodrigue: At the moment, one of the options we're looking at is if we cannot find a technical solution to make them accessible on the public website, what do we do in the meantime. That's the discussion we're having right now.

One solution could be to actually publish them as is with the caveat that those who do request them to be accessible would be provided with an accessible version by a certain deadline, but we're not there yet.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Who can give you the authority to do that tomorrow? I guess what I'm saying is let's just get it done. This is—

A voice: Years.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Yes, years. It's not rocket science. Just get it done. If you need authority from whomever, let's see if we can't get that authority.

Who can make this work? Who told you that you can't do it? Let's put it that way.

Mr. Pierre Rodrigue: No one told us that we couldn't. We're being—

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Let's do it and get spanked later.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Seriously, to be honest with you, we should get that out to the public.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: We need a revolution, everybody.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Yes, there is a resolution on the floor, as a matter of fact.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: A revolution.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: A revolution.

Seriously, it shouldn't be too complicated to just get that out there. I mean, son of a gun....

Who can make it work?

Mr. Philippe Dufresne: All I can say is that so far we've been flagging those concerns in terms of accessibility, ensuring that we

explore all the solutions to comply with those principles. If a decision is made to move forward, I suppose the House administration will manage that risk in that situation.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: It's a decision by whom to move forward? Who needs to make that decision? Is it this committee?

Mr. Philippe Dufresne: We're here before this committee.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: If you get direction from this committee, would this give you the authority to do that?

Mr. Philippe Dufresne: I think that if there's a resolution from this committee, we would consider the impact and the next steps.

• (1235)

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Wasn't there one in 2014?

Mr. Guy Lauzon: As the chair said, I think there was one in 2014.

Mr. Pierre Rodrigue: I don't have the text in front of me. I think it was an instruction to the Library of Parliament to make those available, as I recall.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: I'd be willing to make a resolution. If we can break the logjam and solve a four-year-old problem, I think we should.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Madam Chair, I have the resolution in front of me here if you want me to read it. I wrote it in 2014.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Go ahead then.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: There's tremendous pleasure in having been a staffer who can now talk about his motion five years later at committee.

What we passed in 2014, I think, gives them the mandate, and that's why I'm sort of surprised that four and a half years later we're here, but I understand the accessibility issues.

The motion, as amended at the committee, reads:

That, whereas the Library of Parliament already scans Sessional Papers which are tabled in response to Order Paper Questions in the House of Commons, and makes the scanned copies available on the Parliamentary Intranet, that the Library of Parliament provide unfettered access for all Canadians to these same documents on the public internet site, and that such access be provided, from the beginning of the 40th Parliament and future scanned Sessional Papers, as soon as practicable.

We're in the 42nd Parliament now. I think that mandate is fairly clear.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Yes.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): *[Inaudible—Editor]*

Your time was up, but I think we're on to the resolution now.

Mr. Van Kesteren.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: Thank you.

We have the ball rolling here. I don't want to break the continuity. If we want to continue on with this motion, I can bring my other issue up in a minute.

If we want to continue on with this resolution, we can do that first. I have something else I wanted to suggest.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Okay.

Senator Duffy had a supplementary, and then I'll come back to you.

Hon. Michael Duffy: We all take the question of accessibility very seriously. We all know constituents who have problems, and we should never forget them. Has the Library of Parliament engaged with any of the stakeholder groups on the accessibility side to work with them so they understand we're making a sincere effort to resolve this issue?

Wouldn't that kind of outreach pave the way in terms of our goodwill, so that if we did follow the suggestions of the motion, it would be with the understanding that we would communicate to these groups that we are doing this on an interim basis while we work on a permanent solution? Has that outreach been done? Have we spoken to any of these accessibility groups?

Mr. Pierre Rodrigue: I can't speak on behalf of the library. I don't know if they did have those discussions. We didn't.

I know there's a process in place in the act that will provide for consultations. We're certainly committed to doing that on behalf of the House administration. We want to make those documents as accessible as we can, while at the same time trying to make them available as soon as possible.

Hon. Michael Duffy: It seems to me that, if we start a dialogue with those groups, we would lower the temperature and would increase the understanding on their part that we want to be their partners in this, and that it would be a step-by-step process.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Thank you.

Mr. Van Kesteren.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: I'm going to go off in a different direction, only because I think we recognize we have a problem.

I want to go back to what I suggested first. There must be other jurisdictions that are faced with this. Now, having said that, it would be interesting to find out if this committee has ever travelled. If it hasn't, we should possibly send a letter out. We know, for instance, Great Britain and Australia, those countries with a similar parliamentary system, must have. We should tell them what our problem is, and ask how they've dealt with it. If there's a workable solution, then we can send a task force out and come back and report and get this mess cleaned up.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Are there any comments?

Phil.

Mr. Philippe Dufresne: The only thing I would want to suggest on the issue of reporting and to the earlier question about a motion of this committee being implemented by the House of Commons administration, I would flag the possibility that the report could be made to the House, and the House make a decision on this, which is the normal course of committee recommendations. I just wanted to bring that clarification and leave it at that.

• (1240)

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Thank you.

Madame Quach.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Thank you.

Actually, you have sort of answered my question.

To help you move in this direction, you said that one solution would be to give you time to meet and then invite you back to provide us with a progress report.

Who makes the decision and gives the green light, ultimately, to move in the direction of digitization? Is it the Privy Council Office? Do you have to meet with its members? If not, who are the people with whom you have to negotiate? Who are those people?

Is there a timeline and do you have meetings already planned? Do we have to invite you back in two, three or six months?

Mr. Pierre Rodrigue: We are currently talking to the Privy Council, but it has told us that it does not have the authority to impose guidelines on individual departments. That's the Treasury Board Secretariat's job. So we contacted the Secretariat, but we're really only in the preliminary discussions. In the coming days and weeks, we will certainly meet with them and try to find some solutions. That being said, this is a collaboration, not a negotiation. It's really a collaboration, and we can certainly talk to you again about the outcome of the discussions.

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Is there a timeline?

Mr. Pierre Rodrigue: We would like, as much as possible, to have a system in place at the beginning of the next Parliament. That is our objective.

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Okay. So it won't happen until 2019 or 2020.

Mr. Pierre Rodrigue: Exactly. We need a major development effort to achieve this.

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Do you have the tools you need? We were talking about when it would be possible to obtain the documents in advance. There are electronic issues. Are there any tools you don't have at the moment? Is it expensive to obtain them, to have the appropriate resources and expertise in place to deploy them? What's the stumbling block?

Mr. Pierre Rodrigue: We really need to find the tool that would allow us to do this, but it seems to be a problem. Based on the initial discussions we have had, there is really no tool right now that would allow us to achieve the result we are looking for.

[*English*]

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Senator Duffy, do you have any more questions?

Hon. Michael Duffy: Madam Chair, I wonder if we as a committee should invite people like the Council of Canadians with Disabilities who on October 30 wrote to Minister Qualtrough about Bill C-81, which is the disabilities act.

Should we invite them to come here to help us understand the need for this ability in our documentation? Maybe we could begin to forge a partnership there that we can get this thing moving. It's been years, as our colleagues have said. It seems to me to be, frankly, a bit strange that on something this important we haven't had some meetings with the disability community.

Could I make it a motion or an amendment?

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): I would like to wait until the end, once we have thanked our witnesses, and then we can take this back among ourselves, but I have noted it. There are two items that we are going to be speaking on at that time.

Thank you.

Mr. Graham. No?

Ms. Jordan, you are next.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: Madam Chair, although I totally appreciate where my colleague Mr. Lauzon is coming from with regard to this taking a while and let's just get it done, I do have concerns about just doing something and then asking for forgiveness later.

Can you tell me what it would look like if we do have a human rights challenge? Are we talking about class action lawsuits, undoing work that we've been working on for five years and going back to square one?

I'd like to know those things beforehand because they may play into a decision that's made.

Mr. Philippe Dufresne: In the context of a human rights complaint, the Canadian Human Rights Act provides the right to full participation in Canadian society. If there is a complaint filed, it is looked at, responded to, and we try to resolve it. If it's a complaint where we would clearly have not met the human rights obligations, this can lead to orders—financial orders, remedial orders. That's in the context of the Canadian Human Rights Act process.

In the context of proposed Bill C-81, which is not adopted, not in force, it contemplates a proactive model—inspections, recommendations, progress reports and so on. At the end of the day these also are outcomes where Parliament or the House would be found not to have complied with fundamental quasi-constitutional human rights legislation.

This is why we're being very cautious about this and taking this very seriously, given the importance of the rights at issue and the importance of this institution to Canadians, and to Canadians with disabilities.

• (1245)

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: I think it would be inappropriate for the Government of Canada to go against their own Canadian Human Rights Act. If we have an act in place for a reason, to knowingly go against it, to ask for forgiveness later would be totally against what I think the Government of Canada should be doing.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Mr. Eglinski.

Mr. Jim Eglinski: Madam Chair, this is only my second meeting here, so I'm going to play a bit on the ignorant side.

I'm having a little difficulty here on your paragraph, "In the last Parliament, the 33rd Report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs recommending the establishment of an electronic petition system was concurred in by the House and the solution was launched in December 2015."

I take it that is the motion that Mr. Graham worked on as a staffer at the time, and was presented; it's there. Am I wrong?

Mr. Pierre Rodrigue: No, the origin of the system was a private member's motion that was moved by Mr. Stewart.

Mr. Jim Eglinski: Regardless, we're looking at 2015, and we're now looking at 2018. We're some three years into the process, and it doesn't appear that we've gone anywhere with it. You're saying we're about to meet with our British counterparts.

My colleague here says he'd like to rush it, and my colleague across says we should use a little caution, but we seem to be using a lot of caution in some of your wording here and there, Mr. Dufresne. It's almost as if we're not wanting to make decisions because there may be some complications or there may be....

My God, it's been four years to get this process going and we're nowhere. We're not much further ahead than when David spent the better part of a couple of weeks drafting this. It is complicated, I agree, but it sounds like some reports I was hearing in another committee where a whole bunch of departments weren't doing anything because they didn't want to step on anybody's toes, and nothing was getting done.

How long do you think it will take? I guess it's just as simple as that. How long do we keep putting it off? It's been four years now for something that's not that complicated, I don't think.

It's time for it.

Mr. Pierre Rodrigue: I'd like to say we could do this tomorrow, Mr. Eglinski.

As I mentioned to Mr. Lauzon, in the next few weeks we want to determine if there is a way to make it accessible. If there is not, we will be asking ourselves what we do in the meantime and if there is an option we could take as a transition before we can make them accessible. That would probably be to put them on a public website as is, provided of course that those who request it can have an accessible version within a certain deadline.

We still need to have discussions on that with the government to see if they would be willing to provide it. We don't own the document. We don't produce the content. We're not the authors of the content. We get them at the last minute before they are tabled, so we need the calibration with the departments.

[*Translation*]

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Mr. Graham, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: I need clarity to follow up on Ms. Jordan's question. Are we already vulnerable to human rights complaints, given that these documents are already accessible within the Hill structure for the 4,000 employees who work here?

•(1250)

Mr. Philippe Dufresne: I think being accessible to people working here is a possibility. The issues can come up in that context, but the vulnerability is greater if you make it available to the general public.

Perhaps there are things we're able to do internally more quickly. It's a case-by-case situation, but certainly the more broadly it is made available, the more individuals can find they lack access to it on the basis of their disability.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: What's your role versus that of Parliament? Normally you'd be with us at PROC rather than here. What's your role versus the Library of Parliament's role on this file?

Mr. Philippe Dufresne: My role on this file is as the law clerk to the House of Commons, providing legal advice and support to the House administration that is managing the implementation of these measures.

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion) Mr. Lauzon, the floor is yours.

[English]

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Philippe, I think I asked earlier how many complaints you have received in the last three years.

Mr. Philippe Dufresne: I would have to get back to the committee.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Approximately, are there hundreds or dozens or a handful?

Mr. Philippe Dufresne: I would hesitate to give a number but we're not talking about hundreds. I think it's more in the nature.... It depends on what you're talking about in terms of human rights complaints, as well.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: The thing that you're so worried about, the human rights cases that you're so worried about, how many of those have you had to deal with in the last three years, since 2015?

Mr. Philippe Dufresne: We haven't had to deal with many.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Do you have a ballpark figure? Is it two or 42?

Mr. Philippe Dufresne: I would say it's less than 10, and—

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Have they been resolved?

Mr. Philippe Dufresne: They've been resolved.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: If we'd have had this in place three years ago, you'd still maybe have had those same 10 or fewer and they'd have been resolved, okay?

The other question that I have is I was told that seriously Parliament is exempt from being sued.

Mr. Philippe Dufresne: Parliament has some immunities in terms of parliamentary privilege. That's clear. In the Parliament of Canada Act there is protection for parliamentary publications, but these issues aren't always 100%. There are arguments made in cases as to does this fall inside or outside...so that is something that is managed, as well. Even if you've fallen under parliamentary privilege, there may be an argument that you're still, in fact, not complying with those principles.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: We keep talking in “maybes” and “possibly”.

It seems to me that we probably should go forward with this. Isn't it worth, for the common good, to take the possibility that in the next three years we might get a handful of complaints that will probably get resolved? In the final analysis it won't cost the government anything, and we'll have all these people who got all this information. What's the matter with that?

Mr. Philippe Dufresne: All I can say is that, ultimately, I suppose it would be a decision for this committee in terms of a recommendation, and for the House, ultimately, as to the way to go. Certainly, in terms of complaints processes, as I've indicated before, those can be dealt with, addressed, and there's an outcome.

What I said at the outset is that this legislation, the Canadian Human Rights Act and proposed Bill C-81, set out the principle that all Canadians should be able to fully participate in society, that things should be made accessible by design and that all efforts ought to be made to provide that full accessibility. That's the context in which we're giving—

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Right now, hardly anybody has access. We're going in the wrong direction. We can't keep resisting this. We have to move forward, and I would like to suggest that this committee make a motion that we recommend to Parliament that we proceed with this within 30 days. Let's get it done.

I don't know how somebody can maybe break that.

•(1255)

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Within 30 days might be a little bit.... In any case, we will—

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Okay, 45 days.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): We will discuss it. As I said, it's on my paper. You still have about a minute.

You're good?

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Yes, thank you.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Madam Jordan.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: Madam Chair, this isn't even my committee, but I find this fascinating.

A voice: So do I.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: I'm really struggling. I understand that you want this done, but for us to knowingly go against the Canadian Human Rights Act because we as Parliament can't be sued, I really struggle with this. That's just a comment because—

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Now we're denying everyone.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: We're not because the information is available, to my understanding, it's just not available in an easily accessed format. It's a scan, so it is available. Sorry, that is correct is that not? Is the information available to everyone? What about people with accessibility issues now? How do they receive the information now if they ask?

Mr. Pierre Rodrigue: We would provide them with a paper copy. That's all we have at the moment, or a scanned version.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: You couldn't give a number, in terms of five or 20 or hundreds.

Does it matter?

Mr. Philippe Dufresne: Well, I'm not the person making the ultimate decision on how to move forward, but what I've stated is that this is fundamental quasi-human rights, quasi-constitutional legislation. I'm not sure that it's the number of violations. If there is a violation, you can have one that's a serious one. You can have many that are small ones.

However, this is legislation that has been found to be quasi-constitutional by the Supreme Court of Canada. It's something that my office looks at very carefully, in terms of advising and ensuring compliance.

A voice: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Not yet.

I am going to ask questions, if I may.

[*Translation*]

I have two questions for you.

We are still looking at what the government must do to make those documents accessible. Should the documents be published in their entirety in their own format or are they converted to a format accessible on the Internet?

Mr. Pierre Rodrigue: That's exactly what we're studying. The proposed system for electronic and paper petitions is in XML, which would allow us to transfer data and generate a fully accessible document.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Okay.

My second question is this. You always consider the government side. Do you also consider the users' side to see whether, with the equipment at their disposal, they can enlarge the documents in their current format, without having to adjust them in HTML?

Could we access the documents and see them simply by zooming in? I'm not sure whether you've studied this from the users' perspective and everything that's accessible to them.

Mr. Pierre Rodrigue: I'm not an expert in technology, but I can say that's precisely why we prepared a Word version of Bill C-81. This makes it possible to make the font bigger.

I think we can do this with the tools currently available. It's not fully accessible, but we're improving and that's what we're moving towards.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Okay, thank you.

Are there any other questions?

Otherwise, I would like to thank Mr. Dufresne and Mr. Rodrigue.

It was not easy for you, because I don't think you really have all the answers to the questions you are asked. We still thank you for doing the exercise. Have a good afternoon.

[*English*]

We will suspend for a few minutes.

•(1255)

(Pause)

•(1300)

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): All right, there are a few options that we can look at here.

The first would be to propose that the analysts prepare a report and, in that report, a report that would be tabled in the House of Commons, we could find recommendations as to moving forward on the work that needs to be done for the accessibility issue. That's one proposition or solution. The other one is coming forward with a proper resolution which would be put into the report, and that would be tabled in the House of Commons and the Senate.

Mr. Lauzon.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: They already have the authority to act on this, right?

Do we need another resolution to give the direction, or is the other resolution acceptable? Maybe we want to suggest that they act on it rather than having a whole new resolution. What's the proper way to proceed?

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): —or put that resolution back in the report.

Was that resolution tabled at some point?

A voice: Not in the House.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: I think Senator Duffy's suggestion about having some of the disabled groups appear here is a good thing. Maybe we want to accommodate them, as to the best of our abilities under our current whatever we have.

I think it is important that we get moving on this seriously. I appreciate it, but I think they're being overly cautious, to be quite frank.

•(1305)

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): We'll move to Madam Quach and then Mr. Graham.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: I don't know if this is the right way to go. I understand and agree that, at the moment, no one has access to the documents. However, as I understand it, the Library receives documents at the last minute in PDF, which is not an electronic format.

So it seems to me that the most logical way to help the Library people publish all these documents would be for them to be able to receive documents from the various departments in electronic form as they go along. That seems to me to be a much more logical and reasonable solution.

Mr. Rodrigue also said that they do not have the tool they need to convert all documents in a consistent way. If that tool does not exist, it is not going to be invented in a month or so. If they do not have it, it would at least help them if all departments were required to send their documents in electronic format as they go along and not on the day they are sent, which is too difficult.

Let us put ourselves in their shoes: even if they were forced to do it in 30 days, it could not be done.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: We can agree.

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Really? That's great.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Mr. Graham, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: I have an idea for a motion to see what the feeling of the room would be. It's not an exact framing, but I'll put it up for discussion here:

That the Committee reiterate its desire, expressed on Thursday, May 15, 2014, to have sessional papers available in electronic form to the general public within a reasonable timeframe, while considering accessibility issues, and that an update be provided on progress and timelines toward this goal no later than the end of the current fiscal year.

Does that sound reasonable?

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Mr. Van Kesteren.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: Here's my only problem. I know that I don't think I'll get too much support for travelling. I was saying it somewhat in jest.

However, I'm a car dealer. This is like when somebody has a problem with their car. They go to a mechanic and ask the mechanic to fix it. I'm not so convinced that the mechanics have the diagnostics. I think what we need to do is ask them to reply.

I don't think we had a clear response. Do you have the tools to do this?

A voice: No.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: We have to set out to find those tools.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Your suggestion would give them the tools. They'll transfer it in electronic form. Then they can—

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Could you please finish?

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: At this point, I really think we'd be further ahead to instruct our analysts, clerks or whoever to send a letter out to other jurisdictions and say, "We have this problem. Do you have the same problem and if you do, how are you dealing with it?"

If nobody has a solution, then we're going to have to dig something up. You can tell somebody to fix this thing. If they can't fix it, you can talk until you're blue in the face, but it's not going to happen. We'll be here in another four years.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Senator Duffy.

Hon. Michael Duffy: Madam Chair, I don't believe for a minute that there doesn't exist.... If we can put a man on the moon, somewhere there is a technological answer. Our witnesses today said that they were reaching out to Britain and so on. I am a little surprised that it's taken four years to do that.

I think what we're missing is some political will somewhere in the bureaucracy. People aren't taking this seriously. I think it's important that we show Parliament that there is public demand and concern.

I would like to amend my colleague's motion by adding a phrase or a clause that would suggest that this committee invite representatives from the Council of Canadians with Disabilities to appear here to tell us about the need that exists. We are, in effect, responding, in our report to Parliament, to a public demand for access to these documents and that the status quo not continue to be acceptable. It is not some vanity thing on the part of MPs but in fact is a real public need.

I think if we called on these people, especially considering the accessible Canada act which is now before Parliament, that would give us some added momentum, perhaps. It would only take one meeting. It wouldn't be a long delay. We wouldn't have to have a whole lot of hearings. It would provide us with some oomph to get this paid attention to, because it certainly hasn't been followed up on since our colleague wrote the initial motion.

• (1310)

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Senator Duffy, what we could do, instead of amending Mr. Graham's motion, is have a motion that is specific to your request.

Hon. Michael Duffy: I am in the capable hands of the chair.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): We could put that in the report.

The next person to speak is Mr. Graham.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: I was just going to say that I support what you want to do, but I think it's premature.

In my motion, I say, "considering accessibility issues". I think it is their responsibility to consider those issues. In the response we want by the end of the fiscal year, they have to have considered them, because we have timelines for getting this done. They are in the motion. If they don't give us a satisfactory answer, that is the time to start making more noise. It's already taken four and a half years. Two more months isn't going to kill us. I want this done properly as well as quickly.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Madam Jordan.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: Mr. Graham may have already answered my question. Is it this committee's role to call witnesses, or would it be up to the people who testified today to actually do the research on accessibility? That's a question I have.

I think if the motion says that they have to do this, it would be their responsibility to actually call those witnesses themselves or talk to them and have those discussions and consultations.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Okay, thank you.

Madame Quach.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: I was wondering whether Mr. Graham would accept an addition to his motion, that we also require departments to provide the Library of Parliament with answers, in electronic format, to written questions or any questions that are asked. I think the deadline is the end of the fiscal year. Can we add that? If not, can we add it as a report that we could table in the House of Commons?

The lawyer said that we could report to the House of Commons and ask for a response. That would be another possible solution. Mr. Rodrigue said that they do not have the conversion tool that can standardize all formats of electronic documents. Could a computer expert come and explain to us what tools parliamentarians could have for their work in the House of Commons? I assume there is such a thing. Obviously, we don't look like computer experts. Could someone come and explain to us how these things work and where the House could find those tools?

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Mr. Ouellette, you have the floor.

[English]

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette (Winnipeg Centre, Lib.): I agree with Mr. Graham that we need to do things right, but I also am not convinced that the Library of Parliament or the officials will be able to put in place a user-friendly format. It's great to have everything online, but if it's not user-friendly to the public, what's the point of having stuff online? If you can't research and do your own research easily, then there's no point to even do anything related to it. Part of the issue is related to how the PDFs are done.

I'd also like to contend that it's not just consideration of accessibility issues; I think they must consider accessibility issues. I think we have to be clear in our directives, because it's been four years. With consideration, I think we're using fairly diplomatic language. I think it's time. I think we've moved beyond that.

• (1315)

[Translation]

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Mr. Lauzon, you have the floor.

[English]

Mr. Guy Lauzon: I like Senator Duffy's approach more than what David said, and I'll tell you why.

We gave them this four and half years ago, and what's happened? I think it's going to be four and half years, and we're still going to be talking about it if we wait for them to get these groups in.

Why don't we take a meeting, or part of meeting at least, and have these groups in? We'll get the real goods from them, and then we can give clear direction as to what they should be doing.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): I'm going to take this a bit further.

I am told there is a committee of the House that is looking at this. It's PROC. What I'm suggesting here is that, if we do table a report in the Senate and the House of Commons, we ask PROC to give us an update of where they are on this, because you don't necessarily want to duplicate the work. I understand we want to hear witnesses, but we should ask at what stage that project is with PROC. From there, we would have the next step to say that they're not moving ahead with this, so we will start moving ahead, pushing for witnesses and looking at different options so this can move forward.

It can be done through letters to PROC signed by the co-chairs. We could do both. We could send a letter and we could have a report.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: In the meantime, maybe we could invite the group tentatively, because time is passing. We're coming to the end

of the year. Let's get them on the schedule in a couple of weeks, maybe, and that will give you a chance to hear back from PROC.

Would that work time-wise? The clerks don't look too confident that might work. Will it?

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): We'll see.

Mr. Graham.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: I was going to suggest that I take my motion that expresses our intention to continue as well as send a letter to PROC—where I sit also, not surprisingly—to figure out how to advance on this.

Nothing will happen later than next March. That's the latest things can happen. That's the deadline we're giving them. If stuff happens earlier, that's even better.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Okay, but now you're saying that we would be sending the letter, and in the letter your motion would be...?

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: The motion is to express our intention to the library and the clerks that we want this done. I think that's the intention of us all, that we want this done. Tell me if I'm wrong.

The letter is to ask what the status is, as you were discussing.

I don't know exactly what your question is, so I can't answer right now.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): I just want to get this right.

Do you want the letter to the library?

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: The motion passed here. The motion, as I wrote it and sent it to your clerk, doesn't say to whom. It says we want this to happen, and we want an update. We can figure out whom that update is going to come from, but we want the update.

I think accessibility issues are what you wanted to ask PROC about. The letter to PROC and the motion don't have to be the same thing. You can send a letter to PROC as well as pass the motion expressing our intentions.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Got it.

[Translation]

Mr. Eglinski, you have the floor.

[English]

Mr. Jim Eglinski: I would like to make a motion that we adopt his motion now, because we're going to need it to do the letter.

I make the motion that we adopt the motion as prepared by David Graham and get it on the floor so it's here.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Okay. We'll do it in two steps.

Are we in favour of Mr. Graham's motion?

(Motion agreed to [See Minutes of Proceedings])

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Are we in agreement with Mr. Eglinski's motion?

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: His motion was to do my motion and to do what I said in it.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Jim Eglinski: It was to get his motion moved and we would vote on it.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Okay. So we got yes to both.

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

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Thank you, Jim. I appreciate it.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Now we'll work with the letter. Do we agree to send the letter to PROC?

• (1320)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: I agree with the letter. I would just like to know whether we should set a deadline for a response. If we want this to be done before the end of the fiscal year, they would have to respond beforehand, so that we can evaluate their answer.

Could it be before the end of November, or, if not, at the end of the year?

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Is the end of the year December 31 or March 31?

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Perhaps it would have to be before Parliament rises. Parliament is supposed to adjourn around December 15.

We can ask for it before the House adjourns.

The Joint Clerk (Mr. Paul Cardegna): The last sitting day in the House of Commons is December 14.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): December 14. We can ask for that. We still had to look at Senator Duffy's motion.

[*English*]

The Joint Clerk (Mr. Paul Cardegna): On behalf of the co-chair, is there agreement amongst the committee for Senator Duffy's motion to invite representatives of the Council of Canadians with Disabilities to appear as part of the study?

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: I'm not ready for that one yet, only because I think it's the next step and we're not quite there yet. I agree with the principle, but I think we're one step away from that.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Okay. Will we put that in the report, then, so that we don't forget it?

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Don't forget that it is our intention to do this if we're not seeing real action. We will start bringing every witness until it gets fixed, but I think we're one step away from that. We don't need to bring that sledgehammer down quite yet.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): All right.

What do we put in the report? If that's not in the report, what do we put in the report?

Yes, sir.

Hon. Michael Duffy: Do we need a report?

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): That's the question I'm asking now.

Mr. Jim Eglinski: Madam Chair, why can't we have it in there and just stipulate that we will not use this if there is a debate resolution, but if there's no response from PROC and we have to go, this is where we're going?

Basically, it's very simple. He has made the motion. I think we'll all agree that if we can't get anything resolved with our letter to PROC, then that's the way we're going to have to go, right?

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: I'm on PROC, so....

Mr. Jim Eglinski: I know.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Jim Eglinski: It's not that we're trying to predetermine your guys' thing, but thank you.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): I think this is what I heard: We are not doing the report until we hear back from PROC. That is the conclusion.

Okay? Did we get it right?

It's difficult to follow when you go from one idea to the next.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: When we have so many ideas on the floor [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Well, yes, and it's amazing what smart minds can do.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: It's because Jim and I spent three days in the navy together.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Are there any other questions or comments?

Mr. Van Kesteren, you were asking about research on other jurisdictions. Do you want us to do that; the library to do that?

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: If it's the will of the committee, I think it would be prudent to send a letter out to possibly the Commonwealth countries.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Send a letter or do research?

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: Well, let's do research first. That makes more sense.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Okay. We'll start with research.

Are we all in agreement here? All right.

Is there anything else for the good of this committee?

The meeting is adjourned.

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