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Co-Chairs

The Honourable Percy Downe
Mr. Royal Galipeau

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● (1200)

[*English*]

The Joint Chair (Senator Percy Downe): Colleagues, I see a quorum, and we're ready to go. Our witness can hear us.

I would just like to briefly introduce the witness. This is another committee meeting to talk about our public outreach initiative. We're very pleased today to have as our witness Lord Richard Allan of Hallam, who was appointed to the House of Lords in 2010. He is also employed as Facebook's director of policy for the European Union. Previous to that, he was elected to the House of Commons as a Liberal Democrat MP from 1997 to 2005.

As a member of Parliament he sat on various parliamentary committees, such as education, employment, liaison, and public accounts. His areas of interest include information technology, heritage, and education. He was also involved in the creation of the popular U.K. website TheyWorkForYou.com.

Lord Richard Allan, thank you for your time today, and I understand you have an opening statement.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): A point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Joint Chair (Senator Percy Downe): Excuse me. We have a point of order.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: I'm just a little confused because of an e-mail that we got and the agenda. I'm just wondering, are we going until 1:00 or 1:30? Because one says 1:00, one says 1:30.

The Joint Chair (Senator Percy Downe): This session will be from 12:00 until 1:00, and then from 1:00 to 1:30 we have budget and future business.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Thank you.

The Joint Chair (Senator Percy Downe): Lord Hallam.

Lord Allan of Hallam (Member of the House of Lords of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland): Thanks very much. Thank you for the invitation to speak to you today.

I did just want to make sure that you had the full declaration of my interests. You've listed the fact that I'm a director of policy at Facebook, and I will refer to them when I'm speaking as an example of some outreach work. I'm also on the advisory council of the Hansard Society, who I know are involved in the Parliament 2020 project. I'm a member of the Speaker's Advisory Panel on Public Engagement, which has been set up by John Bercow, the Speaker of the House of Commons here.

I did just want to start by setting out a few key messages that are relevant to the public engagement agenda for parliamentarians everywhere.

I think the first point that needs to be made is that this is not about technology for its own sake. Even though people like myself are very technology-oriented, this is not really a technology problem, but I think it's a question of how expectations among the public, the public that we serve, are changing because of access to certain forms of communications technology and also about the new opportunities that those open up for all of us.

The key concepts I wanted to discuss in the opening statement are around engagement, language, interactivity, fun, TV, and experimentation.

Taking each of those in turn, engagement is something that people in the online world are very familiar with but is sometimes not sufficiently thought through when public bodies are thinking about how to talk with the public.

There are some key questions you need to ask. How often do you expect people to engage with you? That can be very different, from every day through to once a year if it's a tax return, through to something that's periodic if it is a piece of legislation that's a subject of interest that only happens once a year or once every two years. You'll have different cycles for engagement.

The second key question is who is the audience? Who do you want to engage? Sometimes that's everyone, to begin a democratic scenario, but often it's trying to reach hard-to-reach groups. So you may have a specific target group for your engagement.

And the third question is how far do you need them to engage? Is it a question of simply looking for the mass e-mails or the mass correspondence that each of us will receive? Is it a very low level of engagement, like a petition or a mass correspondence, or are you expecting people to come to meetings to exchange points of view over a much longer period of time? I think engagement is crucial.

The second issue is language, and not language in the sense of traditional bilingualism or other forms of language. It's language in terms of technical language, which is used by all institutions but I think is a particularly acute problem in the parliamentary setting. Wherever you go we have very obscure processes and procedures that are extremely obvious to those of us on the inside and extremely opaque to those on the outside. So addressing the issues of language often are the top number one priority when thinking about public engagement.

The third key point was that of interactivity. This is perhaps best summed up by looking at how youngsters are using technology today, where they're moving away from e-mail, which is deemed to be too slow and too little interactive, towards things like chat and SMS almost exclusively. So there is a sense that people want real-time interaction. Again, that typically jars with parliamentary processes, which necessarily can be quite slow and necessarily require periods for reflection. I think it's a major challenge to meet that expectation.

The fourth area was that of fun, which is often not always associated with politics. But we found, certainly in the work that we're doing here, and if you look at what succeeds out there more generally in terms of communications, it's things like games and quizzes. They are expanding in popularity and can cover a multitude of areas. I think introducing those into the political sphere is particularly interesting. I know the U.K. Parliament has been doing some of that with games like "MP For A Week" and things that are more interactive.

The next area is that of TV. This is often a very challenging area in politics. There is a professor of political communication at Leeds University called Stephen Coleman, who wrote a great paper called "A Tale of Two Houses: the House of Commons, the Big Brother House and the people at home" many years ago. It talked about *Big Brother* House and the House of Commons.

●(1205)

And this wasn't entirely popular with many MPs, who said "What has *Big Brother* and *Big Brother* type voting got to do with the House of Commons?" But his central point was that many of the people we engage with see the world through an experience that is being coloured and shaped by their experience of TV culture. So people who watch *Big Brother*, who take part in many of the competitive programs and reality TV programs that exist on TV today, have a set of expectations that they will also read across into the political realm.

I think understanding the vernacular of TV at any particular moment in time is critical, again, for public engagement.

And the last point I wanted to make is just around experimentation. Again it is often very difficult in a political environment to experiment, but some of the best innovation around public engagement comes precisely from experiments, which may be time-limited, which may push boundaries to quite a degree, and some of which, frankly, are quite unexpected.

For example, the U.K. Houses of Parliament have changed fundamentally because we built a new building called Portcullis House. Portcullis House has an atrium with a coffee area in it. Nobody thought at the time that was going to change the way we engage publicly, but it has. It has been perhaps the single most fundamental change, in that the focus of business now of the U.K. Parliament has shifted almost entirely to an atrium with a coffee bar and consists of a series of informal meetings with people sitting around WiFi-connected computers, away from the very traditional meeting room settings like the one I'm sitting in now.

So those forms of innovation that come through sometimes deliberate experimentation, sometimes accidental experience that you then build on, I think are also critical to the public engagement agenda.

I hope that was a useful overview of the kinds of things I've been thinking about. I will stop there. I am very much looking forward to hearing about the subjects of interest to you.

The Joint Chair (Senator Percy Downe): Thank you very much, Lord Hallam. I'm sure we have questions from committee members.

Who would like to go first?

Madame Bennett.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Hi, Richard. It's Carolyn.

●(1210)

Lord Allan of Hallam: Hi, Carolyn.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: You've spent a lot of time doing this, and I guess we are hoping to learn from a lot of the parliaments. Are there things happening in other places that are at the top of your hit parade in things that you really think would be a priority to begin with?

Lord Allan of Hallam: I would pick a couple of things. One is I would refer to some of the social media examples. As I've said, that is my day job, but I kind of took the day job because I was interested in the phenomenon, rather than pushing the phenomenon because it's my day job, I think.

But we have done a couple of experiments that are really interesting. One is ours and one is external. The one that was ours was Democracy UK, which is a space within the Facebook site where we have around 280,000 people signed up as part of that community. It became very active during the U.K. general election but it has continued to be active since. That space is an interesting example of new ways of political communication. You see thousands of individuals there interacting with each other in this very lightweight chat format that you get online, something that I don't think we've seen elsewhere.

And then you see them doing interesting things like playing with games, such as at election time there was a quiz where you answered questions and the quiz suggested who you might want to vote for, not in a very definitive way but as a bit of fun. What we found was that very large numbers of the people doing that then posted up on their Facebook pages who the system said they should vote for, often in very surprising ways, and then they entered into a conversation with their friends about that voting intention.

Where we used to have this sort of traditional sort of secretive approach to your voting intentions and how you make your mind up, we saw that open up completely through that space. I would recommend having a look at that if people have time.

The other one that's an institutional one that's less away from the campaigning politics and more towards the institution is the European Parliament. The European Parliament has a very active page at facebook.com/europeanparliament. There what they do is they post up things that are happening in the European Parliament, with provocative questions trying to stimulate a debate. They get individual members of the Parliament, including the President of the European Parliament, to go online and have live chats with people, and they've just hired a developer so they can go on and do some of this more advanced stuff around quizzes and games, etc.

Those are two examples of things that are happening now that I think are interesting. I particularly recommend looking at the European Parliament page and what they're doing.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: On Democracy UK, is there an interaction with parliamentarians? Do parliamentarians go on this site and ask questions and stimulate?

The other question was that John Pullinger mentioned last week that without civic literacy, are people understanding the difference between government and Parliament? We're having a great deal of trouble with having citizens understand that Parliament's job is to be with citizens and stakeholders in the job of helping make better legislation, better rules, holding government to account, as well as putting forward neat ideas. Yet somehow they're very much blurred in the minds of individual citizens.

Have you seen any solution for that or any progress for that? Or what are the metrics that you would use to know if we're winning on that?

Lord Allan of Hallam: On the first point, about parliamentarians, we certainly have invited them on. For example, during the last leadership contest for the Labour Party, various of the candidates came on and did a chat. Other parliamentarians have done chats at different times. It's largely been in the party political context rather than, if you like, the governmental or parliamentary context.

One of the advantages we have is that we're not bound particularly by having to respect those boundaries. I actually think there are really three sets of interests that merge in the public's mind: one is the government, the other is Parliament, but the third is the party political side—me acting as a party politician. I think this is one of those language challenges, actually, where to try to force members of the public to kind of go into the silos that we need them to go into is doomed to failure.

I think this is where the challenge is to find a creative solution that.... You know, if I'm a member of the public, I talk to you on all three of those levels. If you're on the government side, I'm talking to you as a minister, as my local representative, as a Liberal politician, potentially. I'm not able to make a distinction between those.

For us to try to force a citizen to divide their interest I think is actually one of the problems. But I recognize that institutionally it's easy for me to say that. It's much harder for an institution to respond to that. But I think that looking for forums and places where people are free to speak to all of those is more likely to be a solution than trying to narrow down the citizen voice to just the one that's acceptable within that particular context.

And I think that's a broad problem all over.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Thank you.

● (1215)

The Joint Chair (Senator Percy Downe): Mr. Plamondon.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I often wonder about those new forms of communication, commonly referred to as instant information. When a great and distinguished library such as yours or the Library of Parliament decides to engage with citizens, I sometimes get the impression that it is addressing the average citizen, who is given a little general knowledge about a topic and suddenly becomes an expert.

Should we not do the opposite instead and encourage the citizen to bring their knowledge level up to that of the library's own leading experts? When you ask for spontaneous information, you get a spontaneous answer, lacking any historical references or expert opinions. The topic has not been thoroughly researched in order to provide the citizen with the proper information. So I really question these new forms of communication. We should not be dumbing down the information. In other words, great and distinguished libraries such as these should provide information that is relevant, not simply condensed to fit into an instant answer. What do you think? I am not passing judgment, but I do have some questions.

[*English*]

Lord Allan of Hallam: I think it's absolutely a very fair observation. That instant answer, on its own, can, through a lack of deliberation, produce very poor results.

The concept that I'd like to put forward to counter that degree or to show how success can be achieved is something called the ladder of engagement, where essentially the instant tool may be the first rung on the ladder, something like an online petitions engine, where you sign up to a petition. It's a very trivial action in some ways for the citizen, maybe based on a very small amount of real information, but it's the first step they take on the ladder.

I think the challenge for all of these technologies and approaches is how do we help citizens to go up the next rung of the ladder, where perhaps they have more information, more engagement? Perhaps they then write a letter, having signed a petition. The next rung of the ladder is to get more involved, to go to a physical meeting, perhaps with the member of Parliament, and interact with them.

The ultimate rung of the ladder is that they then themselves perhaps get involved in the political process by seeking election for themselves.

But I think if these technologies are successful, they help citizens to move up that ladder. And if you look at the projects of organizations like mySociety, that's exactly what they're aimed at.

So they're building a service now called FixMyTransport.com, based on something called FixMyStreet.com. FixMyTransport is for citizens to say "I have a problem with the number 23 bus". But when you say you have a problem with a number 23 bus, they then want to link you up with other citizens worried about the 23 bus, introduce you to the transport authority so you can understand more about the 23 bus service and how those decisions are made, and, as I say, take you through this ladder of engagement. So it stops being this very low-level "I have a complaint" situation and becomes something where you engage in a more concrete fashion, and you learn as you go.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Louis Plamondon: Thank you.

In the U.K., a reported entitled *Connecting Parliament with the Public* was tabled in 2004. I believe you were a member of Parliament at the time. Now seven years later, do you think the recommendations in the report were implemented properly? Is there anything you would do differently?

● (1220)

[*English*]

Lord Allan of Hallam: I'm going to be fair: it's been patchy. Some things have moved ahead. For example, there have been a number of experiments around online consultation. Typically, that's not free-standing online consultation, but it's bringing an online element into an existing structure like a committee. Some of that's happened at the experimental stage. We are actually now seeing, precisely in 2011, under the recent government that's taken control, a more systematic attempt to try to build some of that in. There are, again, some of the challenges that Carolyn Bennett referred to about Parliament versus government. The citizen doesn't often know whether they're consulting with Parliament or the government, but we are at least trying to engage them in the processes. So they may be consulting with government ahead of a parliamentary process on the piece of legislation, they may be consulting with a parliamentary committee during the process, or they may be consulting with government once a piece of legislation has been brought in. That adds extra complexity, but certainly some of those experiments I think are now becoming mainstream.

There are other things that have got stuck in process—for example, petitions. There was a petitions engine that went to Number 10 Downing Street, and there was a recognition that wasn't satisfactory, that citizens should be petitioning their members of Parliament rather than petitioning the Prime Minister directly. There we've raised the questions, but we haven't actually come up with the solutions.

So as I say, I think it's a mixed set of results, where a lot of it is still experimental. And to be honest, we haven't seen this stuff mainstreamed yet, but I expect to do so perhaps over the next year or two.

The Joint Chair (Senator Percy Downe): The next question is from Madame Hughes.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Good day, and welcome.

My question is along the same line as the discussion, but I'm just wondering if there are things that you feel did not work at all and things we should actually stay away from, as far as you're concerned. When Mr. Pullinger was here, he had indicated that the Facebook initiative hadn't actually generated the interest they had hoped. I'm just wondering if there's anything there that you would want to offer us.

Lord Allan of Hallam: There is a clash sometimes between a traditional organization or a traditional process being put into the online environments, where it just doesn't get take-up because there's a culture clash, if you like, between the audience and the way the information is being put out there. And I think that is particularly a challenge. As I say, I think we need to recognize this for institutions that by their nature need to operate in a reasonably constrained and responsible way, when they're moving, particularly online, into a culture that is often quite wild and free. So there is a culture clash there.

I think that of the things that in particular have not worked, for the experiments I've seen, it's where the online is disconnected from the real world. So if you create a forum for people to chat about a particular government policy or a particular policy before Parliament but there is no way to connect that into the parliamentary process, that's problematic. If you set a forum up and you say to busy members of Parliament, "There's an online forum as well as your committee work; please go and spend lots of time in the online forum", it's kind of not a surprise that it doesn't always happen.

And there are ways to deal with that. You can bridge that, for example, by having the forum moderator appear as I'm appearing now, in person, conveying the sense of the forum, taking questions back, so that all members of the committee engage with it, as well as those who actually have the time to do it directly.

So I've seen some of the experiments fail for that reason, because they've become too disconnected.

I think the last area that has sort of had mixed success is this area of online petitioning, where there was a big fuss around it when it first came out, and then, again perhaps because it's disconnected from the real world.... In the U.K. Parliament there is no outcome from it, unlike in the Scottish Parliament, where if you put an online petition on, there's a formal place in the Scottish parliamentary procedures for that petition to be heard. In the U.K. Parliament, there isn't. So people started to do a lot of it and now I think most people have lost interest.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Just to follow up on that, I'm just wondering with respect to the schools, what is your connection with the schools? And as well, we know that we're in a time when the baby boomers are all aging and stuff, and if anything, certainly our elders are the ones who actually can also pass down. So I am assuming, have you looked at a programming for how to do the outreach for people who are older? I know this is about youth, but in order to get youth engaged as well, sometimes we have to foster that either at home or somewhere else.

● (1225)

Lord Allan of Hallam: On the youth program, actually that's been very much a face-to-face initiative. Really, again, I'm saying we can get distracted by technology sometimes, but the great success I think the U.K. Parliament has had has been to dramatically step up the number of school groups that come through Parliament, the range of activities that are provided to them. But very much, I think, the bulk of the program is about bringing children physically here to experience the building, experience Parliament at first hand. They are now, the parliamentary authorities, doing some more work around things like games for "a day in the life of an MP". Those are ones where I think it will be very interesting to see what take-up there is. It could be that those are ones that don't have a high success rate because it's the old fogie trying to be fun, it's your dad dancing at the disco. So you're trying to make this thing that is kind of inherently dull interesting, and it just doesn't work. But we'll see. I think it's a brave effort to try it, and it will be very interesting, because we will get some very concrete feedback on how many people use those systems and where they come from.

I think with the question of elders, it's an interesting one. The online demographic is changing quite dramatically now—and I think Canada is actually ahead of the U.K. in this—such that elders are far more connected to some of the mainstream online services than I think people have thought historically. And they often tend to be the most active. So I think online channels may not intuitively be seen as a primary resource for older people, but I think increasingly they will be. So I think that's one area where, again, we shouldn't be blinded and think "It's online, it's for kids". We should be thinking if it's online, equally it's for older people. And you are all involved in political parties, and I'm sure your political party memberships, as they do here, tend towards the older end of the spectrum. But they're organized on e-mail lists, they're organized typically these days on online systems, and older people who are politically interested already are in quite strong online networks.

The Joint Chair (Senator Percy Downe): Thank you.

The next question is from Senator Meredith.

Senator Don Meredith (Senator, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

One of my colleagues already asked you this question with respect to Facebook. And my next question would have been around the youth, in terms of engaging young people and getting their suggestions as they come to Parliament, how to better interact with them, and how they are able to access information for projects in terms of resources and government policies in a timely manner.

You talked about SMS, and live chats and so forth. What are you putting in place in terms of having a focus group with these young people—or high schools or universities—who come through, to engage them so that the information is passed on, and what best practices can you offer to us along those lines?

Lord Allan of Hallam: This does not specifically relate to politics, but generally a lot of youth engagement is happening now around video streaming. So video, and engagement around that video, is a very popular method.

Actually, if you look at the White House, they are the people who, in the political context, have the done the most of this. They run these live streams with either significant political figures or people around that, and it's very engaging.

President Bill Clinton does this fascinating thing where he invites people to ask him questions online. Then he picks somebody's question and records a video of him responding to that question. In the video he says, "Mary Smith from Washington, you asked me about this. Here's my answer." He puts that onto the network, and it's amazing how viral that goes. Mary Smith shares that with everyone, and all of Mary Smith's friends share it with their friends. It has this incredible viral capacity.

That actually is the trick in many ways. If you look at how young people consume media, they consume the media that their friends share with them. So getting into that, as a politician, I think is absolutely critical.

The other things that people are doing with young people are probably in two areas. One is with organizations that are associated with Parliament but run by young people. We have a Youth Parliament here. They get access to Parliament, and for the last couple of years they've been allowed to hold debates in the House of Commons chamber. They make a big deal out of that. They stream it onto the Web. As a Youth Parliament debating issues, they're reaching out through a whole network of young people to bring them in. I find that to be very effective.

I'd say that the last piece of advice on that is making content that is syndicatable. By that I mean that the more you can say to people to take the content you produce about Parliament, reformat it, do something interesting with it, the more likely it is you're going to get people framing that content for different audiences.

We, as Parliament, are probably never going to come up with the killer ways of communicating to young people through SMS or Twitter, or whatever it is, but somebody out there could do that. They'll do that based on the raw material you provide them. I think the provision of raw material that people can reformat is really critical to getting to those audiences.

● (1230)

Senator Don Meredith: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Joint Chair (Senator Percy Downe): Thank you.

The next question is from Madame Wong.

Mrs. Alice Wong (Richmond, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Lord Allan. I've been to Hallam before, so it's brought back memories of when I was studying in England.

My questions are more related to the newcomers. As you might know, we just had the new immigration numbers come out. In the year 2010, Canada admitted a record number of newcomers from overseas, more than over the past 57 years. I understand that England is also experiencing an influx of newcomers. For the second generation or even the first generation of new citizens, how is your country educating new citizens to know more about the parliamentary process and how to get access to government?

Lord Allan of Hallam: There are elements in the citizenship program for newcomers precisely about political engagement. In Canada and the U.K., we are fortunate in having constituency-based systems that have relatively small constituencies. It feels like a lot when you're looking after one, but I think that level of local contact is one of the primary mechanisms for enabling people to engage even if they've come in new. In fact, often if they've come in new, they have priority needs that mean that they're going to present themselves to an individual representative at quite an early stage. So I think that's a key part of it.

In respect of technology, I think some of the most interesting stuff has to do with translation. If you're dealing with a multilingual community, translation is challenging on expense grounds if nothing else. Some of this is part of the Facebook and Google experience. Community translation is a fantastic resource. If you have resources you want to put out there and share with people, and they're only available in one or two languages, you can invite the community to contribute translations. That means you're drawing on a large pool of volunteers. It's something we've used, for example, to translate the Facebook service into languages like Catalan and Welsh, the smaller languages that we would never get professionally translated at an early stage. We were able to do this by inviting the community in.

Certainly, as I look at the public sector and public bodies, I think online community translation is one of the most powerful tools for getting information out quickly and cheaply to a diverse range of linguistic groups.

Mrs. Alice Wong: I think this is exactly what Canada is also going through. For example, we have the newest Canadian citizenship guidebook, which is popular right now for education, and there is a translation available online. So that is probably where our government is heading as well.

I understand that the local MPs would have to get help. For example, I represent a constituency in which a large percentage are of non-British, non-French origin, so that definitely is a challenge we are facing.

You talked about education. I came from that sector, and I understand the British system. With respect to civil education, how are teachers involved? Are they using any of the materials produced by your Parliament?

● (1235)

Lord Allan of Hallam: Yes, there is quite a large parliamentary education. The librarian, John Pullinger, would be better equipped to talk about the scale of it. But the parliamentary education service, as well as being focused on the incoming visits, is producing the materials that go out to schools. Interestingly, that's been given another boost recently by our newest Speaker, who demonstrates

leadership by getting out into schools. So we're supportive of the education service.

The member of Parliament can go into the school as part of their citizenship program, as can members of the House of Lords, so they're actually getting peers. If I have a couple of free afternoons, I can go to the education service and they will line me up with some schools that would like a visit from a parliamentarian. So I think our education service is well worth looking at as an example of a service that is packaging material to get out into schools and sometimes shipping it out with the representative.

Mrs. Alice Wong: I think this is where we should be heading too. I've already had invitations, and I've been to quite a few schools. It seems to be an efficient way.

Thank you.

The Joint Chair (Senator Percy Downe): Mr. Dhaliwal.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Lord Hallam.

Mr. Lunney was asking me to put a motion. I certainly would do that, because it's wonderful to work with representatives from both Houses, the Senate as well as the House of Commons. It's wonderful work that you're doing.

Lord Hallam, when we look at Parliament here we have a highly politically partisan environment in the House of Commons. We have a parliamentary site, but how can we keep the partisan stuff under control on Facebook and the other social media sites?

Lord Allan of Hallam: I think it's a really important challenge, and I think in a way it sets limits for what you can do through the official institutional channels. The question then becomes what are the supplementary channels where the partisan activity can happen? Again, as I said in response to the earlier question, I don't think you can stop it from happening. It's the exciting stuff of politics.

I would look at the way we've developed in the U.K., with the official parliamentary site, parliament.uk, and then a site like theyworkforyou.com, which was deliberately created by activists to make up for what they saw to be the deficiencies of the parliamentary site. The deficiencies were that if you went to the official parliamentary site and you had a citizen's question.... A citizen's question would be "Is this MP for or against the war in Iraq? Are they for or against gay rights?" Something partisan and contentious—that's what citizens ask. And the parliamentary website can't do that. It can only give you very raw facts.

What theyworkforyou.uk does is take those raw facts and put a layer of interpretation on them. Some MPs can test that interpretation, but it is an attempt to give citizens that much more digestible information. And then it offers people the ability to comment and engage around that content.

I think what was interesting here was that in the first instance there was resistance from a number of members, quite naturally, to this interloper that was coming and creating this other space. Over time, you see most MPs adapt to it. Many of them will run theyworkforyou.uk on their own web pages as a resource and many of them will connect to it. To be honest with you, I think the solution lies in a symbiotic relationship between official sources of information, which almost inevitably are going to be quite dry, factual, and non-partisan, and reputable, responsible people externally who are going to take that dry information and create a space for a more interesting debate—probably a partisan debate, but I hope one that's not completely wild and out of control.

● (1240)

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Madam Wong mentioned going to schools. I have the opportunity to go to schools and address classes—grade fours, grade sixes—and if we have a site that is partisan and a site that is not talking to those young people in their language.... When I go out there, I try to be very non-partisan and try to speak their language.

How have you developed a similar protocol or similar system that will talk to our young people—grade four and grade six social studies classes—in their own world?

Lord Allan of Hallam: In large part, I think the solution comes back to this idea of providing the authoritative source of information and then not assuming it will only be presented through one channel. Parliament can do this. Parliament is the place that has authoritative information about who members are and what they're doing. So there will be an official parliamentary channel, largely aimed at people who are in the know and on the inside. There will be some more wild channels where people want to have wild political debates, but there can also be channels that are specifically targeted at schools, for example, using the same information. People like the youth Parliament would be the kind of organization I'd expect to create that channel.

If you start thinking in terms of there being this core of information—the facts about Parliament, MPs, citizenship—and then multiple faces to that information for different purposes, then I think we're going to be successful. I think if we try to cram everything into one channel, which we've often tried to do historically, that's where it breaks down, because that channel just can't serve everybody.

The Joint Chair (Senator Percy Downe): Thank you.

Mr. Lunney, you had the next question.

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much, Lord Allan, for contributing to this discussion here today. It's a fascinating discussion.

The pace of change seems to be the theme of the day. The Library of Parliament this morning started my day with a forum on Arctic issues. Of course the Arctic is changing very quickly for us. There is a whole range of issues in meeting the needs of people in the Arctic and all of the geopolitical considerations that happen with the whole world. Many of our northern neighbours take an interest in Arctic.

The pace of change in the Middle East is happening at an astonishing rate there. Communication changes—and I understand this is something that has to do with your day job in communications—so we welcome you as part of this debate....

We inherited the British parliamentary system here. Thank you very much. We're working on trying to get our political institutions, like others around the world, engaging with our citizens.

You mentioned the channels. I have a large retirement community where I am on the west coast. I'm actually from British Columbia. We have a lot of retirement community out there. My riding actually is the home of the Monarchist League of Canada. Victoria is the capital, and of course it has sort of a British theme there.

But my citizens are watching that parliamentary channel. It actually surprises me that they take the time. They are engaged. They know the political process. But that's not true of the younger generation. In fact in one of my riding's east coasts, the average age is 57 years old in some of the communities. I was holding down the average for a while.

Pace of change...you might call it an information age, but in some sense it's also a disinformation age. This is a real challenge for us, especially, I think, as politicians. We tend to be on the more cautious side. At least I would think that's true of most of us. We want to study an issue before we jump in with both feet. I like your concept about that ladder of engagement. I think that's a useful model, and I'd like to hear a little more about how you're experimenting with that.

I'm intrigued by the idea expressed earlier about taking questions and then responding to a question from someone, which can then go out through their Twitter network and its communications network. I think that's a great idea. In fact one of our colleagues recently had an online phone-in town hall meeting on economic action plans and a pre-budget consultation, which I think was an innovative idea.

I want to direct this to you, because this is an area of your expertise. I want to go back to this issue in the U.K. where you were experimenting with a Twitter feed and some 32,000 subscriptions or something like that. It was part of your experimentation. I just wonder if you would flesh that out for us. How did that work? How is it working? Is it or isn't it working? Does Library of Parliament initiate it? Could you flesh that out for us?

● (1245)

Lord Allan of Hallam: Yes.

If the average age in your riding is 57 years old, I'm sitting in the House of Lords where the average age is 69 years old, so we beat you on that one, unfortunately. And the pace of change is an issue here as well.

I think the observation that the pace of change is fast and is not going to slow down is a very acute and important one. I would conjure up a magic word, which is the second letter of the Greek alphabet, "beta". Beta is used by all technology companies when they want to release something but don't think it's quite ready. It has started to be used in institutions as well, when they want to do something but want to give a signal that they may change their minds later and do something quite different. So it's a very useful badge for innovation.

I know that typically, in a parliamentary system, you often need to get everybody lined up and in agreement before you can move ahead with an agreed change. If you launch it as a pilot or a beta, that gives you a little more licence to get going. That's how a lot of these changes, such as the Twitter feed and other things, have happened: somebody within the institution has taken ownership and said we should try that; we're going to flag it as an experiment, and if it takes off, it will then become part of the institution later.

It wasn't in an area of my responsibility; it's people within the communication service within Parliament who have done that. But they have started increasingly to use this methodology of a beta program to try things out, as I say, with a clear indication that if it fails, for whatever reason, they can pull back without any kind of embarrassment.

There's obviously an issue here for those who are making decisions like the committee members: that there needs to be a certain amount of permission granted for experimentation and a certain amount of praise given for failed experiments—"We're glad you tried and we're not going to curse at you too much for having failed, but are going to move on to the next thing."

The other point is about the ladder of engagement that you mentioned again. The critical thing there is that there is a notion these days that "you are what you share"—this is somebody else's term. As people now are consuming more and more pieces of information, they're defining themselves by what they're sharing with other people. The best indicator of engagement is: "I've done something; I want to tell other people about it." There are lots of different ways you can do it, but you need to understand that this is in the DNA of all of these successful things. If you create a fantastically powerful YouTube video, the indication that it's powerful is that lots of people are sharing it with each other. And there are metrics for all of this.

When you're thinking about producing some content, or anything that you're doing, ask yourself the question why anyone would want to share this with someone else. Don't think of it as just a one-to-one communication between you and them. Think: if they have seen it, why would they want to share it, who would they want to share it with, how passionate would they be about sharing it? If they are passionate about sharing it and want to share it widely, they're doing your marketing and communications job for you, and that's where you start to become hugely successful in reaching good audiences.

The Joint Chair (Senator Percy Downe): Thank you.

Mr. Murphy.

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Lord Allan, it's a pleasure to hear from you.

I come from a municipal government background and I'm reflecting on what you said and the unique experience that you have in your bicameral experience. It strikes me, when you say—and I paraphrase—that you can't push people into having interest in something that we think we have interest in, that as you go through the levels of government, what pushes people up that ladder is an interest in a subject. Snow on streets typically in Canada has interest at municipal levels, because municipal politicians are told about it. At the federal level, maybe if we start attacking people's usage of cable television, that will get them up that ladder.

I'm interested in how you see that paradigm that "if people are interested, they'll become involved" versus the paradigm of a politician often trying to make people interested in things that are essentially not interesting to them. I want to ask whether it's really our job to try to make people interested in things that don't affect them. That's aspect number one.

The second aspect of the question is to ask your opinion on a phenomenon I observe. People seem to skyrocket up that ladder, if it's a single issue. There seems to be—it comes from our southern neighbours—a skyrocketing of single-issue voting: people get very propelled on the issue. I have young children. Typically I find that there's more of an escalator attitude in the case of some of the young people, who say "I'll be interested in politics if there's something in it for me."

That's the first question: how you see engagement generally in the changing times.

The second question is this. You have unique bicameral experience. Trying to make the Lords or the Senate as relevant as the House of Commons often leads to debates between those two houses on their relevance. I'm not sure we see the same phenomenon in the United States, because they're both elected. I'm heading, of course, towards asking for comment on whether you think both houses should be elected in order to have the credibility to say "these are important issues because I've been elected" or whether you think now, with your perch where you are, that the sober second thought of the House of Lords and the Senate is a good balance to the hot-topic parade that we see in the common, elected House.

● (1250)

Lord Allan of Hallam: It's a broader political question, but I have no doubts that my perch is entirely without legitimacy in a democratic system. One of the issues that we have on the agenda—perhaps for next year, once we've changed our voting system—is how we reform the place that I'm set in right now. It's going to be a very interesting political debate. The tendency is for people, the longer they stay here, to become more and more wedded to the current model. I reckon I have about two or three years of passionate, reforming zeal before I start saying "It's not so bad, really." We'll see what we can do in those two or three years.

I thought the questions around single issues were very interesting questions. Can you get people interested in things they're not interested in? This is where some of the most interesting experimentation is going on. This group, my society, who I think really do merit study, are passionate about political engagement in the broadest sense, and they have understood this issue. With something like FixMyStreet, which is about paving slabs and dog muck and all of those things, from the very beginning they have said that this is about getting the problem fixed, but it's also about trying to get people to understand the choices that local government has to make between fixing streets or putting money into schools or social services and so on. With FixMyTransport, the one they're doing now, they're very clear that it's going to be about building local communities and getting them involved in local issues, if they succeed.

None of them yet has succeeded, but all of them are fascinating experiments. The criterion for success is whether I get somebody who came to me—to FixMyStreet or FixMyTransport—interested in something else politically. That's exactly what they're trying to achieve.

I think it's really interesting that they're trying to do that as outsiders, if you like. They are non-partisan, not engaged in the formal institutions—although having said that, Tom Steinberg, who runs my society, now has a job advising the U.K. Cabinet Office. They're essentially doing it as outsiders from the party system, but with a passionate sense of civic responsibility.

I think the skyrocketing on the single issues is a much bigger problem. It's a problem for traditional political parties—shall we put it that way?—that everyone everywhere is trying to hold on to people and keep them engaged in political parties in an environment in which the sense is that if you as the party do anything wrong, in terms of not focusing on the issues that brought them to you in the first place, they're going to walk away.

I don't have any answers to that one, but it's certainly something that, as a Liberal Democrat in the U.K..... Particularly you've seen it lately when people join the party because they're interested in particular issues and the party has not performed as they expected, and it is quite clear that their affiliation was very dependent on the single issue rather than on the broad affiliation across a basket of issues. As I say, I don't have any answers to this, but I feel it.

The Joint Chair (Senator Percy Downe): Thank you.

Madam Bennett.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: At the ethics, information, and privacy committee we are doing a study on open government. We are also hearing a bit about how intra-government communication could be opened up. It seems that in regard to this open-parliament idea, plus open government, two and two makes five, when you consider the data sets and what government is willing to release. As Parliament, with some reference to your site, or the site that we have here, www. openparliament.ca, we are hoping at the other committee to put together a summit as we try to do an open-government online consultation for later. We were wondering if you had any advice on how we could have a summit that could deal with open government, open parliament. We would like to bring in the best of international advisers like you and Professor Coleman. We want to know if you

can come and inspire the rest of the Canadian parliamentarians. Just having you exposed to this committee is not enough.

● (1255)

Lord Allan of Hallam: It sounds like an offer I can't refuse. Let me make an observation on that. It's interesting how, certainly here, the agendas for open government, open data, open freedom of information, and parliamentary engagement are completely merged. The people who brought www.theyworkforyou.com also have www. whatdotheyknow.com, which is a site for making freedom of information requests. They're great names who do what they say on the tin. www.whatdotheyknow.com is a way for people to make freedom of information requests. Writetothem.com is one for writing to your member of Parliament.

It's interesting. There is a coincidence, I think. There is a sense that the more you free up information, the more you enable people to participate on their own terms. In this way, they can take the same data that members of Parliament see and engage themselves in that data. This prevents public information from being the private domain of members of Parliament.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Is there a place where parliamentarians from different countries are working on this issue, on an open-government movement around the world? The U.K. or the Commonwealth, the meeting in Cardiff, is supposed to have some stuff on citizen engagement. Are you going?

Lord Allan of Hallam: I don't know yet. I'll check.

The leading light is Beth Noveck in the Obama administration, who's been doing a lot on this. Then there is a team in the U.K. Cabinet Office, where the headline figure is Tim Berners-Lee, who is a kind of poster child for it, and Nigel Shadbolt, a professor in Southampton. Then there is Tom Steinberg himself, from MySociety. They're now a unit in the cabinet office, came in with the new government. They've been doing it themselves and they've created a broader network of people on this agenda.

The Joint Chair (Senator Percy Downe): Thank you.

This is the last question, Madam Hughes.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: You have a website, www.theyworkforyou. com. I'm just wondering if you can tell us approximately how many hits you're getting, and whether or not it has been well used.

 I understand you have another program called *The Peer Factor*, where the children are asked who they would put in the House of Lords and why. Do the youth see the House of Lords as being something that should be maintained, or do they think it should be reformed?

Lord Allan of Hallam: The www.theyworkforyou.com site is run by a charity called MySociety. I will ask them for the usage stats and send them over to you. Actually, part of the conversation I'm having with them at the moment has to do with the fact that they have fantastically accessible services. With theyworkforyou, writetothem, and whatdotheyknow, there is a whole family of services built around democratic engagement. But at the moment they're not very plugged in socially.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Interconnected.

Lord Allan of Hallam: Yes, and they tend to exist on their own. They're very good if you find them.

One of the questions is how we get more people to discover them. That's why I'm quite interested in the sharing aspect. How do we get somebody to share the comment they made on theyworkforyou.com with lots of other people, so that other people who wouldn't have found it start to find it? We're having that conversation with them right now. I think it could be very helpful.

The Peer Factor is one of those examples, as I say, where looking at TV vernacular is important. It may not succeed and it may seem naff in some ways, but I think these are really valuable experiments. It could actually take off, because it's trying to talk to younger children in a vernacular they understand. I think it is really important to try to do that.

Generally, the attitude of the House of Lords is that it depends on how you ask the question. If you say, "Do you think the House of Lords should be elected", the general population view, about 80%, say that it should be elected. If you say, "Do you think we should have a chamber in Parliament that is full of seasoned experts and not ridiculous party politicians", about 80% say yes, we should have that. Again, depending on the way you ask the question, you get a different answer.

I don't think there is a settled view. I think it will genuinely be an open debate when we come to put forward proposals for reform. It will be quite a contest, I think, between those two opposing viewpoints.

● (1300)

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Thank you.

The Joint Chair (Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC)): Lord Allan, I want to thank you very much for the testimony you provided to our committee today. I notice that the clarity of your thought hasn't changed since you're no longer a commoner. At this table we have both senators and commoners, who have demonstrated to you the collegiality of our bicameral system.

Thank you very much. We'll try to imbibe some of the wisdom you've shared with us.

Lord Allan of Hallam: It was a pleasure. Thank you.

The Joint Chair (Mr. Royal Galipeau): We have some committee business to do now. I'm quite open to doing it in public, but if you want to do it in camera that's okay too. I'll be directed by the committee.

Hon. Terry Stratton (Senator, CPC, Senate): I see no reason to go in camera.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: It is about open Parliament.

The Joint Chair (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I was just waiting for instructions by the committee. I'm quite open either way.

[*Translation*]

As far as the agenda goes for the next few meetings of the Standing Joint Committee on the Library of Parliament, there are some witnesses we would like to hear from, particularly, an official from the Fondation Jean-Charles-Bonenfant at Quebec's National Assembly.

[*English*]

There is Roxanne Missingham, who is the parliamentary librarian with the Parliament of Australia; Moira Fraser, parliamentary librarian with the Parliament of New Zealand; and Professor Stephen Coleman from the University of Leeds in the United Kingdom.

[*Translation*]

There is also Michael Mulley, an individual from Montreal who has a Web site called "Open Parliament".

[*English*]

One of the things I want to alert you to is the scheduling as it pertains to time zones. I'd like to propose—and of course we'll follow the direction of the committee—that we have one meeting with the guests from Australia and New Zealand, but that would need a change of time in order to accommodate their time zones. Assuming that we do this at 5 p.m., that would be 9 a.m. Canberra time and 11 a.m. Wellington time.

I'm thinking that 5 p.m. might be in the way of potential votes. We can't do it on a Friday. Thursday night is very inconvenient, especially for members of the T to T club.

● (1305)

Hon. Terry Stratton: What is "T to T"?

The Joint Chair (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It's Tuesday to Thursday.

An hon. member: Is that a club?

The Joint Chair (Mr. Royal Galipeau): That leaves Tuesday and Wednesday. Then I thought sometimes we have votes at those times in the Commons, so I propose we do it at 6 p.m., in which case if there are no votes we will start then, and if there are votes it means asking our guests to twiddle their thumbs for 15 minutes or so in Canberra and Wellington, but we have to work for both possibilities.

The other thing I'd like, if we choose that sort of thing, is that we try to find a venue, not here but closer, right on the Hill, and at six o'clock it would be practical to get either the Reading Room or the Railway Committee Room.

I've said enough.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Plamondon.

Mr. Louis Plamondon: If we did it Tuesday, it would have to be at 6:30 p.m., given that the vote starts at 6 p.m. The bell sounds at 5:30 p.m. for the vote in the House. There might not be a vote on Tuesday, but there are always votes on private member's bills on Wednesdays. Yesterday, for example, there were three or four. In short, it would have to be 6:30 p.m. if we do not want to pay for nothing.

There is something else I am wondering about. I get the sense that Australia's system is quite similar to the United Kingdom's and to the descriptions we have heard from the other witnesses. I feel as though we are always doing the same thing, always asking the same questions. There is nothing there that will contribute to or advance our work. It seems as though we are scheduling meetings for the sake of having meetings. I would prefer to focus on the content of our discussions with the head of the library. I want to know exactly what is happening at the Library of Parliament, and how to go about making changes and implementing new initiatives.

The Joint Chair (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Mr. Plamondon raised a very good point. Our committee has already approved the list of witnesses, but if we think we have already gained the necessary insight into the areas of expertise of our scheduled witnesses, we are not required to hear from them.

Mr. Lunney.

[*English*]

Mr. James Lunney: With all due respect, back to the T to T Club, which is a new term to me, sometimes there are fewer votes on Mondays. Once in a while you can avoid a vote on Monday, and it would seem to me there might be a better chance of doing it on a Monday evening at six o'clock.

The Joint Chair (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I like that. Is there consensus?

The Joint Chair (Senator Percy Downe): There is only one potential problem. The Senate would have to have approval to meet outside our regular time, which normally is done, but I can't guarantee it.

Mr. James Lunney: Are you T to T? Is that all senators?

The Joint Chair (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Is there consensus?

Monsieur Plamondon.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Louis Plamondon: On Monday, the House adjourns at 6:30 p.m., not 6 p.m. Private member's bills are debated in the morning. I am not sure whether any committee members who sit on Monday are on duty, as we say around the hill. Are you, Ms. Hughes?

Mrs. Carol Hughes: No, but I just wanted to mention that, if necessary, it is usually possible to find a replacement for an hour. That is not too difficult.

The Joint Chair (Mr. Royal Galipeau): At the end of the day, it is actually closer to a half-hour.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: I was going to suggest Monday. I am not sure whether that poses a problem for those in the Senate.

The Joint Chair (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Mr. Kerr.

[*English*]

Mr. Greg Kerr (West Nova, CPC): Mr. Chair, as somebody new to the committee, I was just wondering if this is to finish up the study itself and that's why the witnesses are....

The Joint Chair (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Yes.

Mr. Greg Kerr: What's the timetable for the conclusion?

The Joint Chair (Mr. Royal Galipeau): We have not established a timetable.

Mr. Greg Kerr: Okay, there is no rush then.

The Joint Chair (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Right now we're at the stage of exploring how other people do things. There are also other witnesses. The only reason I am highlighting these two is because of the extraordinary distances and differences in time zones. If we want them at the start of the day, we have to be at the end of the day, otherwise one of us is at midnight.

● (1310)

Mr. Greg Kerr: But there's no time pressure, that's what I'm saying.

The Joint Chair (Mr. Royal Galipeau): No.

Mr. Greg Kerr: If it's not right away, whatever it fits in as convenient works out.

Okay. Thank you.

The Joint Chair (Mr. Royal Galipeau): But I was trying to gather a consensus from the committee about this suggestion, and I think what Dr. Lunney said seems to come around a consensus.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hughes

Mrs. Carol Hughes: If there is an election and the report based on the evidence is not ready, will all of our work be lost?

The Joint Chair (Mr. Royal Galipeau): No decision will be made, but the clerk will keep the information we have gathered up to that point, and it will still be useful in the next Parliament.

Ms. Bennett.

[*English*]

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: We're having difficulty getting the open government e-consultation up and running, but we believe that we will have it up soon. I think that in a study on open government, open Parliament, it is going to be very important to get the input of Canadians rather than just from experts. So in terms of finding out what Canadians want.... I know Mr. Nanos did a pretty good job at this, but to have some website for this committee or some way Canadians can interact with what we're doing—where they would find the testimony, where they could check out how they vote—a way of sending Canadians to the various things that we are seeing around the country....

I just was wondering if we would consider the proposal the consultant's giving us for the open government study to see whether there is some adaptation that we could use at this committee, but also I think an invitation, as we at the House of Commons committee are thinking...because the e-consultation is taking so long to get going.

We will be pretty well finished with our witnesses by the time, practically, that we're out in the field on the e-consultation. I think what we're looking at in a timeframe is that we will probably finish with the witnesses by the end of March and be out in the field for April or so. And then we would probably want a summit where we present both the traditional hearing report plus what we've heard online. What we were thinking about offering would be a summit that was webcast and where Canadians could participate. Could the open government study maybe do the agenda for the morning and this committee do the agenda for the afternoon? As Lord Allan said, it all sort of comes together. But if that was the event, could we somehow get someone between the various committees and anybody else who was interested—maybe one of the universities, like Carleton, which is looking at some of these things—to host the summit, and maybe have Richard Allan or Stephen Coleman come over as some sort of draw?

So I don't know where we place the responsibility to play with other committees, but it's just a suggestion.

Mr. Greg Kerr: So we're going to be out on the field by the end of March?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: No, the e-consultation should be live online, hopefully, if the Liaison Committee will get the money. The fact that we don't have the capacity to do that in the House of Commons or in the Senate is problematic, because by the time the committee decides to do anything.... You have to hire a consultant, you have to get the budget. So part of our experiment is a pilot. We did it in my disability committee in 2002-03. We had tremendous support for going online on the future of CPP disability.

Michael Kirby did not a bad job, I think, on the mental health report use with an online approach. I guess we're sort of trying it as an experiment so that eventually all committees would want this capacity to talk to regular Canadians, and not only with the issue poll —tell us your story, present your solutions—but with the capacity of the Library of Parliament to analyze it, and for us to just sort of get into this century.

●(1315)

The Joint Chair (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Senator Meredith.

Senator Don Meredith: I have a comment. I hear your point, Ms. Bennett, with respect to expediting this process.

I know I'm new to this game, but to my colleague Mr. Plamondon's comments with respect to whether we need to further engage these other witnesses, I don't think there was agreement. If we need to get these other witnesses to come forward, and considering the time constraints of trying to arrange them to fit with our busy schedule—the House's schedule and the Senate's schedule—we need to ask whether we can come to some consensus today on whether we need to solicit these other witnesses or we have sufficient evidence to proceed in this manner.

That's my suggestion.

The Joint Chair (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Senator Stratton.

Hon. Terry Stratton: Briefly, Carolyn, I agree with you, but I think we should continue the logical process of listening to the experts. We don't know what's out there in those countries; they may be doing something pretty exciting. I would agree that at the point

we're satisfied we can't learn any more from those experts, that perhaps we do something like you're talking about

You know, I'm sitting here, listening to all of this, and I'm wondering about something. I haven't yet heard from any witness that there is a magic bullet to this, and if anybody thinks there is....

This isn't that social network movie. If you ever want to watch something dramatic, it is about Facebook and how it was created. That's a fascinating movie to watch about why Facebook is so outrageously successful. We're nowhere near any kind of concept like that, to achieve even a tenth of their success.

I'd like us to proceed as we are, and then explore the opportunities out there for involving the public.

[*Translation*]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I will allow three more people to speak.

[*English*]

Out of respect for the clock and other decisions we need to make, I'd like these comments to be a little shorter than the last ones

Dr. Bennett.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I believe we need to hear from the witnesses who are the other partners in this vision 2020 exercise that the Library of Parliament has undertaken. I think we do want to hear...because it is all of us trying to move forward together.

I think we should also find future witnesses, like we did with the disability committee, and ask the experts what they think we should be asking when we go online, if we go out online. Having them help us to shape the next chapter of the citizen engagement would help us. It certainly did when we did it with the disability committee. The witnesses actually told us what questions we should be asking when we went online.

The Joint Chair (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Thank you, Dr. Bennett.

Monsieur Plamondon.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Louis Plamondon: I have no objection to hearing from the witnesses. I was going to suggest that we do so. One of the witnesses from Quebec is from the National Assembly. There is also a teacher from Montreal. They may have a North American vision that is closer to what we are looking for. We could hear just from those two and then figure out how to bring about some tangible results.

The Joint Chair (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Ms. Hughes.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: I am not sure how many programs are out there, but perhaps we should hear from the people at the Forum for Young Canadians. Students who have gone through the program or program organizers may have some helpful suggestions for us.

●(1320)

The Joint Chair (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Mr. Lunney.

[*English*]

Mr. James Lunney: Thank you.

I've found this rather instructive and helpful, because some of us are new members of this committee and we didn't know we were at the end a study and getting ready to do a report today, or exactly where we're headed with this. I think that would probably be true of a few of our colleagues on this side.

It would be helpful, especially for those of us who are new, if the clerk could distribute to us the game plan or the vision of where this study is going, and what the timeframe is, if you have one.

Do you have a timeframe?

The Joint Chair (Mr. Royal Galipeau): No.

Mr. James Lunney: The committee hasn't struck a timeframe— how many weeks, how many meetings—or where you actually see this going?

An hon. member: It's totally exploratory.

The Joint Chair (Mr. Royal Galipeau): This committee, of which I am also a new member—

Mr. James Lunney: You're now a senior member.

The Joint Chair (Mr. Royal Galipeau): This committee normally sits only occasionally, but right now—

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Not when I chaired it.

The Joint Chair (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Since Senator Downe and I have taken the leadership here, foisted on us by the committee I must tell you, the committee has given itself more work than it normally does. This seems to be an exciting challenge, but it's taking more meetings than your whip has led you to believe.

An hon. member: It always does.

The Joint Chair (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Still, in eight minutes we will have obligations elsewhere, and right now I need to know whether there's consensus at this table to arrange for a Monday evening meeting at six o'clock as soon as possible for these two witnesses, one from New Zealand and one from Australia.

Is there a consensus at this table that we do that?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Louis Plamondon: I suggested the opposite, in other words, that we hear only from witnesses from Canada, Quebec and Ontario, so we get a more tangible viewpoint. Last week, it was Chile. Listen....

The Joint Chair (Mr. Royal Galipeau): There is a consensus that, at six o'clock on a Monday evening in the near future, we hear from an Australian representative and another from New Zealand.

[*English*]

That leaves three other witnesses. One more meeting following this one would wrap it all up. It would involve the National Assembly that Mr. Plamondon is promoting here, plus Mr. Mulley

from Montreal and Professor Coleman from the United Kingdom. Those three could all be part of the same meeting.

My suggestion would be that the representative of la Fondation Jean-Charles-Bonenfant and Mr. Mulley could be invited here from Montreal and Quebec City, rather than a video conference.

The last thing I'd like to deal with is approval of a budget.

[*Translation*]

Yes, Ms. Hughes.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: One of the reasons we wanted to hear from foreign representatives was that they had already carried out the process or were in the midst of doing so. I think we should hear from them. So I agree with you on holding a meeting on a Monday evening. As for the witnesses, I would really like to add someone from the Forum for Young Canadians. I believe Ms. Bennett also has someone she would like to add. We could hear from them that day, but if we have only an hour to hear from four or five witnesses, it will be tight.

● (1325)

The Joint Chair (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The clerk has already made a note of your suggestions.

[*English*]

We have the consensus for New Zealand and Australia?

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Yes.

The Joint Chair (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Should we have a formal vote?

Some hon. members: No.

The Joint Chair (Mr. Royal Galipeau): We're satisfied with a consensus?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Joint Chair (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Then soon after that we would have the other meeting at a regular time.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Joint Chair (Mr. Royal Galipeau): My co-chair, Senator Downe, will request leave from the Senate for this meeting to be held at an extraordinary time.

I would like to draw your attention to the need to approve a budget. You all have a copy of it. The total amount is $14,000, 70% of it to be paid out of an allocation from the House of Commons and 30% to be paid out of an allocation from the other place.

An hon. member: So moved.

(Motion agreed to)

The Joint Chair (Mr. Royal Galipeau): *Merci beaucoup.*

The meeting is adjourned.