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**Official Report
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Wednesday 2 March 2016

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Mercredi 2 mars 2016

**Standing Committee on
the Legislative Assembly**

Municipal Amendment Act
(Election of Chair
of York Region), 2016

**Comité permanent de
l'Assemblée législative**

Loi de 2016 modifiant
la Loi sur les municipalités
(élection du président
de la région de York)

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Hansard Reporting and Interpretation Services
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Service du Journal des débats et d'interprétation
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ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DE
L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Wednesday 2 March 2016

Mercredi 2 mars 2016

The committee met at 1301 in committee room 1.

**MUNICIPAL AMENDMENT ACT
(ELECTION OF CHAIR
OF YORK REGION), 2016
LOI DE 2016 MODIFIANT
LA LOI SUR LES MUNICIPALITÉS
(ÉLECTION DU PRÉSIDENT
DE LA RÉGION DE YORK)**

Consideration of the following bill:

Bill 42, An Act to amend the Municipal Act, 2001 to provide that the head of council of The Regional Municipality of York must be elected / *Projet de loi 42, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2001 sur les municipalités pour prévoir que le président du conseil de la municipalité régionale de York doit être élu.*

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly. We're here to hear about Bill 42, An Act to amend the Municipal Act, 2001 to provide that the head of council of The Regional Municipality of York must be elected.

MR. CHRIS CAMPBELL

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): We'll call on the first presenter today: Chris Campbell. If you could just introduce yourself. You'll have five minutes to present, and then each party will have three minutes to ask questions. We'll be beginning with the official opposition. The floor is yours.

Mr. Chris Campbell: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and committee members. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to come and speak to you today.

My name is Chris Campbell. I'm a proud resident and taxpayer from the town of Newmarket—the seat of York region government—and a former mayoral candidate in the 2014 municipal elections.

I'm here today to enthusiastically support and endorse our own MPP Chris Ballard's private member's bill and amendment to the Municipal Act for the direct election of the chair of York region.

Today we live in uncertain and fictitious times. In the US, we are watching unfold perhaps the most fascinating presidential election ever, whereby Donald Trump, a businessman who today is probably known by many just

as much for being a reality TV star, stands on the verge of securing the Republican Party nomination by capturing the hearts and minds of many disaffected Americans who feel left behind and not part of the political process. Mr. Trump rallies the masses by saying that he is the anti-Washington candidate and that he is funding his whole campaign. He goes on to say, "I cannot be bought by corporate America and special interests." In some ways, it all feels too surreal and, to some, quite frightening.

On Sunday evening, Mr. Chair and members, I, like many people, stayed up late to watch the biggest collection of story-makers gather for the Oscar awards. Many, including myself, anticipated that the last award presented, for best picture, might go to *The Revenant*. But, no, the best picture award went to *Spotlight*.

I, like many others, had never heard of or even seen *Spotlight*. The movie is about a group of investigative journalists at the Boston Globe who uncovered a pattern of abuse by Roman Catholic priests in Massachusetts. It has, if you'll pardon the pun, put the spotlight on the need to keep on top of potential abuses of power, whatever they may be, wherever they may be—which brings me to why we are here today.

Mr. Chair and members of the committee, when I put my name forth to run against the incumbent mayor of Newmarket in July 2014, I was wrestling with my conscience, my public duty as a citizen to expose and debate what I thought were abuses of power. The people of Newmarket understand this first-hand. Newmarket, I believe, more so than any other municipality in York region, has seen an erosion of democratic principles and a lack of oversight and proper mechanisms to enforce decisions that are made behind closed doors.

Our mayor—who, along with our deputy mayor and regional councillors, sits on regional council—is one of 15 members who in recent months voted against the motion for direct election of the chair. I should also add that in recent weeks he was the lone dissenter with regard to a motion that was brought forward at Newmarket council for the direct election of the chairman of York region.

Our mayor, who has simply refused when asked by members of the public what his compensation is at the town and at the region, has said quite openly that he thinks that there are more pertinent issues to be heard other than the direct election of the chairman of York region, while other members of York regional council

have stated that the current backroom jockeying for members' votes is acceptable. I think the quote that has been used on many occasions is, "If it ain't broke, why fix it?"

Well, I suggest to you today, members of the committee, that this method of election, of choosing a chair of York region, is open to abuse and may affect the decisions that are being taken on behalf of the people of York region. I, for one, find this unacceptable, and so do a large majority of taxpayers in York region.

I remember a time in the 1970s, not long after the formation of York region, when York region had a population of only 100,000 people. It was a vast expanse of small communities, interspersed with farms and open fields. In the mid-1970s, Newmarket had a population of approximately 30,000 to 35,000 people; it is now approaching 95,000 people. Newmarket is grappling, like other municipalities in York region, with a myriad of big-city issues like growth, transportation, housing, infrastructure, employment and traffic congestion—

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Mr. Campbell, we're going to have to move to questions from the official opposition now.

Mr. Chris Campbell: Okay.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Thank you very much for your presentation today. I'm a little concerned as to what the expectations are as to the difference between a directly elected regional chair and the way they are presently elected by the council and the municipality, and how that depends on the size of the population—that that should be different today than when the region was formed. What's the difference in the function, whether you're governing 100,000 people or 200,000 people?

Mr. Chris Campbell: To your point, I think what we have seen and the point that I have made is that the regional municipality of York is now one of the fastest-growing economies in North America. The chair and the members of council oversee a multi-billion-dollar budget. The decisions that they make affect numerous individuals who either live or work within the region.

Again, I would speak to the fact that I believe that we have seen a pattern where other regional municipalities around southern Ontario have moved to a direct election of their chair. I haven't done an intense amount of research about the background to that, but I see those regional municipalities working quite effectively.

I would say this to your point: I think the people of Newmarket and the people of York region want more openness and accountability, not less. I believe that the people of Newmarket and York region want a directly elected chair of York region. I think it has been stated many, many times. I don't have a precise, accurate poll, but from what people have been telling me, this is something that they want, and I believe it's time that this committee force this on York region.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I guess the reason I asked the question was that I was a little concerned with the start of your presentation—that somehow this relates to and needs to solve the problem that the government down

south is having right now. If that's really true, then I'm going to have to change my position on it, because it's terrible when we have a society that loses that much faith in the people who are governing, remembering that all those people you're referring to are directly elected by the people they represent. This situation would have a greater chance of making things worse rather than better, if we use that analogy.

1310

Mr. Chris Campbell: If I'm led to believe what you're saying, I don't see that correlation at all. As I go back to my point, I think people want more openness and transparency, and I think direct election will remove any—

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Mr. Campbell, we're going to move now to Mr. Mantha from the third party, please.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Good morning to you, Chris.

Mr. Chris Campbell: Good morning.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Thanks for coming to join us.

Last week, we heard from one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight—you being nine—organizations and individuals who are all in favour of seeing this happen. I'm out of questions, to be quite honest with you.

I want to give you an opportunity, first, to add anything to the debate as number one. Number two: Since you touched on it, did you happen to see Bernie Sanders' comms team? Did you see his video *Feel the Bern*?

Mr. Chris Campbell: Yes, I did.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Isn't that something else?

Mr. Chris Campbell: It is fantastic. It is incredible, I have to say.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I looked at that thing and I went, "Wow, somebody is really on the ball with this one." We've got to get some of that stuff going up here.

Anyway, the one thing I did want to ask you is—yes, there were a lot of individuals who spoke in favour of this. The one question that I have for you is: Does it go far enough? Do you believe that there are some additional regulations for oversight and transparency that should be included in this bill? We heard from one of the presenters last week that they would possibly like to see the bill go a little bit further. Your thoughts?

Mr. Chris Campbell: I've read the bill thoroughly. In the format that it is in now, I think it's certainly acceptable to me and the people I have spoken to in Newmarket. Again, it really comes down to this. This is what I would ask the members of the House: You're either for democracy or you are not. It's that type of question that the people of York region, at a very simple level, understand. Not many people have an opportunity to get engaged and involved in democracy at this level. I, for one, take my democratic rights very, very seriously. That's why I took some hours off work today to come and talk to you, and I thank you again for that. But I think it really does come down to that point.

York regional council has only recently made amends to be more open. I know that the hearings, the meetings—you can hear them over the Internet, but they're

still not televised. In many of the municipal council meetings that I have attended or watched on local television, there is very, very little discussed or reported back from York regional council to local councils. That would be my answer to you, sir.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Okay. How much time do I have?

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Twenty seconds.

Mr. Michael Mantha: You won't be able to answer the question, so I'll save the question for another one that will come later.

Mr. Chris Campbell: Thank you very much indeed.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Great. We'll move to the government side: Mr. Ballard.

Mr. Chris Ballard: Thank you very much for coming in, Mr. Campbell. Are the roads all plowed in Newmarket?

Mr. Chris Campbell: I'm happy to say that I used GO Transit.

Mr. Chris Ballard: Good. We're happy to hear that.

Mr. Chris Campbell: I got on the bus at Davis Drive and Eagle and had a wonderful journey down here. So again, on record, I would encourage the people of Newmarket and Aurora to always use GO Transit where they can.

Mr. Chris Ballard: Good. You ran for the position of mayor in the previous municipal election.

Mr. Chris Campbell: Correct.

Mr. Chris Ballard: What were people talking about? Were you hearing this as an issue? Are you currently hearing this as an issue in terms of the direct election of the regional chair? If you are hearing it, what perhaps is the main message that you're hearing from the people in the Newmarket area?

Mr. Chris Campbell: To your question, I think when I was running for mayor, it really wasn't a prevalent issue. But as time has gone on, the issue has come to the fore. A regional councillor has brought forward a motion to York regional council, and it's getting covered more in the local press. I think it's something that is becoming more and more out in the open, as it were. I have had people stop me and talk about this as an issue.

Again, to my point and endorsement of the bill, the overwhelming majority of people—again, I bring it down to this simple question: Are you for democracy or against it?

The regional municipality of York is very, very unique in its composition as a regional municipality around southern Ontario, in size or scope. I think that the complexity of problems that we are facing in York region is probably much more difficult to grapple with than some, with respect to other, smaller, municipalities. I think when you put that into context, people really want to ensure that the person who is leading that council is very open and transparent, very credible and will speak very clearly without any type of bias or influence with

regard to decisions he or she will be making on their behalf.

Mr. Chris Ballard: A bit of a leading question: What I've heard from people over the years is that when they elect their municipal mayor, their municipal leaders, they get a sense of where that person is with regard to economic policy, environmental policy, transportation policy, those sorts of things. Do you have a sense that a direct election of regional chair would affect that knowledge—

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Sorry, Mr. Ballard; that's time.

Mr. Chris Ballard: That's it?

Mr. Chris Campbell: That's time? Okay. It's a yes.

Thank you, Mr. Chair and committee members, for your time today.

MR. AL DUFFY

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): We'll now call upon Mr. Al Duffy.

Mr. Duffy, please introduce yourself; then you'll have five minutes for a presentation and three minutes each, starting with the third party.

Mr. Al Duffy: My name is Al Duffy. I'm a former member of York region council. I have no axe to grind with any of the members; they're all friends of mine, and the chair.

I'd like to remind the committee that when York region and other regions were formed in the 1970s, it was to replace an existing county system—Toronto was part of York county—and to amalgamate towns, townships and police villages in the higher-growth areas of the province. The provincial government appointed the first regional chair to each region. This was, I'm sure, due to the large geographic nature of the new regions and the impossible task of running an effective election.

York region had been reduced to nine towns from 14 and witnessed the loss of 11 police villages. I don't believe any individual could have run an effective campaign to be elected to the seat of chairman back then. Most people did not know what town or township they belonged to, never mind understand what a chairman was.

Let us now think about what the region of York was in 1971, compared to today. It had a population of just over 200,000 people and very limited responsibility—mostly roads and the direction from the province to create a major servicing scheme to provide water and treated sewage for all nine municipalities.

In the 2011 census, York region's population was over 1,050,000 people. Today, it's about 1,150,000 people. That's a larger population than Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan, and it's closing in fast on Manitoba.

The region looks after roads, water and waste water as it did, but it's now one of the largest regional governments in Canada and has expanded its delivery service

and responsibilities to include health and social services; the growth and delivery of public transportation, which was uploaded from the local municipalities and downloaded by the province; policing; public housing; regional planning; waste services, including garbage, recycling, organics and treatment, along with dump sites and incinerations; plus many other services.

Each of the provinces that we are larger than has a Premier who must be elected to the government prior to being sworn in as leader. Each Premier is chosen by the party through a very public process, as the leader of the party, then must seek a mandate throughout the province and get elected in a riding.

I do not believe for a second that the government of the day or the minister responsible contemplated at what responsibility the region would be at this point in time or that, with a population of over one million people, we'd still be appointing a chair with a simple majority of regional council. That is 11 people, out of over 1,150,000 people, who choose our chair.

I was a member back in the 1980s—actually, my name was put forward to be chair at one time. I wouldn't cut the deals necessary to gain the position.

There are only a few regions that still practise policies of the 1970s and appoint their chair. All counties in the province elect their chair or warden from members of county council—a little bit better.

There is not a wholesome discussion, during municipal elections, about the major regional issues. When there are questions at all-candidates meetings about regional issues, the response from candidates is normally, "That's a regional issue. We're not here to discuss that. We're talking about town issues. This meeting is for municipal elections."

1320

If you follow the Toronto election, the issues now seem to revolve around issues such as policing and crime; social housing; public transportation; major roads—i.e., the Gardiner Expressway; major planning initiatives; water and sewer issues; and, to a very small degree, local issues. They are all regional government issues in York region, and they are not discussed.

Because there is not a direct election for the head of council in York region, there is no one to defend the actions of the region. There is no one to challenge the actions of the region and there is no debate on the future direction of York region on such issues as post-secondary education, regional parks, major public transportation issues, location of public housing, and development charges, just to name a few.

We need to have an elected head of council, or a lord mayor as some other places have done, for York regional council. There is always the comment that it will be expensive to run the regional chair and hold elections. It's just another box on the ballot of each town, just like school trustees or, in the past, hydro commissioners.

Unlike the rural York region in the 1970s, the York region of the 21st century is a modern, urban region with access to print and electronic media plus social media.

We need to have an elected head of council that is directly elected by the electorate and responsible to the people who elected her or him, not to simply the majority of regional councillors.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Thank you very much, Mr. Duffy. We're going to move to Mr. Mantha from the third party.

Mr. Michael Mantha: There's a comment you made that really jumped out at me, and I want to ask you if you'll elaborate on it. You said that you were approached to be the chair at one time.

Mr. Al Duffy: Yes.

Mr. Michael Mantha: You made the comment that you weren't in a position to cut the deals necessary.

Mr. Al Duffy: I think anybody who has followed any of the regional councils—it's, "Let's make a deal." There's no question about that. It's not the right way. It's not the way of any other level of government. It's too important a process to do that. My comment was that, "I just can't agree." The issue was a very major issue and I thought that it needed wholesome debate. It needed a lot of study; it's not just something you do.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Having this new process implemented would bring greater transparency and accountability for that process and would actually eliminate individuals being in the position that you were going to be put in.

Mr. Al Duffy: Yes. I think that the issue that I was discussing at that time, that I wouldn't agree—

Mr. Michael Mantha: We don't have to go into details about it.

Mr. Al Duffy: I'm not going into the details. I wasn't going to do that, but I think that that was one of the major issues that would have been discussed during an election. I think that's where it should have been discussed.

Mr. Michael Mantha: There are many other individuals who have sat here, and you're number 10. I'm going to ask you a question. I'm always one to look at both sides of the story. Can you give me an example as to why people don't want to see this process go through? Why is it that, "If it's not broken, let well be" is the only explanation that I seem to be getting?

Mr. Al Duffy: I disagree with that. I really think that it's a very important level of government. Over a period of time, as happened in metropolitan Toronto, you're going to see fewer municipalities in York region because their responsibilities are being diminished all the time. They had public transportation. I think very soon you're going to see fire services jump up and be a regional issue.

I think it's important that the people have a say in it and they hear it from not only the existing chair who is running for re-election but someone who is going to challenge them on every issue. I think that's very important. It's important in politics.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Great. We'll move to Ms. Wong from the government.

Ms. Soo Wong: Thank you very much, Mr. Duffy, for being here today. I just wanted to recap because I want to

make sure I heard it correctly that you're opposed to the proposed Bill 42.

Mr. Al Duffy: No.

Ms. Soo Wong: No, you support it.

Mr. Al Duffy: I support Bill 42.

Ms. Soo Wong: Okay.

Mr. Al Duffy: If Bill 42, as I read it, is to have direct election of the chair, I support it.

Ms. Soo Wong: Okay, direct election. Why are some of the municipal mayors—the council votes to support the bill, then they go to regional council and vote against it. Can you explain why? You were a former mayor.

Mr. Al Duffy: It's like anything. I think there's a little peer pressure when you're sitting in regional council and you're looking around the room. It's when you have to hold your hand up in front of everybody who is there. I think that's the nice thing about a ballot when you're electing a chair. There's no peer pressure when you walk behind that box. Donald Trump is proving that now.

Ms. Soo Wong: With regard to those who are opposed to this bill, they are saying that—you're from Richmond Hill. The mayor of Aurora is supposed to be here, but I guess he's not here on this list. He made a comment in a letter to the members here today; I'm quoting him. He believes that "the greater issue is the whole form of governance, which in my opinion, leaves the municipalities"—his concern was if he could not attend the regional council meeting, there would be no representation for the town of Aurora. What are your comments on that?

Mr. Al Duffy: You know, it's an interesting comment, but if someone is running for the chair of the region, to be elected by all of the people of York region, he won't have just a municipality in mind; he will have the region of York in mind, to provide better services to everybody. I think it's that way.

It's not that they don't today, but I think we got into that thing from the 1970s or the 1980s, when I was on there, that if you miss the meetings, no one is looking after your town. That's not true.

I think there are other changes needed along with Bill 42. I think there need to be some members who are full-time councillors. The bill doesn't address that; I think it needs to.

Ms. Soo Wong: Thank you.

Mr. Chris Ballard: How much time do we have, Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): About a minute.

Mr. Chris Ballard: A minute? Okay.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): About 40 seconds.

Mr. Chris Ballard: Forty seconds?

One of the concerns we've heard time and again—and it's great that you're here, given your background as a former mayor and former member of council—is that there will be an imbalance of power: The south will have all the power; the north won't have any of the power.

Richmond Hill is kind of in the middle of that. What do you make of that argument?

Mr. Al Duffy: That's the way it is now. There are more members from the south than there are from the north. They have absolute power. I think if you have an elected chair, that changes things. He has the ability of going out to people. But it's the condition today, and I think that needs to be addressed.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Thank you very much. We'll move now to Mr. Hardeman from the official opposition.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Thank you again, Mr. Duffy, for making the presentation. We've heard a number of presentations, as was mentioned earlier, and everyone has concerns about the way the chair is presently elected.

The reason I support this bill and direct election is because democracy is about being responsible to the people who elect you. Presently, the way it is, the regional chair gets elected by 11 out of 20 people. At the end of the day, that's where the loyalties lie, as opposed to the public in general. If you get elected by all the people, then you're responsible to all of them.

Could you explain to me again the issue that Mr. Ballard brought up about how the disproportionate, one side to the other—if you're elected across the whole region, how would you define a line of which is north and which is south, and what's the difference? They would be elected and responsible to the individual ratepayer in every part of the region, would they not?

Mr. Al Duffy: Right now, each regional councillor is only elected from his own municipality, not from the rest of it. That concern has been there. It's been there since the day the region was started, the north-south, because it's represented by population, so the south—Markham, Vaughan, Richmond Hill—has more than the others combined.

It's never been a problem. I have never seen bloc voting on that council. It's never happened. But the problem that you get into—and I think you started there—is if you need 11 votes and it's tied at 10, that one guy who comes to you is the most important guy on the council. That's the guy you owe a lot to. So we've got to be careful that there isn't that one guy out there.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Great. Thank you very much.

MR. JOE LI

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): We do not have a 1:30, so we'll advance and call upon Councillor Joe Li. Mr. Li, if you'd introduce yourself. You'll have five minutes to present, and then we'll be starting with the government for questions.

Mr. Joe Li: Thank you. Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and members of the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly. I am here this afternoon to support MPP Chris Ballard's Bill 42 for an elected regional chair.

Today, I will be discussing an important issue that has been brought to my attention and had been a subject of concern for many people when I was running for re-election in 2014.

The present process for York region council appointing the regional chair deprives the citizens of a democratic process for senior members of the regional government.

1330

Every four years, local ward councillors, regional councillors and mayors have to campaign and validate their position and have a vision for the people, whereas a regional chair is not directly elected by voters and is simply appointed by a mere majority of 20 members of the regional council.

The regional municipality of Halton has the most experience with an elected chair. It was the first municipality to change the system, in the year 2000. Chair Gary Carr, who has been Halton's elected regional chair since 2006 and was re-elected for a third term in 2014, said that popular election keeps him accountable to the citizens instead of politicians.

"If I was appointed by the regional council, they would be my boss instead of the people of Halton," he said.

"Carr dismisses the idea that being elected makes it harder to work with the mayors on regional council.

"It's an excuse for people who don't want democracy," he said. "The way it's set up is exactly the same as the mayor system (in Toronto)... It brings accountability: If you don't like what somebody's doing, you can vote them out."

The municipalities of Durham, Halton and Waterloo all have an elected regional chair. A change to have an elected chair of the region would bring York region in line with the majority of regions across southern Ontario.

York region is one of the fastest-growing regions in Canada. It is the sixth-largest municipality in the country, and consists of nine local municipalities. Approximately 1.18 million people live in the region of York. The regional chair only requires 0.001% of the population to secure the most powerful position in the York regional government.

Citizens of York region contribute so much of their taxes to the regional level of government and, really, they don't have a say in how the money is spent unless they can decide on the platform of a regional chair.

Presently, York region is in huge debt. The region's debt is presently estimated at \$2.5 billion, and it's expected to rise to about \$3.7 billion in 2020. An elected chair would be accountable to the voter as well as council, and would be able to voice personal opinions on issues, campaign on their own platform and send a strong message.

I believe it is vital that we give the power to the people and allow our citizens to engage in a fair, democratic process, to question the candidates for regional chair about their political platforms, and to understand the direction and vision for the future of the region before

they cast a vote for their candidate of choice, thus gaining more confidence about transparency and accountability in our government.

I will end with this quote from one of the greatest leaders of democracy, Mahatma Gandhi: "True democracy cannot be worked by 20 men sitting at the centre. It has to be worked from below, by the people of every village." Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Thank you very much. We'll move to the government, and Mr. Ballard.

Mr. Chris Ballard: I wanted to thank Councillor Li for being here today and for moving this at regional council, and for the interesting discussions that were held there over a couple of days.

You and I have talked about this. I've heard you talk about this a number of times. A number of issues: One of them talks about, in terms of opposition, the cost to run a regional campaign for the chair of the region, and that they may be unduly influenced because there are only certain groups that could afford to back them. Do you have comments about that, about the cost of a campaign stopping people from running?

Mr. Joe Li: That's an excuse. I will just use a unique example. In 2009, in Markham, when your former colleague Tony Wong died, we had a vacancy situation in the city of Markham. They were talking about the same excuse: It's too expensive to call a by-election because it costs half a million dollars.

So I said, "Well, if that's the issue, then I have a solution for you, because I was the first-runner-up. That's how the people of Markham voted. It would save you a lot of money to just appoint me." But then, they say, "Oh, wait a minute. You don't have any experience, so we can't give you the job." So I say, "Make up your mind. Do you want to talk about cost, or experience?"

This is just an excuse, when they talk about costs. If cost is an issue, then I have an idea: Maybe the federal government should stop spending money—billions; I'm talking about billions—promoting democracy around the world. And yet, in our backyards, we're trying to practise hypocrisy and say that we can't afford to spend that kind of money.

There has to be some accountability; either you want to promote democracy—because with democracy there is no price tag there.

Mr. Chris Ballard: How much more time?

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): A minute.

Mr. Chris Ballard: Okay, good.

I just wanted you to comment on a quote. When MPP Reza Moridi raised this issue many years ago—it was the precursor to my Bill 42—he had an open forum. A professor from York University went: Robert MacDermid, whom we've probably all bumped into, those of us in municipal politics at one time or another. He said that candidates for regional council don't have to present a political platform to residents. Instead, they lobby other regional councillors behind the scenes, and voters have no idea what discussions have taken place.

Can you comment on that statement from your experience at regional council?

Mr. Joe Li: Well, it's true. When I was first elected, the first thing that happened is that I got a phone call from the chairman, who said, "I would like to have an appointment with you," and I said, "Well, that's strange. I don't know you very well. Why would you like to talk to me?"—

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): I hate to cut you off, but we have to move now to the official opposition and Mr. Hardeman.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Thank you, Councillor, for your presentation today and all the work that you do in your position as a regional councillor.

I do want to agree with you that we all have to accept that there's a cost to democracy. To talk about what's the best way to elect a regional chair, to put it on the cost of doing it, doesn't make a lot of sense to me. Obviously, if we really believe that, then why don't we just have eight-year terms instead of having four-year terms? You could save half the money by doing that. It doesn't make any sense.

In the change that you're looking to make here in this bill, could you explain to me how the actual operation, or the responsibility of the new regional chair, would differ from the way it's presently elected? Obviously they'd be the same person, and I'd just add on there that if you do it the way you're doing it now, but what's the difference between the position of regional chair and the CEO or the CAO of the municipality?

Mr. Joe Li: Well, right now the regional chair, even though he says he can't vote, dictates all of our agendas.

I remember when I was elected, we had an important issue about the Clarington incineration plant. I think they made a decision on November 27 and I got in the job on December 1, only three days later. I was given a committee to sit on, the environmental committee. I thought that I should be given the privilege of that information, yet they denied me the information. Then, three days later, they came to me and asked for that \$265-million budget for funding. I'm just curious why they put me on the committee and denied me information, yet they don't have a problem coming to me for money. I have issues with that.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Okay.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): We'll move to Mr. Mantha of the third party.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I was just reading some of our written submissions here, and I finally found one where somebody was opposed to this. I want to see what you think about the rationale that was put behind the opposition. It said that there are six other regional governments that are there, three of which elect their chair and three that are appointed. I guess the rationale behind it is that if it's not going to be done for all, why should we just be looking at ours?

How does that sit with you as far as the rationale not to progress and have elected chairs for York region?

Mr. Joe Li: Well, I think that the provincial government has a responsibility to make it uniform across Ontario. Because I'm from York region, my first duty is to speak on my constituency. I cannot argue for other municipalities, but being a member for York regional council, I have a moral responsibility first and foremost to argue for my region. Obviously, I hope the government of Ontario will eventually have elections across Ontario. I don't want my members to keep on arguing, "Why are they picking on us? Only York region had to do that. What about Peel region?" That was the argument, but I said, "Wait, it's coming. Don't worry."

1340

Mr. Michael Mantha: It's obvious that the status quo isn't working because that's what the elected representatives are hearing.

What is the argument for maintaining the status quo?

Mr. Joe Li: I'll just give an example about Markham council. They want their status quo. Their argument against by-elections is cost. But then I say, if it's the cost, then we have to ban the federal government from spending any further money on promoting democracy in Afghanistan and Iraq because that's costing billions of dollars.

So I'd put an end to that practice. As a matter of fact, Markham is now the only city in Ontario that requires a mandatory by-election when there is a vacancy.

No more talk about cost. I always say that democracy has no price tag. Either you are in or you're not in.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Thank you, Mr. Li. Thank you very much.

Mr. Joe Li: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Great. Thank you very much for your presentation today.

MR. GORDON PRENTICE

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): We'll now call upon Gordon Prentice. Mr. Prentice, if you could introduce yourself. You'll have five minutes for your presentation. Questioning will begin with the official opposition.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: I'm Gordon Prentice. I live in Newmarket. I'm very grateful indeed to be given the opportunity of addressing the committee today.

On Saturday, I became a Canadian citizen.

Applause.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: Do I get extra time for that?

Laughter.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I'll give you my time.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: Anyway, I can now vote, and that is a pretty big deal. But I may not be able to vote for the chair of York regional council in 2018 because that is up to you.

You heard from Jim Jones last week, and just a few minutes ago from Mr. Duffy, that York region really is a region on steroids. It's growing very fast indeed. The population is bigger than PEI, Newfoundland, Labrador, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan, and it's

rapidly closing on Manitoba. Yet the person who leads York region is indirectly elected by 20 people.

We know that York region will not initiate change. You will have to do it for them. Many regional councilors believe that the status quo is perfect, or 80% or 90% perfect. It is not a priority for them at all.

Last year, when the provincial government was doing its consultation on the Municipal Act, it specifically asked for views on the way in which regional chairs were selected. In its official response, York region ignored the question; York region said nothing. So the only way we're going to see change is if you force it through, using this bill.

I want to make three quick points, because I don't have much time. The first one is, York region is semi-detached from its residents. Under the Municipal Act, the chair is supposed to ensure accountability and transparency, and yet, for most people in York region, York regional council is a closed world. It is secretive; it's inward-looking; its meetings are not broadcast. Council meetings are audio streamed live on the day, but then there is no record; they just disappear into the ether. It is like a time warp; it's like the 1950s. And committee-of-the-whole meetings, where all the heavy lifting is done, are not streamed. They're not broadcast at all. There is no record of what anyone said.

The second point is that the method of selecting the head of council—that's the regional chair, the chief executive officer of the corporation—is archaic and arcane. It needs to be replaced with something simple and something that has legitimacy, like direct election. Under the present rules, it is astonishing that the regional chair doesn't need to be a resident of the region—doesn't even need to be a member of the council.

When Mr. Emmerson—and I like him—was appointed, he was a private citizen, even though he had a distinguished career as mayor of Whitchurch-Stouffville. But in December 2014, quite literally, he walked in off the street and landed a job at over \$200,000 a year. At the inaugural meeting, the regional clerk asked members if they wanted to vote for the new regional chair in public or in private. They could have done so by secret ballot. Of course, Mr. Emmerson's predecessor, Mr. Fisch, was appointed on December 11, 1997, and he was returned in four subsequent inaugural meetings by acclamation. He never faced any election at all. I suppose York region is a bit of a club; it's a very clubbable atmosphere. I think maybe Mr. Duffy touched on that earlier.

The third point: the powers of the regional chair. The regional chair is more than a figurehead. He has far-reaching powers, formal and informal. We can come back to that later, if you wish.

Mayor Scarpitti from Markham takes the view that the chair is not even the first amongst equals; he's just one of 21 and he can't vote except in a tie. That is not the case. He can vote in committee-of-the-whole meetings, but he chooses not to do so. He has exactly the same rights as all other members. Last year, there was an important debate on the growth plan and the greenbelt. There was a

recorded vote which fell 10 to 10, with Mr. Emmerson breaking the tie and voting against the amendment. He joked—and it was a joke—to his colleagues: “You put me on the spot. That's why I get the big money.”

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Mr. Prentice, I'm sorry to cut you off at that particular point, but we'll move to the official opposition and Mr. MacLaren.

Mr. Jack MacLaren: Mr. Prentice, you and many others have made it clear that you'd like to see the chair elected. What would you think of doing it as the region of Durham did, with a referendum vote of the municipalities, as opposed to having the province coming down and telling people in York, in this case, what to do—give the people of the community a choice in a democratic fashion with a referendum vote, which, in this case, would have to be the next time you have a municipal election?

Mr. Gordon Prentice: Well, I'm generally relaxed about referendums, but we are where we are. We have a private member's bill in front of us. Maybe I could make the point that in your session last week there were questions about uniformity: Why doesn't the province step in and impose uniformity across Ontario? Of course, it can do that. It will, no doubt, bring forward a bill to implement some of the recommendations that come out of the consultations on the Municipal Act.

There are lots of asymmetric features of municipal government in Ontario, but, as I say, we are where we are. We have Mr. Ballard's very narrowly focused private member's bill and we should stick with it. You should vote on it. If you want any other changes affecting other municipalities, then that is a matter for the government, to bring forward a government bill based on last year's consultations.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Mr. Hardeman?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I wanted to go back the comment you made about the powers of the regional chair, some that are assumed and some that he actually has. Could you talk a little about those that he is assumed to have, that don't exist?

Mr. Gordon Prentice: Well, as I said, there are formal powers—he is appointed to chair the regional council—but there are lots of informal powers that he can exercise because he knows the internal wiring of the organization. He sits on committees that look at the agendas that are going before members.

If there are changes to the established policies and strategies of York regional council, there is a separate committee. It's a staff committee, but he's on it. They seek his views. They seek the direction—I've got the quote here somewhere—of the regional chair. Here it is. He's on the strategic policy committee, which reviews policies and strategies that “require direction, input and advice from the regional chairman.” I think that's quite a big deal.

On the formal powers, he can declare a state of emergency in York region. Mayor Frank Scarpitti can't declare a state of emergency.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Mr. Prentice, I have to move to the third party and Mr. Mantha.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Mr. Prentice, you have all the time to finish what you wanted to say from your opening comments and to finish the comments you were making now.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: Well, only if you find it interesting.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Absolutely.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: Mr. Emmerson is chair of the York region rapid transit board. He's a member of the York Regional Police Services Board and he appoints citizen representatives to it. He is responsible for recommending the appointment of members to task forces; we're got one on broadband and we've got one on transportation. He has authority with the chief administrative officer to award contracts, buy and sell land over the summer and, other times when the council is suspended, he sets the agenda. Mr. Duffy said this earlier: He is the only full-time regional councillor who can take an expansive, region-wide view; all the other members are looking out for their own turf.

1350

I think he has got quite a wide-ranging role and lots and lots of responsibilities, and it is not true to say—as Mr. Blommestein said at your meeting last week—that he doesn't really have many powers at all. He said that dismissively. He has a lot of power.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I just wanted to finish by saying that I wish I could bring you along with me to many of the communities for engagement because of your opening comments, in saying how excited you were, first, becoming a Canadian citizen—congratulations—and the fact that you had that opportunity to vote. There are so many individuals across the province and across this country who take that opportunity and that privilege for granted. It was refreshing to hear you say that. Thank you.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: Well, thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Thank you. We'll move to Ms. McMahon.

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: Thank you, Chair.

Congratulations on your Canadian citizenship.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: I thank you again.

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: Rule, Britannia. You're very self-deprecating, in keeping with where you come from, if I may say. You're a former member of Parliament in the British House. That's quite a distinguished honour for you, and we welcome your conversation on this very topic. I know that it's something that you care passionately about.

I did a little digging into your voting record and some work that you've done. I know your wicked past—

Mr. Gordon Prentice: Oh, no.

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: No, it's very interesting. When you were elected in Great Britain, you talked about the wholly elected House of Lords. I think there are some parallels here. Can you draw some for us between that conversation and this one in terms of the unelected office?

Mr. Gordon Prentice: I think we may be straying off point here, but—

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: We may be, but I'm going to let you make it anyway.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: I think the appointed House of Lords is totally anachronistic, and I have long believed that Britain should have an elected second chamber: although I wouldn't necessarily look to Canada for inspiration.

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: Fair enough.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: But as I say, the most important thing for Chris Ballard's bill, if I can put it this way without appearing impertinent, is that you pass it; you don't amend it; you don't make it more difficult to get through. It's difficult enough for a private member's bill to get through the House. You've got to keep it narrowly focused and you've got to vote for it because the regional councillors in the region will not do it. The alternative of having a ballot triggered by the region is immensely complicated—and you heard about this last week.

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: We had the mayor of Aurora send in an email to the committee. Regrettably, he wasn't here today, but he did make the point of underrepresentation, in his view. I'd love your thoughts on this. May I quote from the email?

He says, "I believe the greater issue is the whole form of governance, which, in my opinion, leaves the municipalities of Aurora, East Gwillimbury, King township and Whitchurch-Stouffville underrepresented, or potentially unrepresented."

What do you think of that in the context of the legislation before us now?

Mr. Gordon Prentice: Well, I said earlier that there are huge asymmetries. If you look at Niagara region, there are 31 members of the council and 13 lower-region municipalities. If you look at York, there are 21 members of the council and nine lower-tier municipalities. Halton, I think, is four; is it?

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: Yes.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: So there are huge variations, but it is not the job of Mr. Ballard's bill to address all that. That's just a smokescreen. I'm very disappointed that Mr. Dawe is not here to defend his own position, if I'm honest.

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Great. Thank you very much, Mr. Prentice. As Mr. Mantha said, congratulations on your Canadian citizenship. I would add, now that you're a Canadian citizen, you may be able to run for president of the United States, because I heard there might be a Canadian running for president down there.

Laughter.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: Very good; very good.

MR. MICHAEL THOMPSON

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): We'll now call Mr. Thompson. Thanks, Mr. Thompson. If you would identify yourself, and you have five minutes for

your presentation. Questions will start with the third party.

Mr. Michael Thompson: Good afternoon, Mr. Chair, members of provincial Parliament, committee members and staff. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you on this issue. My name is Michael Thompson and I'm a councillor for the town of Aurora.

After an election, whether it be provincial, federal or at the municipal level, we've all heard at one time or another the phrase, "The people have spoken loud and clear." And yet when I look at the election of the regional chair, I question whether the people really get a chance to speak. That is why I have come before you today to share my opinion on why we need to change the current governance model for York region and begin electing the regional chair.

I share some of the thoughts and opinions that have been expressed both today as well as last week before this committee, but for me, it's primarily about accountability.

In the municipal councillors' handbook, which the province provides, it states that accountability and transparency are a priority in maintaining public trust in council and in the management of a municipality. It also states that section 224 of the Municipal Act explicitly includes ensuring the accountability and transparency of the operations of the municipality as part of the role of council. Councillors are, of course, accountable to the public every four years through municipal elections.

If, as indicated, we as councillors are accountable to the residents through municipal election, I believe that the regional chair should be accountable in the same fashion to all those who live within the region.

In Aurora, 43% of residents' tax dollars go to the region. That's a larger portion than to the town, and yet what say do the residents have on how their money will be spent or was spent? Being more accountable means giving the residents a voice and/or a vote on who will lead the region.

In an elected system, candidates for regional chair would need to share their vision for both the region and Aurora, and explain how they would plan to address the issues that matter most to the residents. During the last election, we had no idea what, if any, thoughts the chair had on regional growth, transportation, affordable housing or even who was going to run for regional chair.

In my opinion, the election of a regional chair would provide an opportunity to raise awareness of regional issues and allow the community to weigh in on the discussion and play an active role in the shaping of our future. To me, more public engagement is not just a principle of good governance but leads to a more effective and efficient government.

We recognize that accountability is a fundamental principle in what we do, but so is transparency. Municipal elections are regulated. The rules, processes and procedures are crystal clear. These rules and procedures preserve the integrity of the process and are essential to maintaining the public trust. We value these standards,

we all abide by them, and yet the process for selecting the regional chair differs. In my opinion, those rules don't meet the same standards that apply to all of us.

I have delegated before regional council and have spoken on the issue. While some on that council may have concerns about the process or the cost of an election, or question the value of change, I think it's better to be proactive rather than reactive and to seize upon this opportunity to make an effort to collaborate with the province, not only on electing the regional chair but also the process by which it is done, so that any of the considerations which have been raised can be addressed.

I think it's also important to note that while regional council may not have voted in favour of Councillor Li's motion, it has gone through a number of the municipalities within York region, and 33 of 40 elected members have voted in support of it. That presents a strong argument for representing the views of the public within York region.

The time has come for change, and I hope that this committee will recommend election, and not selection, of the regional chair. I appreciate your time.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Great. Thank you very much.

Mr. Mantha.

Mr. Michael Mantha: It's 33 of 40?

Mr. Michael Thompson: I believe so—five councils.

Mr. Michael Mantha: That sounds like overwhelming support for this, in my view.

You talked about greater engagement. An elected chair: How do you see his role as a chair, and how do you see him conducting himself—or herself—as having greater engagement with the community? How do you see that benefiting, through the lens of this bill?

Mr. Michael Thompson: It's the same as for myself. As the election comes upon us, you're out in public. You're talking about your vision for the community, the issues. You're meeting with the public and responding. The same thing would be for the regional chair.

In York region, in Aurora, we have the same issues as everyone else in terms of transportation, in terms of managing the growth and balancing. It's important that we're engaging the residents, so that the decisions being made are in the best interests of the community itself. I think just having the discussion, having the opportunity to weigh in on it, increases that engagement and the involvement.

For municipal elections, I think the last turnout was 35%. I think it's another way to get people more involved in their community.

Mr. Michael Mantha: It was 35%?

Mr. Michael Thompson: I believe so.

Mr. Michael Mantha: And having this election for the chair, I think you're going to see maybe a positive move towards more involvement. Do you see the appointment of the chair having kept that 35% low, or do you see this as an opportunity to have even greater involvement?

1400

Mr. Michael Thompson: I think we should always look for opportunities to increase engagement and voter turnout. I think this is another way to do it: by engaging them in additional issues.

Mr. Michael Mantha: There were some previous presenters who were here, and I have yet to hear of a person opposed to this, but do you see this bill going far enough? Is there anything else that could be added to it to strengthen it, to make it more transparent? Is this a step in the right direction?

Mr. Michael Thompson: It's definitely a step in the right direction. The principle is selection versus election, and the principle behind it is that democratically the right thing to do is to elect the regional chair. Then those issues of representation, process and cost can all be worked out. That's logistics. That's operational issues. What we're here for today is to talk about the principle: What's the right thing to do? All the other concerns and issues being voiced can be addressed through York region. I don't necessarily see them needing the province to weigh in in terms of how you're going to run the election and how it's going to integrate with the other municipalities. That's logistics. Businesses deal with that stuff all the time.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Thanks, Mr. Thompson.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): We'll move to Ms. Wong from the government.

Ms. Soo Wong: Thank you, Mr. Thompson, for being here today. I'm going to your mayor's letter to the committee. I want to get some clarity. I just want to hear your view as a member of the Aurora council, because he wrote to the committee, saying in the third paragraph, "We are not in favour of a 'solution' that may address a perceived lack of democracy...."

In your opinion, Councillor Thompson, do you see the election of a chair of one of the largest regions in this province as a lack of democracy? That's what your mayor is saying to the committee.

Mr. Michael Thompson: I would view it in terms of a glass half-full as opposed to a glass half-empty. I would say it's a greater form of democracy.

Ms. Soo Wong: Okay. Your mayor also indicated to us that his concern is the fact that if we have an elected chair, there would be less representation. "In the event that I cannot attend a meeting ... Aurora is not represented." What is your view about this?

Mr. Michael Thompson: Again, it goes back to the principle. We're here talking about the election of the regional chair. The issue of whether or not to appoint an alternate so that there's representation for Aurora at the table—that's an in-house issue that could be resolved through York region. They could address it through their own bylaws. To me, that's something that could be done at the regional level. It doesn't need the province to weigh in on whether or not to allow our mayor to have an alternate when he cannot attend a meeting. That's a secondary issue. Sometimes at the council table we say, "Let's stick to the motion at hand and try not to stray too far." To me, that argument is a separate argument.

Ms. Soo Wong: Can you explain to the committee how it is that your council voted in support of this proposed bill and your mayor voted against it regionally?

Mr. Michael Thompson: I don't want to put words in our mayor's mouth. I think he commented in the local paper saying that he takes council's comments under consideration but then he weighs it with his own opinions and information that we may or may not have and makes a decision on what he believes is best for the community. That's his position.

Ms. Soo Wong: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Chris Ballard: How much time have we got left? Have we got some time?

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Thirty seconds.

Mr. Chris Ballard: Thank you for your advocacy on behalf of Bill 42 and for coming down today. Very simply, what are you hearing in the community about support for direct election, either for or against?

Mr. Michael Thompson: Certainly when I've talked to residents, I've not heard a single one say that it should be anything other than election. As always with those issues, they may not show up at the chambers, as you well know, but when you engage them in conversation—it's the principle, of course. In our system, it's always about election, not selection.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Thank you very much. We'll move to the official opposition. Mr. Hardeman?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Thank you very much for your presentation.

Mr. Michael Thompson: My pleasure.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: A couple of quick questions: We keep hearing about representation and that somehow the ability to represent all the people will be diminished by having an elected regional chair. How could anybody even come up with that suggestion? Obviously, if it's an appointed one, the 20 members of council get to decide the area that that regional chair is coming from; if the people elect them, they get elected by a majority of the vote. Could you explain to me why that would even be an item of discussion?

Mr. Michael Thompson: I certainly don't support that position. I grew up a fair bit in Ottawa. I would say that the area of Ottawa is similar to York region, as is the population. Their mayor, Jim Watson, is able to manage and run it and do an effective job supporting and representing the people, as well as the costs. I don't clearly understand how they can use the vastness of York region as a reason not to move forward. Again, it's about the principles.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: The other thing I just wanted to quickly talk about is that the percentage of voter turnout would be increased when you elect the regional chair because everyone would come out—or at least, more people would come out because they'd think that was important. I was just sitting here, putting out a comparison saying what voter turnout would be provincially if the leaders of the parties were appointed instead of

elected. I can tell you, it would be like by-elections and it would drop in half to what it is in a general election. The process that represents all the people is the one that brings all the people out to vote. I think it's a real plus to have one elected to bring the people out to vote.

Mr. Michael Thompson: I always hope to try to get more people involved in the process.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Thank you very much. We'll move now to Mr. Mantha.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Didn't we start with me?

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Oh, did you start? Okay. Sorry.

Thank you very much for your presentation.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Hey, we could talk some more.

Mr. Michael Thompson: Sure. I'm happy to.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Chair, you're giving me special privileges. You'll have to go for a second round—

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): We like the sound of your voice.

Thank you very much for your presentation.

Mr. Michael Thompson: Thank you again for the time.

MS. CATHERINE MARSHALL

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): We'll now call upon Ms. Marshall.

You're pretty honest, Mr. Mantha.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Pretty honest?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: That's a low benchmark.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): I'll correct my record: You're very honest.

Ms. Marshall, you have five minutes for your presentation. If you'd start by introducing yourself, please.

Ms. Catherine Marshall: Okay. I'm Catherine Marshall. I live in Aurora. I'm not sure what else—that's it.

Good afternoon. I want to thank the standing committee for listening to my deputation on Bill 42. I believe it is an important and overdue necessity for the over one million residents in York region to elect the most influential governing person in the municipality: the chair of York region.

We are way behind the times, with only two other regions in Ontario still appointing this most powerful political position. Of those, Peel is already considering this change ahead of the 2018 municipal election. In the Niagara region, at least the chair must be a mayor or regional councillor, and so elected democratically to govern.

I'm sure that you have already heard or read the so many good reasons to pass Bill 42—and the two times that similar bills have already passed second reading unanimously—so I would just like to emphasize the ways in which our current appointment process does not serve us democratically, in my opinion.

It is anachronistic that in this country, where we know which leader we are voting for while electing representatives to the national government and to the provincial government, and elect our mayor and representatives to the municipal government, we do not have a democratic voice in the choosing of the leader of the very powerful regional council. We do not even know who the potential candidates for this office are. Those candidates are not required to have ever been elected and held a governing position or to be answerable to an electorate. This appointed person will only be answerable to a majority of 11 votes on a newly minted York region council. A point against the argument that the officials at that council appointing the chair have the best experience to do so: At the time of appointing, this is just post-election, and many are sitting on regional council for the first time.

The process, I think, of electing the chair will be educational to the public and further their engagement and understanding of regional issues, our critical services that are overseen there and that this is where the chair, currently appointed, oversees a \$3-billion annual budget.

1410

The municipalities of Aurora, East Gwillimbury, Markham, Newmarket and Whitchurch-Stouffville have all deliberated on the issue of whether to elect or appoint, and voted overwhelmingly to include the citizens in the process by supporting MPP Ballard's Bill 42. I am appalled that all their mayors except for Stouffville's chose to vote against these resolutions at the regional council level. When a mayor can represent only their own wishes at regional council, ignoring the other elected representatives of their municipality who represent us and who have supported better accountability in our leadership through the democratic process, it is time to change.

I would like to finish with a quote from a recent column by Chris Simon entitled "Election of York Region's Chair Makes Sense," on page A6 in the February 25 issue of our regional newspaper, the Banner. He very succinctly sums up my deepest concerns, I believe: "The chair is the highest paid municipal political position in the region, but its selection process is the least scrutinized. It's time to change that. York residents should select a chair through the rigours of an election campaign, where candidates debate their competing visions for the region and show they're worthy of your trust and tax dollars."

Thank you very much for this opportunity.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Thank you very much. We'll move to Ms. Naidoo-Harris.

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: Thank you, Chair. First of all, I want to start out by thanking you, Ms. Marshall, for coming in and participating in our electoral process and making sure your voice is heard. I'm especially impressed by the fact that, just briefly looking over your background, I see that you are quite engaged locally in your community. I know that that says a lot about the kind of resident you are for your community.

I see that you are on the Highland Gate Rate Payers Association. You're also involved with the environment

and sit on an advisory committee to the town. These are great things. It also means that you're involved quite a bit with regular folks—that you get to sit down and find out what people in your community think about various things.

So, tell me: In your conversations with people in your community and in your area, what do you hear when it comes to this particular issue in Bill 42? What kind of a response is it getting?

Ms. Catherine Marshall: I think the fact that people's attention has been brought to this issue—they were almost ignorant of it before, so I'm really pleased that the bill has been brought forward again—or a similar bill—because people are amazed that the chair is not elected.

The information that is now coming because of this discussion and push—people seem to think that an election is obvious. It's a responsibility that we should all have and that appointment is not appropriate at this time.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Mr. Ballard?

Mr. Chris Ballard: Thank you. I thank you very much for coming down from Aurora today. I know that the weather isn't that great.

Ms. Catherine Marshall: Actually, it's gorgeous out.

Mr. Chris Ballard: Is it beautiful out there now? Good stuff. I look forward to the trip home.

I recall seeing you numerous times, appearing before Aurora council when I sat there, bringing concerns forward. You're very involved in following what's going on within town. Do you think the direct election of a regional chair is going to increase people's awareness of what the region does?

Ms. Catherine Marshall: Oh, absolutely. I think, at least from the bits that I hear, that people really don't know what their region's responsibilities are as opposed to the town's, and how much the region's decisions can affect our town and our own lives. There are critical issues. I believe—

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Ms. Marshall, I'm sorry. We have to move to the official opposition. Mr. MacLaren.

Mr. Jack MacLaren: Would you say the majority of the people in your community are supportive of an election of your regional chair?

Ms. Catherine Marshall: I can't really speak for the majority, but to me, it's the most reasonable approach, and so I would have to give them the benefit of the doubt and say yes, they must be. I haven't done a referendum or seen one.

Mr. Jack MacLaren: It's pretty clear from what we hear that most people are in favour of this bill and of having an election for your chair. In the interest of making it a local initiative in the form of a referendum, as opposed to the provincial government telling municipal government, or regional government in this case, what to do—in other words, keeping decision making at the grassroots level where it more appropriately should be, I would say. They've done this kind of thing in the region of Durham. Would you consider a referendum as a

reasonable approach, or a better approach, to achieving your goal of election for your chair?

Ms. Catherine Marshall: I think that the necessity of a democratic process is obvious. I'm not sure that resources need to be spent on a referendum. It seems obvious to me that the regional chair should be elected, so I would not see a referendum as a necessity. I'm comfortable with the province overseeing it, with the understanding that democracy is the best approach.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Mr. Hardeman?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: There have been a lot of discussions about this being a unique situation and that it should be broadened out so that it covers all regions. We hear that there are three regions that have gone to direct elections, three that haven't and so forth. It is true, from my own information, that every one that was created since 1970—all the regions had indirectly elected chairs. They've all, one at a time, changed to what they presently have—those that have changed. Do you think it's necessary that we broaden it out that everybody has to be one way or the other?

Ms. Catherine Marshall: I'm not sure I understand the question.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Durham region is now directly elected by the people. Originally, it wasn't.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Mr. Hardeman, I'm sorry; I have to move on to the third party and Mr. Mantha.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Thank you for joining us today.

When you started out with your comments, you referred to Chris Simon in a quote. I thought you were going to talk about Chris Simon the ex-hockey player who lives in Wawa. I was thinking, "Wow, Chris is getting around," because—

Ms. Catherine Marshall: Who's that?

Mr. Michael Mantha: I don't want to put words in your mouth but—I'm just trying to do some math here. Earlier, Mr. Thompson said that 33 out of the 40 councillors were very supportive of this. If it's transparency and engagement that we're trying to do—I'm thinking that those 33 probably got a very strong message and mandate from their constituents, because that's who they represent as far as coming forward. In my mind, that's a pretty strong message as far as what the people from this region want. Bar none, any of the other arguments—and I still haven't heard a good argument to not do this.

I know you didn't want to put words out there speaking for the majority of individuals out there, but the facts speak for themselves. When you look at individuals in the position, the reason why all of us are here is because we're listening to constituents back home. Thirty-three out of 40, relating back to the communities they represent—that's a pretty strong message, would you not say?

Ms. Catherine Marshall: I would certainly say so. I think the regional councillors are supposed to represent their electorate, the municipality, and I do think it's a strong message.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I'm looking at the list: 16 to come up next. I'm hoping this is going to be a clean sweep with yeas and we're not going to see any opposition to this, other than the written submissions that are there. That's a pretty strong message.

I think York region has given a directive to this committee as far as what they want to see. They want to elect their individuals and they want to see greater engagement and greater involvement from their chair. I think it's fair to say that we've got a decision to make here.

1420

Ms. Catherine Marshall: I'm very glad to hear it.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Great; thank you very much for your presentation.

Ms. Catherine Marshall: Thank you very much for the time.

MS. CHRISTINA BISANZ

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): We'll now call upon Christina Bisanz—hope I pronounced that properly.

Ms. Christina Bisanz: You did.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): If you would state your name for the record, please. You have five minutes for your presentation, and then we'll move to questions.

Ms. Christina Bisanz: Yes, thank you very much. Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. My name is Christina Bisanz and I'm the ward 7 councillor for the town of Newmarket. Coincidentally, the region of York headquarters is located in my ward and it's the largest employer in my ward, so I have a particular interest in the region and its functioning from that standpoint.

I realize that I am the last of a long lineup of speakers that you've heard from today and previously. I think, Mr. Mantha, I'm number 15. I've read through the transcripts of last week's meetings. I've listened to the comments of the others here today. I realize that you've heard many times the background and history of why, in 1970, it seemed to make a lot of sense for the region to appoint the chair. You've also heard that the region has grown significantly since that time in size, in the size of our budget and so forth. I know I don't need to take your time to comment on those things.

On February 8, I brought forward a motion to Newmarket council in support of Bill 42, requesting that the province pass the bill and enable the election of the regional chair. My motivation was based on my belief, which has been echoed by many residents and those who have appeared before you, that the position of the regional chair is a significant enough one in the construct of the region's responsibilities and its influence in our lives, livelihood and quality of life that the role of the chair now supports being an elected role with a very clear mandate from the citizens of our region. That motion was supported in an 8-to-1 vote by council.

It has been suggested that the role of the chair is a limited one—presiding over council meetings, voting in the event of a tie and so forth—and that a change from the current process is unwarranted. However, we know that section 225 of the Municipal Act actually states that as head of council, the chair also acts of CEO of the municipality; provides leadership to council; represents the municipality at official functions; promotes public involvement in the municipality's activities; acts as a representative of the municipality; and so on and so forth.

Recently, for example, regional chair Emmerson successfully organized and led a delegation from regional council to Ottawa for what I understand were a number of very fruitful meetings with the Prime Minister and several federal ministers. So it is a significant role.

I understand that the Municipal Act provisions are mirrored by those related to the head of council and CEO in the City of Toronto Act—in other words, the elected mayor. However, despite the importance of the role, particularly in the growing region of York, the position is not advertised to the general public to inform them of the process or to possibly increase the number of qualified candidates. The majority of the region's population, as we've heard, is not even aware of the significance of the position of chair of York region, or that it's an appointed position.

I must say that one thing that has happened as a result of MPP Ballard's initiative in putting forth this bill and the all-party support in bringing it thus far—and I want to commend you all for that—is that we've sparked more public awareness and dialogue about the role of both the chair and the region, and that's healthy, it's positive and it's timely.

I understand that MPP offices across York region have received hundreds of phone calls asking for direct election of the regional chair now. I've personally received numerous responses from residents throughout Newmarket expressing their support for my motion. The public fully supports Bill 42 because it enhances the democratic process and it gives them a sense of ownership of the region that their lives are so invested in.

I'd like to conclude with a comment regarding the timing of this bill. I believe that time is of the essence, given that 2018, particularly when we're all viewing it from our lens of an elected official, is just around the corner. I recognize that there's a lot to do to put all processes in place to make this happen for the next election. Otherwise, we'll be making democracy wait until 2022. It's time for change. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Right on time. Thank you very much. We'll move to the official opposition. Mr. Hardeman.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Thank you very much for your presentation and all your hard work on this issue. I just wanted to point out, going back to the years when all the regions were formed, that there was a reason why they called it regional chair, not regional mayor. In fact, the position is exactly the same except, at the time, they didn't give the chair any power. He only had the

ability—at that time, they were all “he”—to break the tie, so all decisions were made by council. He only chose if the council was equally divided.

Council has let that change happen. Legislation hasn't changed since for that position. What's your suggestion to keep that from happening if it's an elected chair?

Ms. Christina Bisanz: From council changing—

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: To actually give him the power that he has now. What do you think needs to change? The power they have is exactly what it was then: just to run council. In fact, the city of Toronto decided to put in a speaker to do exactly what regional chairs were supposed to do originally.

Ms. Christina Bisanz: To answer your question, the mandate is there. The difference is, it's not a mandate that has been chosen and elected by the populace which that position represents as a whole. That's the democratic process that's missing.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Thank you very much. It's what we wanted to hear.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Great. We'll move to Mr. Mantha.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Good morning, Christina. How are you doing?

Ms. Christina Bisanz: I'm well this afternoon. It's been a long day for you.

Mr. Michael Mantha: You know what? A lot of individuals are always opposed to change. Change is frightening for some people sometimes.

You referred to a couple of dates, and I made note of them. In 1971, when this whole thing started, I was in kindergarten. That was quite a few years ago. I always keep hearing changes and people referencing “those days.” I hear it in the House among our colleagues; I hear about the Rae days. Those were in the 1990s, 1995. Then you get into the early 2000s; those were the Harris years. And then we get into the last 13 years and possibly the next two years, in 2018; we have the Liberal years.

I absolutely agree with the statement you made: It's long overdue. It's time for change.

Thank you for joining us.

Ms. Christina Bisanz: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): A man of few words. Thank you, Mr. Mantha. We'll move to Mr. Anderson.

Mr. Granville Anderson: Hi, Christina. Thank you for being here and thank you for the work you're doing in your community.

I am from a region that now has an elected regional chair, the region of Durham. In the beginning, you heard the complaint that the sitting chair who ran would have an unfair advantage, but that would only happen, probably, the first time around, and as people understood the process, it would become fairer and more equitable.

The current chair—I don't know what he said before being elected—said he feels it legitimized his position and he feels good that he actually represents the people. That's a good thing. He supports that wholeheartedly because he's responsible to all of Durham region, the various communities. To him, that's of personal satisfaction.

The second part is, I see that the mayor of Aurora had something about governance and imbalance. If you look, Durham region just fixed that, and it was done internally. Oshawa had eight regional councillors and other areas were under represented. They just rejigged the representation to make it more equitable. You don't need legislation for that; that's something that's done internally.

I know I'm doing all the talking, so any comments on what I've said?

Ms. Christina Bisanz: I think that the situation you've described is one that the region of York is currently considering. In fact, at the last council meeting, council bifurcated the two issues, if you will. They had a vote on this issue of the elected chair role, but they also voted in support of a governance review.

I think there is a recognition that there is need for change. There is need to adapt to the fact that the environment in which the region is operating is demonstrably different now, that there's a need to better respond to the challenges that the region as a whole has, and that means a different way of looking at representation in all areas of the region to make sure that that's done appropriately.

To commend the council, they are forward-looking with respect to needing to have some changes. I just don't understand why this very fundamental part of ensuring that the change is one of a full democratic process has not been included in that deliberation.

The Chair (Mr. Monte McNaughton): Thank you very much, Ms. Bisanz. That's all the time we have.

I'd like to thank all the presenters for coming today, and last week as well, and thank the members of the committee. We will be meeting next Wednesday to discuss Bill 76, the Natural Gas Superhighway Act, 2016.

Meeting is adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 1430.

CONTENTS

Wednesday 2 March 2016

Municipal Amendment Act (Election of Chair of York Region), 2016, Bill 42, Mr. Ballard / Loi de 2016 modifiant la Loi sur les municipalités (élection du président de la région de York), projet de loi 42, M. Ballard	M-195
Mr. Chris Campbell.....	M-195
Mr. Al Duffy	M-197
Mr. Joe Li.....	M-199
Mr. Gordon Prentice.....	M-201
Mr. Michael Thompson.....	M-203
Ms. Catherine Marshall.....	M-206
Ms. Christina Bisanz.....	M-208

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