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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Cyber-Safety Committee

Report

SPEECH

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Questioner
Speaker Ms RISHWORTH

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(Kingston) (NaN.NaN pm)

Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (12:22): I am going to speak very briefly, but as a member of the Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety I would like to commend the committee's report, *High-wire act: cyber-safety and the young*. I was very pleased to be a part of this report because it allowed us to connect with a variety of different stakeholders and people involved in this area. It is not just young people who get caught up in some of these issues on the internet. In fact, what we did hear on the committee time and time again is that parents often have a fear of the unknown. When they do not know what is happening on the internet they can become quite worried and fearful. Part of the recommendations are looking at what we can do to empower young people to stay safe on the internet but also empower parents to feel that they are in control. There is a recommendation in the report for a self-assessment tool that allows people, whether they be parents or young people, to gauge exactly what they know and do not know.

For young people it was a different issue. They are so familiar with this technology and so comfortable with it that every now and again they do get caught out on some of the technicalities and localities and are less fearful about this. This was a very wide-ranging report. We as a committee did a survey. I think it is unique for House of Representatives, joint and select committees to directly go to young people. There were 60,000 comments received by the committee and over 7,000 responses directly from young people so that we could hear what they had to say. That was an important part of the committee's work. I must commend the chair, Senator Dana Wortley, and the deputy chair, the member for Mitchell. They worked very hard on this. The chair definitely took this up with a lot of passion and a lot of dedication. Hearing directly from young people was critically important.

This being a new area, it is at times difficult to find out where to go to report things—if people have experienced bullying, for example—or to learn that you are not alone. One of the recommendations that has come out is, while a lot of great tools have come out on what to do about cyberbullying, to centralise that and have a portal through which people can directly access information about where to go and what to do. This is a really important recommendation.

Another area that we looked at is what is happening in schools and with teachers. A lot of young people spend most of their time at school and with teachers during the week. We need to look at training teachers on how to watch out for this issue and how to be involved in this issue. We do not want them to preach to young people because, as I have said, young people know a lot more than a lot of older people sometimes about how to navigate the internet. But we want to teach them how to support young people in the constructive use of the internet. We want to teach them how to intervene if there is a problem online. Teacher training and cultures within school environments are things that this report makes some very good recommendations about.

There are also some regulatory recommendations about privacy. This is not just an issue concerning young people. A lot of people do not know what to expect when they go on to things like Facebook. While there is a lot of information out there, it is not always clear. One of the issues that I raised in the committee was the fact that privacy settings are made without notification. Privacy settings get changed and then suddenly your information has become available after you have set up that Facebook page doing everything that you could to protect your privacy. When a setting changes, you are not notified about it. Or, if you are notified, that notification is not very clear. When it comes to social networking sites, especially when offensive material is put up, there is room to improve things. While the government is somewhat restricted because this is an international issue, there are certainly regulations that we can look at to help ensure that people are safe.

But it is also about empowering young people, parents and teachers to protect themselves online. It is about helping them understand the gaps in their knowledge—things that they might not have thought about. For parents, it is about facing some of the unknowns, some of the things that they are not confident about and are concerned about.

Another recommendation, which was touched on by the previous speaker, was to do with the importance of peer-to-peer education campaigns. As I have mentioned, there is a gap. This was certainly evident in the survey. There is sometimes a gap between generations in their understanding of the internet and what can be done. I certainly know that. When I go to

schools I see young people on laptops in year 2 and year 3 doing their research on the internet—these children are six and seven—and those children are often a lot more savvy than I am. There is certainly a gap, so having that peer-to-peer discussion or education is also critically important.

There was a lot of work done on this. I would like to thank all the members of the committee. I would also like to thank the secretariat, who worked very hard on this. I would like to thank all of the young people and others who gave evidence for their participation. It was greatly valued. It does provide a bit of a model for how committees can work in the future—going out and directly talking to young people or whichever different group is concerned. Directly consulting is a good idea. With 7,000 responses, this was of great interest, with young people really wanting to have their say. On that note, I commend the report to the House and thank everyone involved.

Debated adjourned.