Toronto Housing Company Case A & B

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**Toronto Housing Company**

**Part A**

Derek Ballantyne, Chief Executive Officer of the Toronto Housing Company (THC), sat in his office, reflecting on the progress he had made in his new job. It was May, 1999 and he had been with the Toronto Housing Company for just over 9 months. He had deliberately spent the first 6 months of his tenure watching, listening and learning about the environment he had inherited. Now it was time to take decisive action and Derek was pondering his next steps. Derek had been hired with a specific mandate – to merge the THC with another organization, to improve tenant satisfaction and to reduce costs. It was time to set priorities and to find the best route to achievement of that three-fold mandate.

**Background**

The Toronto Housing Company, a share-capital corporation, wholly-owned by the City of Toronto, was formed in the late 1990s during the city amalgamation of Toronto. It began operations in January 1999, as a result of a merger between two municipal organizations - the Metropolitan Toronto Housing Company Limited (MTHCL, formed in 1954) and the City of Toronto Non-Profit Housing Corporation (Cityhome, created in 1974).

**History of Public Housing in Ontario**

Until 1964, the provision of affordable housing was primarily the responsibility of individual municipalities, which built and operated housing for their constituents of lower income. In 1964, the Ontario Government formed the Ontario Housing Corporation (OHC) and took on the major responsibility for the provision and management of public housing. In many cases, this meant the transfer of ownership of municipally-initiated projects (such as Regent Park in Toronto) to the province. Local Housing Authorities, reporting to the OHC, were set up across the province to operate such public housing projects.

During the early 1980s, changes to the National Housing Act enabled municipalities to form non-profit housing corporations and to build and operate their own social housing projects with federal and provincial funding. These non-profit housing corporations differed from the Ontario Housing Corporation in that they served a mix of tenants, some paying market rents and some paying geared-to-income rents, while OHC provided only geared-to-income units. As the municipally-directed non-profit housing projects became more and more successful, the OHC stopped building public housing in 1978. The local Toronto branch of the OHC, called the Metro Toronto Housing Authority (MTHA) continued to operate in Toronto, managing 30,000 housing units, primarily in large subsidized-housing ‘projects’.

In the early 1990s, the federal government decided to terminate funding for the development of any new social housing. Then in 1995, the Progressive Conservatives were elected in Ontario and they, in turn, promptly terminated provincial funding for the development of permanent social housing. Shortly thereafter, the provincial government announced that it intended to transfer the responsibility for both the administration and the ongoing funding of existing social housing to the municipal level. This devolution of housing responsibility towards municipalities was initiated with the signing of the Federal-Provincial Social Housing Agreement on November 15, 1999, just two months after Derek Ballantyne joined the Toronto Housing Company.

**Metropolitan Toronto Housing Company Limited**

The Metropolitan Toronto Housing Company (MTHCL) was incorporated in 1912, as a result of a committee formed by concerned municipal stakeholders (city council, Board of Trade, Manufacturers’ Association). The committee determined that “the best way to solve the (housing shortage) problem was to form a company to construct low cost units for the working man.[[1]](#footnote-1) At the time of the merger, MTHCL provided geared-to-income housing primarily for seniors and families living in the boroughs on the periphery of Toronto’s downtown core. Just prior to the merger with Cityhome, MTHCL owned and operated 20,500 housing units.

**Cityhome**

In the early 1970s, the Municipal Non-Profit Housing Corporation (Cityhome) was formed. The mix of housing provided by Cityhome was significantly different than that of MTHCL. Cityhome’s portfolio of 7,500 units was 75% market-driven and 25% subsidized housing and, as a result of its smaller size, Cityhome was seen by many to be more innovative and less-process-oriented that MTHCL. At the time of the merger, Cityhome’s issues included growing concerns about safety and security, tenant activism and a large committee structure that some felt was removing power from the organization’s managers.

**The Merger**

When Derek Ballantyne was hired to run the Toronto Housing Company, his mandate was clear and it was three-fold: to create a single corporation from two rivaling organizations, to improve tenant satisfaction and to reduce costs. He comments: “I felt that the key to a successful merger was to have a simple vision – if I focused on those three objectives and made sure that everyone in the company could focus on them, we would be successful.”

Ballantyne believed that if he were successful on the first two objectives (merging the two organizations and improving tenant satisfaction), the third, cost reduction, would naturally follow. “It was clear from the beginning that there were some economies of scale to be reaped by combining the administration of the two organizations. In addition, I felt from the beginning that there would be a good business case for looking at outsourcing some of our functions. So clearly, there were going to be some significant human resources challenges. I suppose that is natural any time two organizations come together. There is always the fear of losing one’s job or of having the processes and culture of another company forced upon you. That fear exists right up the chain to senior management and I need to be sensitive to that. My challenge is to get the right senior management team in place and I still am not sure that I have the right team.”

One of Ballantyne’s first tasks had been to set up interviews for key management positions. After the senior management team was in place, Derek felt that one of these managers, the former Director of Operations from MTHCL, was particularly strong. He was considering creating a Chief Operating Officer position for that person, whereby the two men would jointly supervise the senior management team.

“I am hearing that there are still two camps – the Cityhome way and the MTHCL way. I don’t like to hear that and am working with my senior team to bring in the “THC way”. Derek had been advised by the outgoing General Managers of the two organizations that the best way to manage an effective merger would be to have an even mix of senior managers from both organizations, who could work together to identify the best practices from each organization.

On the issue of tenant satisfaction, Ballantyne was firm in his belief that “tenant satisfaction can only come with tenant engagement. I don’t just mean token representation on committees. I firmly believe that we have a community mandate in our business. If we just provide bricks and mortar to these people, most of whom are at the low end of the scale economically and socially, then we are no better than any landlord. We know that a sense of control is a determinant of health in our society. Supporting and assisting our tenants through engagement is something we are obliged to do.

“There is no evidence that social housing on its own works – that it helps people to get ahead and to help themselves. But by engaging tenants and empowering them, perhaps we can help them to build confidence, and that might help them to get ahead.”

Ballantyne’s beliefs were echoed by business leaders in Toronto. One such leader, from the Toronto-Dominion Bank, summed it up as follows:

*Affordable housing is frequently viewed as a social and health issue, but the fact of the matter is that it runs deeper than that. Working to find solutions to this problem is also smart economic policy.   
   An inadequate housing supply can be a roadblock to business investment and growth, and influences a potential immigrant's decision on whether or not to locate in Canada. Addressing this serious situation ties in well with the goal of raising the standard of living for all Canadians.” (*Don Drummond, Senior Vice President and Chief Economist, TD Bank Financial Group)[[2]](#footnote-2)

Ballantyne believed that some sort of decentralized management was the best way to meet local tenant needs while effectively delivering high quality service at an affordable cost.

“Besides”, he added, “from a purely self-interested point of view, some of our environments can be scary and volatile. If we can get our tenants on side, they will have a greater interest in keeping the premises safe and well-maintained. This can tremendously help our cost situation.”

Ballantyne had been working since late 1998 with consultants from the Berkeley Consulting Group, experts in change management and organizational design. From this work came the concept of Community Operating Model, a key instrument for effecting change at the community level. The premise of the Community Operating Model was to give communities flexibility to meet local needs while retaining the value and performance standards of THC as a whole.

As Ballantyne sat in his office, he reflected on two key questions:

1. What are the first steps in merging these two organizations?
2. How concerned should I be with the agenda of the Harris Conservatives?

**Toronto Housing Company**

**Part A—Teaching Notes**

**Synposis:**

Derek Ballantyne is 9 months into a new job. He has been brought in as the new CEO of Toronto Housing Company, which was formed as a result of city amalgamation. Two municipal organizations have merged – Cityhome (downtown core housing) and Metro Toronto Housing Corporation Limited – MTHCL (families and seniors subsidized housing in the outlying boroughs).

Political environment – Harris’ Tories promise to download many provincial functions to the municipalities, including social housing

**Issues Examined:**

* Merging 2 organizations, improving tenant satisfaction and cost reduction are his mandate
* Other issues that should be identified: outside political environment – provincial downloading – how real is it, what will it mean to the organization, and what, if anything, should they be doing about it?

**Teaching Points:**

* Keys to success in managing change: simple vision, communication, getting buy-in, finding change agents
* Importance of ongoing environmental scan to anticipate issues, threats.
* Understanding the differences in the two cultures: MTHCL – traditionally seniors and families in the boroughs, security not an issue, less engaged in social housing politics. Cityhome – downtown issues, tenant activists, big committee structures (managers were rendered ineffective)
* Caution in managing a merger – over-sensitivity to perceived equity and fairness in appointing senior management. This can result in uncertainty re: power, stifling of the development of a unique new culture for the new organization.
* How long does it take to effect change? 3 years? 10 years? What if another ‘change’ comes along during that time?

**Student Assignment:**

1. What are the first steps in merging these two organizations? **Look at establishing a senior management team, setting a vision, communicating a vision, getting buy-in, finding change agents. Use the Community Operating Model as a basis for the culture of the new organization. Sell it.**
2. How concerned should I be with the agenda of the Harris Conservatives? **Very – it is a very real possibility that he will find himself in the middle of another merger in the not-too-distant future! As it turned out, he got himself involved early on an advisory panel with David Crombie, and he established an Alliance to examine potential merger issues.**

**What they did:**

* Appointed a senior management team that equally represented both organizations. This turned out to be a problem for Derek – there was too much emphasis on being ‘kind’, achieving balancing and evening the scorecard.
* Hired Berkeley almost immediately to consult on organizational design – to address the pressure towards outsourcing and to address the tenant issues. Community Operating Model was the result of this - basic tenets (which Derek Ballantyne has carried through to 2005) were:
  + - Decentralized general management
    - Support of common services
    - Corporate controls re: accountability

* Initiated an “Alliance” with MTHA (provincial housing authority) to look at commonalities in cost-savings. They were looking to outsource or separate some functions, such as maintenance. This met with moderate success.
* Over time, THC wanted to move the emphasis of the Alliance to examine the political environment; the potential impact of the Harris agenda on downloading. MTHA was less interested in this. They were in the Alliance to ‘be seen to be looking at cost economies”, but were very distrustful of THC on any merger discussions. (this moves into Part B of the case)
* In 2000, THC re-hired Berekely to work on the Alliance, on shared services issues
* By the end of 2000, there was no doubt at all that the devolution (downloading) legislation was coming (it was passed in December 2000)
* As it turns out, Derek was appointed CEO – possibly because he had acknowledged the Harris agenda early and initiated action to be ready for it?

**Toronto Community Housing Corporation**

**Part B**

“It’s like trying to build an airplane while it’s flying,” exclaimed Derek Ballantyne, Chief Executive Officer of the Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCH). “Just when I thought I had a good handle on managing change, here I am, faced with another change situation altogether! We just made it through one merger and now we are into another. But this time is different – back in ’99 and 2000, we were merging two city organizations that were performing similar functions. This time, we have to put together a huge, bureaucratic provincial organization with a smaller municipal organization!”

It was April, 2002 and Ballantyne had been in position as CEO for just over 3 months. “I need to make sure we don’t make the same mistakes this time around!”

**Background**

Derek Ballantyne was hired in late 1998 as CEO of the newly created Toronto Housing Company. In the late 1990’s the amalgamation of the City of Toronto and its boroughs necessitated the merging of two municipal housing organizations, the Metro Toronto Housing Company Limited (MTHCL) and Cityhome. The merged organization was responsible for the management of 28,500 units of social housing (of which 85% were subsidized and 15% market rate) and operated with a budget of $265 million and a 580-member staff. 63% of its tenants were seniors, with the remainder being families or individuals. With a predominance of seniors in single buildings and with a good percentage of market-rate rents, THC’s focus was on community-building; they had relatively few concerns for security on the premises. Derek was hired to implement the merger and charged with the mandate to reduce costs and improve tenant satisfaction.

Peter Schafft had been CEO of the provincially-owned Metro Toronto Housing Authority since 1997. The MTHA was one of the many local housing authorities under the direction of the Ontario Housing Corporation (OHC), and Mr. Schafft had spent much of his career in various management positions with OHC. With an annual budget exceeding $431 million, the MTHA was responsible for the management of 30,000 housing units, primarily in large ‘projects’ within Metro Toronto. Since 100% of the MTHA’s housing units were designated as ‘subsidized housing’, security and safety of property were ongoing issues at head office.

In 2001, it was announced that the two organizations would merge, and that Derek Ballantyne would be the one to lead the integration.

**History of Public Housing in Ontario**

Until 1964, the provision of affordable housing was primarily the responsibility of individual municipalities, which built and operated housing for lower-income citizens. In 1964, the Ontario government formed the Ontario Housing Corporation (OHC) and took on the major responsibility for the provision and management of public housing. In many cases, this meant the transfer of ownership of municipally-initiated projects (such as Regent Park in Toronto) to the province. Local Housing Authorities, reporting to the OHC, were set up across the province to operate these public housing projects.

During the early 1980s, changes to the National Housing Act enabled municipalities to form non-profit housing corporations and to build and operate their own social housing projects, with federal and provincial funding. These non-profit housing corporations differed from the OHC inasmuch as the former served a mix of tenants—with some paying market rents while others paying geared-to-income rents—and the latter exclusively provided gear-to-income units. As the municipally-directed non-profit housing projects became increasingly successful, the OHC stopped building public housing in 1978. The local Toronto branch of the OHC, called the Metro Toronto Housing Authority (MTHA) continued to operate in Toronto, managing 30,000 housing units, primarily in large subsidized-housing ‘projects’.

In the early 1990’s, the federal government decided to terminate funding for the development of any new social housing. Then in 1995, the Progressive Conservatives were elected in Ontario and they, in turn, promptly terminated provincial funding for the development of permanent social housing. Shortly thereafter, the provincial government announced that it intended to transfer the responsibility for both the administration and the ongoing funding of existing social housing to the municipal level. This devolution of housing responsibility towards municipalities was initiated with the signing of the Federal-Provincial Social Housing Agreement in November 1999, just two months after Derek Ballantyne joined the Toronto Housing Company.

Within a year, the provincial government introduced the *Social Housing Reform Act*, under which responsibility for social housing and the ownership of provincial housing was to be transferred to the municipalities. This meant that the Metro Toronto Housing Authority (one of Ontario Housing Corporation’s many local housing authorities) was to be downloaded to the city. The *Social Housing Reform Act* was passed into legislation in December, 2000. In 2001, the assets of the provincial organizations were transferred to cities, and on 2 January 2002, the newly formed Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC)—a merger of the former provincial authority MTHA and the city’s Toronto Housing Corporation (THC)—began operations.

Derek Ballantyne was appointed Chief Executive Officer of the new Toronto Community Housing Corporation in November, 2001.

**Toronto Housing Company**

During his two years at THC, Ballantyne was successful in reducing costs through consolidation and streamlining of administrative functions and by outsourcing the management of selected properties. With the assistance of organization design and change management consultants, he introduced the concept of Community Operating Model to the organization, which contemplated decentralized decision-making at local levels, balanced with centralized administration of those functions subject to economies of scale.

Ballantyne was unwavering in his dualistic belief that: (i) decentralized management was the best way to meet local customer needs while effectively delivering high quality service at an affordable cost, and, (ii) that tenant participation was critical. As he affirmed:

“Tenant satisfaction can only come with tenant engagement. I don’t just mean token representation on committees. I firmly believe that we have a community mandate in our business. If we just provide bricks and mortar to these people, most of whom are at the low end of the scale economically and socially, then we are no better than any landlord. We know that a sense of control is a determinant of health in our society. Supporting and assisting our tenants through engagement is something we are obliged to do.”

“There is no evidence that social housing on its own makes a difference – that it helps people to get ahead and to help themselves. But by engaging tenants and empowering them, perhaps they can start to build confidence, and that might help them to get ahead.”

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“Besides”, he added, “from a purely self-interested point of view, some of our environments can be scary and volatile. If we can get our tenants on side, they will have a greater interest in keeping the premises safe and well-maintained. This can tremendously help our cost situation.”

THC prided itself on being a lean, innovative organization, more results-oriented than process-oriented. “We had a very flat organization structure”, explained one senior executive. “There were essentially two bosses, the CEO and the COO, and our senior managers reported to either one or the other.”

Knowing that the provincial Conservatives intended to proceed with devolution (downloading of the responsibility for and ownership of social housing), Ballantyne became involved in public and government consultations on the process. He took part in a number of panels created by the provincial government, designed to investigate the “hows” and “whens” of downloading. In 2000, Ballantyne approached Peter Schafft, CEO of the provincially-run MHTA, proposing talks to look for commonalities between the two organizations. Ballantyne recalls, “Initially, the ‘Alliance’ as we called it, was a strategic business decision, to investigate whether there were business functions that we could consider outsourcing or making more efficient. We figured that the MTHA folks might be in the same position as we were”. As it became apparent to Ballantyne that the devolution of the MTHA would have a significant impact on THC, he assigned one of his senior executives to head up the Alliance with MTHA.

Reflecting on the 1998 merger of two city organizations that created the Toronto Housing Company, Ballantyne stated, “We were well on our way to being an excellent organization. I really believe that it takes three years to fully implement change and we didn’t have three years. We did many things right, such as focusing senior management right away on the fundamental goals of the new organization. I think it took too long for the senior management team to get settled. It turned out that the human resources function was much more important than I had anticipated. Perhaps there was too much emphasis on being fair to both organizations, balancing out the scorecard, so to speak”.

**Metro Toronto Housing Authority**

The MTHA had been in existence since 1964, operating under provincial policies and processes. Staff at the MTHA had endured high turnovers of CEOs and board chairs, all with their own ideas for change. There was a feeling within the organization that it suffered somewhat from ‘change fatigue’. Commenting on the cultural differences between MTHA and its municipal counterpart, one senior executive stated, “a municipal organization is much more subject to politics – councilors have a vested interest in what goes on in their particular areas. In a provincial organization, politicians are farther removed from the business.” Staff at the MTHA were grateful for the distance from politicians and felt that they were better able to run their business without interference. That being said, other staff felt that the MTHA, being a provincial organization serving a municipality, often found itself stuck in the middle of tensions between the province and the city.

According to one staff member, the atmosphere at MTHA was much like any other government institution, and this was reflected especially in the budgeting process. “Each year, budgets were allocated based on the previous year’s spending, plus a cost of living increase. Now why would I try to be innovative and cut costs? It would just mean a lower budget allocation for the next year!”

During the 1990s, MTHA was subject to significant pressures to examine alternative methods of service delivery in the name of cost reduction. The company underwent an extensive exercise of outsourcing between 1997 – 1999, contracting out the property management of close to 30% of its assets and achieving a 30% reduction in costs. When approached by THC to create an alliance to investigate commonalities, CEO Peter Schafft agreed. He stated: “We felt that we needed to show that we were looking for further ways to reduce costs. The threat of being forced to outsource even more of our functions was something that was always present during that time.”

**The Merger**

During 2001, anticipating a merger that had not yet been officially announced, Derek Ballantyne hired consultants to help THC examine potential integration issues, specifically in areas of human resources and change management. He knew that a merger of two such radically different cultures would be a massive undertaking and that he needed to prepare his staff for the “new agenda”.

In November 2001, it was announced that Derek Ballantyne would be CEO of the newly formed Toronto Community Housing Corporation, which would begin operations on 1 January 2002. Toronto Community Housing (TCH), with an annual budget of over $580 million, would own 57,500 units of housing, of which over 90% would be geared-to-income units. Only a very small number (4,000) were market-rent units. Families represented the largest percentage of clients at 38%, with seniors at 36% and individuals at 26%.

The merger was now a reality, and organizational fear quickly set in. Employees of the provincial MTHA, who until now had been relatively protected from municipal politics, feared a city takeover. Toronto Housing Company employees feared being swallowed by a provincial monolith. Unionized employees in both organizations feared for their rights and the protection of their collective agreements. Both sides agreed that the atmosphere of uncertainty and distrust made work extremely difficult.

Ballantyne moved quickly, having learned from his past merger experience that decisive action was necessary. An executive team was put in place almost immediately, with consideration given to previous executives from each organization. Ballantyne felt strongly that his role, first and foremost, was to work with the board of directors to create a new vision for the organization and to communicate that vision at all levels. From that vision needed to emerge new policies suited to the new organization, around which all staff could focus and unite. He knew from past experience that they needed to get away from the ‘them and us’ attitudes that prevailed when he managed the 1998 merger.

Early in 2002, Ballantyne assigned his vice-president of Corporate Planning and Performance the task of assembling TCH’s first business plan. They felt it was essential to get down on paper the new organization’s mission, vision, values, strategic objectives and plans for measurement. She had just recently started a process of consultations with stakeholders, including tenants, labour, staff, community agencies and city representatives.

It became clear early on in the integration process that one of the greatest difference of opinion or difference of approach lay in the concept and perception of decentralized decision-making. Staff from the former MTHA firmly believed that there were many areas in which they had developed significant centralized expertise and that such expertise represented economies of scale and should remain central. Derek Ballantyne and his staff at the former THC had adopted a philosophy of moving as much decision-making as possible out to the individual Housing Managers in the communities. Whereas in the former MTHA, individual property managers were given a budget and allowed to allocate the funds according to their own priorities, the former THC had a much more complex system of community-based budgeting. Issues of importance were identified at the building level, then taken to the community level by representatives, who subsequently worked together to rank all the issues by priority. Tenants elected from the community levels then worked on a Tenant Council to set the entire company budget.

As time went on, it became clear to Ballantyne that the senior staff of the former Toronto Housing Company seemed to have “bought in to the change agenda” better than some of the others and that some members of the executive team were less than enthusiastic with the amount of power being shifted to the local housing developments. A few had expressed concern that the Community Housing Managers were being asked to take on management functions that were beyond their capabilities. Derek Ballantyne was determined to continue with his plan to implement the Community Model, moving authority and accountability to the community level. “We know that we are asking these managers to move beyond the standard property management function. Capacity building will be a top priority.” He was also determined not to let resistors to change hamper his progress. “I learned from the last merger that trying to please everyone only prolongs the uncertainty and pain. We need to move ahead and stick to the values of the Toronto Community Housing Corporation.”

Student assignment:

1. What are the critical success factors in moving an organization through change?

2. What are the barriers to change and can you identify such barriers in this case?

3. What has TCH done right? What should they change?

4. What would you do next as Derek Ballantyne?

**Toronto Community Housing Corporation**

**Part B – Teaching Notes**

**Synposis:**

Derek Ballantyne is 3 months into a new job. His former organization, Toronto Housing Company, has recently merged with a provincial housing authority (MTHA) as a result of provincial downloading.

**Issues:**

* Merging two organizations with such different cultures and sizes. Is it a merger or a take-over?
* When the new boss comes from one of the two merged organizations
* Continuous change versus multiple change situations
* How long does it take to effect change and how can you do it when the environment keeps changing?

**Student Assignment:**

1. What are the critical success factors in moving an organization through change?

* **Common NEW vision**
* **Constant communication of the vision**
* **Finding change agents**
* **Aligned Leadership - getting buy-in.**
* **Consistent business concept**
* **Perseverance. Derek has persevered through 2 mergers with his vision of decentralized management.**
* **Relatively low uncertainty**
* **Multiple approaches to communication – events, symbols, plans, report cards**

2. What are the barriers to change and can you identify such barriers in this case?

* **Processes: the two organizations look at decentralization differently.**
* **Culture: a smaller, more innovative organization and a large bureaucratic organization**

3. What has TCH done right? What should they change?

* **Look at change as a 5-10 year process, with peaks and troughs.**
* **Community Management Plan!! They update it every 3 years now.**
* **Open Space**

4. What would you do next as Derek Ballantyne? **Continue environment scan for possibilities of any changes. Focus on skills development of CHU managers.**

**What they did:**

* Brought in consultants on HR and OD early
* Community Management Plan to communicate the vision – Derek did a lot of face-to-face presentation of the CMP
* Open Space Forums for brainstorming ideas and implementing new processes (particularly in the area of establishing the Community Housing Units, and tenant involvement)
* Re-org three years after formation – remaining MTHA senior management have now left or retired.
* 2004 – introduced 360 feedback – Derek and Senior Managers. Some feedback on Derek: “his expectations are too high!”. This is not all bad – it shows that he continues to hammer home his visions and expectations of the organization.
* 2005 – Focus on management training and capacity building.

1. *The Municipal Role in Meeting Ontario’s Affordable Housing Needs*, The Ontario Professinal Planners Institute, February 2001. Page 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Source: http://www.onpha.on.ca/issues\_position\_papers/default.asp?load=bill128 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. http://www.onpha.on.ca/issues\_position\_papers/default.asp?load=bill128 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)