



ISSN 1180-4335

**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

First Session, 41st Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Première session, 41^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

Tuesday 3 March 2015

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Mardi 3 mars 2015

**Standing Committee on
Government Agencies**

Intended appointments

**Comité permanent des
organismes gouvernementaux**

Nominations prévues

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Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Service du Journal des débats et d'interprétation
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
GOVERNMENT AGENCIESCOMITÉ PERMANENT DES
ORGANISMES GOUVERNEMENTAUX

Tuesday 3 March 2015

Mardi 3 mars 2015

The committee met at 0900 in committee room 1.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): I call the meeting to order. Good morning. Our first order of business this morning, before we begin our intended appointments review, is to consider the subcommittee report dated February 26, 2015. Would someone please move adoption of the report? Mr. Gates.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I move the adoption of the subcommittee report on intended appointments dated Thursday, February 26, 2015.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): Thank you very much, Mr. Gates. Any discussion? All in favour? Opposed? The motion is carried.

INTENDED APPOINTMENTS

MS. ERICA PHIPPS

Review of intended appointment, selected by official opposition party: Erica Phipps, intended appointee as member, Pesticides Advisory Committee.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): We'll move on to the intended appointments review. We have one appointee this morning. That intended appointee is Erica Phipps, nominated as member of the Pesticides Advisory Committee. Ms. Phipps, can you move forward? Thank you very much for being here this morning.

Ms. Erica Phipps: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): You may begin with a brief statement. Following that, members of each party will have 10 minutes to ask you questions. Any time that you use for your statement will be taken from the government's time, and the questioning will begin with the government.

Thank you very much. Ms. Phipps, you can begin.

Ms. Erica Phipps: Thank you. Good morning, distinguished members of the committee, Mr. Chairman. It's my pleasure to have this opportunity to present my candidacy for the Pesticides Advisory Committee.

I'd like to start by sharing some of my experiences that I believe to be of relevance to this important work; specifically, my background and expertise in environmental health, as well as my experience working with diverse sectors and disciplines on the often complex issues that lie at the interface of health, environment, and

the sound management of chemicals, including pesticides.

I received my master's of public health in the United States, my country of origin, in 1994, and have been working on toxics and human health issues ever since. I've worked in the Office of Pollution Prevention and Toxics at the US Environmental Protection Agency and for four years at the United Nations in Geneva, where I worked with developing countries to assist them in building their capacity to manage chemicals and pesticides.

From the UN I moved to Montreal, where I worked for four years with the North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation. It was there at the CEC that I began my work on children's environmental health, work that continues in my current role as executive director of the Canadian Partnership for Children's Health and Environment, or CPCHE. CPCHE is a collaboration of public health, medical, legal and child-focused organizations that came together more than a decade ago to advance children's environmental health protection in Canada.

Drawing upon my public health training and professional experience, I believe I could contribute to the diversity and effectiveness of the Pesticides Advisory Committee in particular by ensuring explicit consideration of the unique vulnerabilities and exposure patterns of infants and children when it comes to pest control products.

Through my work, I routinely interact with front-line service providers, child care workers, health professionals and others who interact with families on a day-to-day basis. I am well familiar with the ways in which parents and other members of the public respond to environmental health issues, including pest management and the use of pesticides, and the complex trade-offs that sometimes exist.

I would also bring to the committee my dedication to fostering meaningful dialogue among diverse stakeholders in pursuit of solutions that consider all perspectives and ultimately serve the best interests of citizens and communities.

In my various professional capacities, I've had the opportunity to convene and facilitate numerous multi-stakeholder processes, from my role in working with the three North American governments alongside public interests and private sector stakeholders to chart a continent-wide co-operative agenda on children's en-

vironmental health, to my current role in managing a multidisciplinary partnership of scientific experts, policy professionals and front-line staff.

On a more personal note, I grew up in a family with a strong farming tradition on my mother's side, and my husband, children and I spend as much time as we can at our hobby farm in a largely agricultural and economically depressed region of rural Quebec, where my husband owns and runs a small business. I have an appreciation for the pressures that exist for today's agricultural producers and the local communities they sustain.

I have expertise serving on expert committees, including in my ongoing role as a member of the Canadian Committee on Indoor Air Quality and Buildings, hosted by the National Research Council. My knowledge is qualitatively different from that of the mostly building managers and engineers on that committee, yet I feel that my ability to bring a child- and family-focused human health perspective to the committee's deliberations is valued and appreciated by my colleagues around the table.

In summary, I believe I could contribute to the diversity of viewpoints and breadth of expertise within the Pesticides Advisory Committee, and would welcome the opportunity to serve the people of Ontario in this capacity.

I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): Thank you very much, Ms. Phipps.

From the government side: Madame Lalonde. You have about six minutes.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: First of all, I would like to say thank you for putting your name forward. It's a very impressive resumé. It's nice to hear you talking about the well-being of our children. Certainly, from my personal background, it's music to my ears. So thank you for all the hard work; you're helping.

From our perspective, I would feel very confident at this point to say that we are supportive, and we feel very strongly that you're a perfect candidate for this role. I thank you for putting your name forward, actually. Thank you again.

Ms. Erica Phipps: You're very welcome. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): The official opposition: Mr. McDonnell?

Mr. Jim McDonnell: Thank you, and welcome today. You have a strong health background, which is good. I'm from an agricultural community, and I know all the work they've done and how far they've come, especially with pesticides, from where they were 30, 40 years ago and from what I see my brothers doing today.

A lot of it is around best practices. You come from something that may lend some knowledge: Do you see any best practices in your line of work that have made a difference as far as working with children and that you could bring across to this side of the ledger?

Ms. Erica Phipps: Best practices specifically related to pesticides management in agriculture, for example?

Mr. Jim McDonnell: Yes.

Ms. Erica Phipps: Certainly, I would agree that a lot of progress has been made, in large part due to the role of

growers and others, to try to improve. I think that there is widespread public understanding that reducing the amount of chemicals that go into our environment and into the food system is advantageous for many reasons, including an oftentimes economic reason, particularly as we see increasing public interest in the issue of pesticides and other chemicals.

We work a lot with chemicals other than pesticides in the work that we do. There is increasing concern among the public about chemicals that may be in household products, for example. So I think public awareness, and the support of the public to help drive the economic incentives and encourage best practices, is an important part of the solution—so, open dialogue and transparency, and also, I think, not so much drawing from our work but making sure that the appropriate supports, incentives and information are available to support those best practices.

A lot of us would have good intentions, but maybe the systems aren't there to support those good intentions, so I see a role for government and others in that regard.

Mr. Jim McDonnell: I always believe that it's important to use the science. I know that a number of years ago, there was a ban put on many pesticides, other than in agricultural use, and yet the biggest problem was with the uninformed and uneducated user at the time. So instead of, say, requiring it to be licensed, as it is in agriculture, they just banned them outright, and it has caused a lot of issues.

I know, coming from the municipal side, we had a lot of weed issues along the roadsides, and there was a lot of opposition. But on the public health side, some of these weeds were not only bad for agriculture, in the fact that they spread across, but they were actually dangerous, like poison parsnip and poison oak, and were not easily handled. They were almost impossible to handle, other than with pesticides, which were very successful. But we ran into substantial opposition, except from anybody who actually came in contact with this and had had an experience with it and knew just how bad it was—much, much worse than poison ivy.

0910

Any thoughts on just how the education of the public—and actually, some of these things that are viable alternatives to letting these things grow and exist in public roadways, where they can be a danger for anybody who happens to be there, even emergency workers?

Ms. Erica Phipps: I guess a couple of things. I, too, believe that we need to always look at the science when we're making informed decisions about any topic related to chemicals or pesticides; but part of that science is also on the social sciences side, to understand use patterns. We heard just yesterday about a tragic experience in Fort McMurray, where a mother did not understand the risk of a pesticide product that was produced in another country and lost her child. I think understanding the use patterns and the misuse patterns is an important input into sound decision-making on these issues.

At the same time, I also think that we need to think as broadly as possible if we're trying to address an issue such as unwanted weeds—whether there are other best

management practices that can help support eradication, physical methods in addition to the last-resort use of chemical methods, particularly if it's in public spaces where children may happen upon those substances.

Of course, the trade-off there is happening upon the poison oak or other noxious plant, but I think that there are a number of tools to be used to help solve a problem like that. In the tool box for sure would be pest control products as needed, but also looking at that broader range of tools and making sure that we use the least-risk options first.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I don't disagree. I think the biggest problem they had was with the users themselves, and I didn't disagree with the banning of personal use. But certainly the education, that they are a benefit, and allowing homeowners to use licensed people who are trained in it—I think the biggest problem we had with pesticides was not from bad use of them, but it was actually ingestion, people putting them in containers. They're just a chemical that's not great to have around. If you don't know how to use them, it's even worse.

Along with this, there was a lot of opposition. I know we tried mechanical means. On the roadway with ditches and rough terrain, it's very difficult. I know I myself came in contact—and I've seen people come in contact with these weeds. You're taking a month-plus to get rid of the rashes. I think it's poison oak that can actually cause blindness. They're fairly significant, and they have been caused, really, by trying to eradicate the weeds with mechanical means, because these weeds generally are held back by the local grasses. Of course, when you cut the roadsides for visibility into the season, they jump up above the grass and then they take over the territory. That's really what seems to have caused this issue since we've started getting into higher standards on our roads. It's a significant issue.

It really comes back to public knowledge of what these chemicals should be used for, that they are safe and there is a place for them.

We see the same thing now with some of the products used on the agricultural side as far as the bee population and the effect. The science doesn't seem to support it, but we seem to be jumping ahead of ourselves to where nobody else is, at least in North America. Again, it's a matter of being competitive.

Also, if science is showing a need, then using that science to make an educated guess versus going out in left field and trying something that really is not supported—I mean, everybody has been very much aware of the bee issue. Your thoughts on that?

Ms. Erica Phipps: Sure. Maybe I have a slightly different perspective on where we are with the science. Because of my work with infants and children, including pregnant women, and the very vulnerable developmental stages that exist in the womb, I tend to have a more precautionary stance. I'm not an expert in the pollinator and bee health issues, but I'm certainly well versed, at least, in the information that's in wide circulation.

My sense is that there is enough science to warrant some action to halt what seems to be a widespread

systemic effect that's occurring. Even PMRA has said that continued use per current practice is not sustainable, so I actually think that the government—Ontario is taking sort of a leadership stance that is welcomed. There's a lot of public support for taking action to protect the bees. I think the public is aware of the issue and can appreciate the very important and irreplaceable role of pollinators in our food security.

I think that pest control products and agricultural chemicals have been used to sustain food security when we have evidence—and I think we have sufficient evidence—to suggest that those products are in fact detracting from food security and sustainability over the longer term. I do think it's worthwhile looking at some steps before waiting too long for the results of those actions to become very hard to reverse. There are precedents in other jurisdictions—in Europe, for example—where the governments there have also responded to that science, to say that we need to take some actions. Even if not every answer is available, I think we know enough that some action is needed.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): You have about 20 seconds.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Okay. I might disagree on the science. I think the science shows some best practices being put in place that would limit the exposure, but certainly I don't think that the science is—I think it's been used to change public opinion, but if you look at the evidence base, I don't think it's there yet. It's moving towards it. The reason for what's actually happening is certainly up for discussion. I don't think—

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): Thank you very much, Mr. McDonell. Mr. Gates?

Mr. Wayne Gates: Hi. How are you?

Ms. Erica Phipps: Great, thanks.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Thanks for putting your name forward. I took a look at your resumé; it is very impressive, and it's always nice to have somebody working hard to take care of our children and our future, so congratulations on that.

I'd just like to continue on about honeybee health and insecticides, because in Niagara we have a very big bee population, and it is disappearing. You said that in Europe they've come across where they've taken some action. Maybe you could just explain that action to me. I'm going to do a little talk on honeybees this afternoon, so it would be nice if I could include something that you told me right in my speech. I think that would be good. I can say, "I learned that this morning." It would be great. Go ahead.

Ms. Erica Phipps: I'm by no means an expert on legislative action on this issue. I think there are probably others in the room who are more well versed, but it is my understanding that the European Union has put a temporary restriction on neonics. I don't know the details about whether it's just seed treatments or more generally, but I think that it's similar to what's being proposed here in Ontario. They're reacting to the bee die-offs and the link with the use of these chemicals.

From the reading that I've done, which is not extensive—I expect to have an opportunity to do a bit more immersion in this topic—it sounds to me as if it's also not clear whether the seed treatments that seem to be an issue here are actually significantly increasing the yields.

Going back to best management practices, whether those seed treatments are just being offered as a sort of proactive remedy to a problem that may or may not exist in any particular plot of agricultural land reminds me of the antibacterial issues. We're overusing antibiotic drugs, and we're ending up causing a significant problem for ourselves around the globe by increasing the resistance of microbes. I think the same could be said here: that we need to very judiciously look at, at what point, and for what specific purposes, we want to use these toxic substances to control a problem. If the problem doesn't exist, let's not use them.

Mr. Wayne Gates: The other part that I liked in your answer as well is that you talked a little bit about food security. I've spent a fair amount of time saying that if we can't feed ourselves, we're going to be in trouble. I don't know if you agree with that or not. Maybe you could enlighten on what you meant by food security, because it's a huge issue here in this country.

Ms. Erica Phipps: Yes. I think that certainly, with one in five families living in poverty, there are a lot of very serious food security issues. We are a prosperous nation, and I think that we could probably be doing better at feeding our children healthful foods that are grown locally in particular.

Part of that, of course, is making sure that the natural environments—our food comes from Mother Earth, so we need to take care to make sure that those ecological systems, which are vastly complex, are not disturbed inadvertently by our actions to try to use nature to the extent that we can, to make sure that the food security isn't just good today and tomorrow but over the decades, really having a longer-term perspective on our soils and the ecosystems etc., that are important for food production, including the bees.

0920

Mr. Wayne Gates: I like a few of your answers; I could probably talk to you a lot longer.

Ms. Erica Phipps: I'd be happy to.

Mr. Wayne Gates: On the poverty issue, you're right on the money. In a province and a country as rich as we are, nobody should go to bed hungry. We should be making sure that we use all the resources we have to feed our own. I think the opportunity is certainly out there to do that. I'm glad you raised the fact that it's unacceptable to have children and families go to bed hungry at night. I'm glad you mentioned that.

With your workload in your full-time job, are you going to have any scheduling or workload difficulties?

Ms. Erica Phipps: If I'm allowed to make a joke—I always have workload issues.

Mr. Wayne Gates: And you're a mother, and you've got all the other stuff that's going on.

Ms. Erica Phipps: No. I mean, my work with CPCHE is very flexible, and they are accommodating of my

participation in this committee, so it's not an issue. It is added work, but I'm prepared to take that on, because I think the issue is very important.

Mr. Wayne Gates: So you have an understanding partner as well at home, so that's good.

Ms. Erica Phipps: I do.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Okay. I'm going to read this one, because I think it's important—even though a lot of us like to do this: There is currently no requirement to monitor the level of contaminants in the surface or ground-water running off golf courses—the properties. Do you believe it should be required for class 9 pesticide users to demonstrate that they are meeting the PWQOs by requiring regular independent testing during periods of high runoff in the spring, summer and fall?

Ms. Erica Phipps: Not being too well versed, my general response is yes, if we are applying significant amounts of pesticides to golf courses, which are often located near neighbourhoods, we should be aware and knowledgeable about what runoff may exist, what drift etc.

Specific regulations: I'm not really prepared to speak to that, but I would say that certainly we should know whether there is over-the-fenceline exposure potential for ecosystems or for kids and families.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Yes, golf courses are allowed to do a lot of things that a lot of other properties aren't. It might be something that we should take a look at, including the reporting, where they get almost 18 to 24 months for the reports to even come out.

The last question that I have: Some class 9 pesticides are used, despite there being no ministry-certified laboratories willing or able to test for these pesticides. Do you feel that they should be tested before they are used by governments?

Ms. Erica Phipps: The laboratories aren't able to—they don't have the technology to test—

Mr. Wayne Gates: They may have the technology, but because of probably the dangers, they don't want to test them. So before they're approved and used by the government—do you think they should be okayed by the government before they're used?

Ms. Erica Phipps: That would seem logical. Yes.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Okay. Because there are examples of that not being done.

Ms. Erica Phipps: I wasn't aware of that. Certainly, I think the expectation, and the public expectation, would be that things are tested before they're put into use.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'd give you the name of the two, but they're taller than I am in length. But I will show them to you.

Ms. Erica Phipps: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): Thank you very much, Mr. Gates.

Mr. Wayne Gates: It was a pleasure talking to you.

Ms. Erica Phipps: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): Thank you very much, Ms. Phipps, for being here this morning.

Ms. Erica Phipps: My pleasure.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): You may stand down. Thank you very much.

We'll move on. We'll now consider the concurrence for Erica Phipps, nominated as a member of the Pesticides Advisory Committee.

Can I have someone move the motion, please? Mr. Rinaldi.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I move concurrence in the intended appointment of Erica Phipps, nominated as member of the Pesticides Advisory Committee.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): Thank you very much, Mr. Rinaldi. Any discussion?

Okay. All those in favour? Opposed? The motion is carried.

Congratulations, Ms. Phipps. Thank you very much for being here this morning.

Interjections.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): No further discussion? The meeting is adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 0925.

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