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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

Tuesday 3 May 2016

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Mardi 3 mai 2016

**Standing Committee on
Government Agencies**

Intended appointments

**Comité permanent des
organismes gouvernementaux**

Nominations prévues

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
GOVERNMENT AGENCIESCOMITÉ PERMANENT DES
ORGANISMES GOUVERNEMENTAUX

Tuesday 3 May 2016

Mardi 3 mai 2016

The committee met at 0900 in committee room 1.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Before we begin our intended appointments review today, our first order of business is to consider two subcommittee reports. The subcommittee report dated Thursday, April 21, 2016: Would someone please move adoption of the report? Mr. Pettapiece.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I move adoption of the subcommittee report on intended appointees dated Thursday, April 21, 2016.

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Any discussion? All in favour? Opposed? The motion is carried.

The second subcommittee report is dated Thursday, April 28, 2016. Would someone please move adoption of the report? Again, Mr. Pettapiece.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Chair, I move adoption of the subcommittee report on intended appointees dated Thursday, April 28, 2016.

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Any discussion? All in favour? Opposed? The motion is carried.

INTENDED APPOINTMENTS

MR. TONY VALERI

Review of intended appointment, selected by official opposition party: Tony Valeri, intended appointee as member, McMaster University board of governors.

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): We will now move to appointments review. We have two intended appointees to hear from today. We will consider the concurrences following the interviews.

Our first intended appointee today is Mr. Tony Valeri, nominated as member, McMaster University board of governors. Please come forward, Mr. Valeri, and take a seat at the table. Welcome, and thank you very much for being here today. You may begin with a brief statement, if you wish. Members of each party will then have 10 minutes to ask you questions. Any time used for your statement will be deducted from the government's time for questions. Welcome, Mr. Valeri.

Mr. Tony Valeri: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I just have a couple of opening comments, perhaps to provide some context.

First of all, I'd just like to say that it's certainly an honour to be asked to come before the committee, and I appreciate that very much. I thank the committee members as well.

Madam Chair, I thought what I would do is just begin with a little bit about my background, a bit of short history concerning the employer that I'm with today to provide some context, and then finally what I think are some thoughts around the importance of post-secondary institutions.

A number of months ago, I was asked to consider coming on the board of governors for McMaster University. I consider that to be an honour and a privilege given that I am an alumni from McMaster University and it is an opportunity to give back, I think, to the community and to the university itself.

By way of background, I am presently vice-president of corporate affairs at ArcelorMittal Dofasco, the largest steel maker in Canada, producing about 4.5 million tonnes of steel, specifically for the automotive industry but also for construction and energy as well. I'm responsible for communications, corporate responsibility, trade policy and public policy generally. My work in that area stems from the 13 years that I spent in Ottawa as a public office-holder, as a member of Parliament and a minister in the government of Canada.

As far as why I would be interested in serving as a member of the board of governors with McMaster University, I think it's clear that universities' roles are evolving and have evolved, certainly in the province but also in the country. I've always looked at post-secondary institutions as an opportunity—you look at it through a lens of three partners, essentially: academia, government and industry. ArcelorMittal Dofasco has worked with McMaster University over a number of years. We actually support a number of research chairs at the university, and I have had a history of working with the university both at ArcelorMittal Dofasco and outside of ArcelorMittal Dofasco, in establishing partnerships and opportunity for collaboration, ultimately striving for the translation of the research knowledge that exists at universities into an opportunity to improve productivity and innovation at the level of industry, and also for opportunities of commercialization. For me to have an opportunity to sit on the university board of governors, as I said, would be an honour. Certainly I would be looking to pursue those types of opportunities with the university,

and also support the university in the production of highly qualified individuals, which in essence is what industry and our economy are looking for in order to remain competitive as a province and, ultimately, to remain competitive globally.

I'll close there, Madam Chair. Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Thank you, Mr. Valeri. The questioning will begin with the official opposition. Mr. Pettapiece.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: You certainly have long-standing ties with McMaster. I wonder if you could give us some idea of what you hope to accomplish—a few things—if you were appointed to the board.

Mr. Tony Valeri: It's a governance board, so essentially the opportunity would be to support the university in good governance and to support the university based on whatever committee I might be assigned to. I'm not on it, so I'm not quite sure what those committees are at the moment.

But I think more generally it's to support the university in its continued efforts to collaborate with industry, and also in its outreach to community partners. McMaster University is very much focused on the collaboration and the interdisciplinary approach to not only research but to teaching, so I'm hoping that I could support the university in those endeavours going forward.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: How do you see the university—maybe it has to change a little bit; I don't know—supporting the industry that you're involved with?

Mr. Tony Valeri: I'm sorry?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: How do you see it supporting the industry that you are involved with more in the future than it maybe is now?

Mr. Tony Valeri: I think universities are very well positioned from a research perspective. McMaster University is ranked number one in research intensity and has always, for the longest time, had a relationship with ArcelorMittal Dofasco from a research perspective.

I think there's a very strong materials and engineering faculty at McMaster University, so not only would the relationship continue and be enhanced with ArcelorMittal Dofasco, but I would say that I would hope to encourage the university to continue to support the OEMs that the province is very focused on—automotive, to be specific, where there is a McMaster Automotive Resource Centre, MARC, which is a partnership between the university and the automotive OEMs, and others. Obviously it's very important to the steel industry, but also very important, I think, to the province as a whole.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I think you are aware that industry has left the province. Certainly in the car industry there are different things that have happened in the last few years. For whatever reasons, we've had a migration of industry out of the province. So I wonder, sir, what you see as some challenges facing provincial universities, and McMaster in particular, concerning this type of thing or others that you might have on your mind.

Mr. Tony Valeri: Just like any other university, I think the challenge of enrolment growth—I think the

university continues to try to position itself to be able to support growth in enrolment.

There is also, I think, the issue of ensuring research excellence, the ability to continue to attract the brightest minds, not only from Canada but also around the world. Being able to compete with research universities around the world and being able to access the funding from both the federal and provincial governments to support research endeavours is certainly going to remain a focus of the university, going forward.

0910

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I understand that the university does quite a considerable amount of research, but do you see that pointing in a different direction in the future, the research end of it?

Mr. Tony Valeri: McMaster has really led the way in interdisciplinary research. McMaster's approach to not only teaching and knowledge transfer to students, but also to research, has always focused on bringing together various faculties to tackle a particular issue—where it might be a technical engineering issue, but the research that is being contemplated or completed may benefit, for instance, from the participation of individuals from the faculty of social science or some other faculty. So going forward, university research will become much more interdisciplinary.

As far as the area of research, I think that's consistently evolving. The issue of carbon and climate change is certainly becoming very much at the forefront of what universities are looking at. McMaster also has a very strong medical research capacity, and in that way, I would argue that the new innovations not only in medical devices, but also in procedure and discovery, are certainly an area that will continue to evolve at McMaster University.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: How much time do I have, Chair?

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): You have four minutes.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Four minutes? Okay.

I was talking to one of my constituents the other day, and it's interesting that we have you here today because it kind of fits into this. They have two high school boys. One is in grade 9 and I think the other is in grade 11 or something like that. I said to them, "Have the boys any kind of a decision as to which direction they would like to go in?" Their mother said, "Well, in the time it takes them to get them to university, maybe 90% of those jobs won't exist anymore because of the changes going on."

This is where I was kind of going at: Things are changing at a more rapid pace job-wise for opportunities going forward. I think universities are trying to do a pretty good job at it, keeping ahead of this if they can and seeing where things are going to go. There's all this talk about cars that drive themselves or whatever else is going on.

I just wonder, sir, how one keeps ahead of that or how do you think you can keep ahead of that, or how the university can work towards these types of things.

Mr. Tony Valeri: The dialogue between industry and universities is critically important, not only on the research side but in the production of what I'll call highly qualified individuals, university graduates who are positioned to contribute to organizations—so I think identifying or ensuring that not only are we as universities looking to deliver the types of skills and qualities that organizations need today, but we are also forward-looking.

A lot of that knowledge comes from understanding the trends and understanding the kinds of investments or contemplated investments that industry is considering, and in what areas. What kinds of skills would organizations require in their people in order to achieve the goals and objectives of that organization?

There is also something unique about McMaster that I've always been very much a fan of. I don't know if this is 100% correct, but if it's not number one, I would say that it is in the top two or three, certainly in the province—I would say in the country—in collaboration with colleges. There is a very strong relationship between McMaster University and Mohawk College—the identification of B.Tech., which is the bachelor of technology, for instance, where an individual can enter their post-secondary career at the college level and actually proceed right through to a PhD at the university level seamlessly. I think what that does is it provides—

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): You've got one minute.

Mr. Tony Valeri: —it provides some applied skills and an experiential opportunity for students, along with the theoretical training that they would get at a higher-learning institution like a university.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Okay. I think we're out of time?

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): No, you still have about 40 seconds—50 seconds, Mr. Bailey.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you, Chair. My notes here say that, at one time, you were associated with the DeGroote School of Business, but I didn't see it on your resumé. I didn't know whether that was wrong or—

Mr. Tony Valeri: My association with the DeGroote School of Business was as an executive in residence, where I was, again, volunteering and had the opportunity to interface with business students who were interested in the bridge between business and government. I had the opportunity to liaise with a number of students in the business school.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Tony Valeri: Thank you.

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): You have nine seconds. You're good?

Interjections.

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Excellent. Thank you very much.

The questioning now proceeds to the third party. Mr. Gates.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Good morning, Tony. How are you?

Mr. Tony Valeri: Very good, thank you.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Good. As a former Liberal MP in Hamilton, it is pretty clear which party you hold ties to. In spite of these ties, are you prepared to serve, in your role on the board, in a non-partisan manner?

Mr. Tony Valeri: I have always prided myself as being non-partisan and very focused on public policy that actually moved the agenda forward. It's been a decade since I was involved in public office. I'm not actively involved in any partisan way. I'm driven by my position in the private sector, where I think I would receive a good reception, irrespective of which political party a public office holder might be associated with. I think that, over the years, I've certainly transcended that partisanship.

To speak directly to your question, it would be that, yes, my view of politics is not in any way related to my position today or, potentially, to my future role with the university.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I appreciate you expanding and not just saying "yes." I think that it's helpful.

At the end of the day, I noticed that you worked at Dofasco.

Mr. Tony Valeri: I work at Dofasco.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Yes. I'm actually out of the auto industry. I worked at General Motors and, unlike Dofasco, I actually worked with a union. I know that Dofasco is non-union.

But one thing that's interesting, and one of the reasons why I asked a question about you being an MP, is that you certainly understand trade policies. I'd like to hear your position on the trans-Pacific trade agreement that, in my humble opinion, may devastate the steel industry and the auto industry. That's not coming from me; that's coming from people who are involved with the industry. That's coming from people who are opposing the trade agreement. I think that it's important, although it doesn't really function on what you're going to do at Mac. But in a way, it does, and I'll follow on that after you answer the question.

Mr. Tony Valeri: I guess that my comment would be that Canada, as a country that is dependent on trade for its prosperity—in essence, the domestic economy is not of a size that Canada can merely produce and support its own domestic economy but needs to have access to markets around the world. I think my comment would be that a trade agenda, in my view, is important to be made up of trade agreements that governments might be pursuing or signing, but also a very robust and effective trade remedy.

We have been working with the federal government. The Canadian Steel Producers Association has been working very closely with the federal government on updating its trade remedy and its trade remedy modernization act. In fact, the elements of that regulatory change—and, potentially, legislative change—were found in the last federal budget.

I would argue that, while trade agreements are important to Canada and to the province of Ontario, trade agreements must be fair—not only free, but fair. The way that

we would look to ensure that trade agreements are fair is by having a very robust trade remedy modernization, where these anti-dumping, countervailing duties should be put on, in our case, unfairly traded steel dumped in Canada or Ontario. We need to see duties on those to ensure that we're able to compete and to sustain the employment of steelworkers, as a very significant contributor of steel to the automotive sector, in order to sustain those employment jobs in the automotive sector as well.

0920

Mr. Wayne Gates: I can tell you that I certainly agree that Canada is a trading nation, and we should be. Quite frankly, I think we have to be. But I certainly believe your comments about how trade should fair; it should be reciprocal. The whole idea of trade is that it benefits both countries. In my humble opinion, I don't think the Trans-Pacific trade agreement has enough safeguards for steel. It certainly doesn't have enough safeguards for auto or dairy. I agree with the fact that we have to trade, but I think we can do a better job than this particular agreement, certainly for the industry that has employed you for a long time.

But equally important, it's a major employer and a respected employer that has given back to the community for a number of years. We want to continue to make sure that the kids who do get a university degree will have that same opportunity to go to work at Dofasco or US Steel or General Motors or Ford or those types of places. I'm glad that you kind of agree with the same position I've been on for a long, long time as a leader in the auto sector.

I have a couple of other questions; I might not get to them. One thing that's been really interesting to me is that our young people go to university and a lot of times they're getting hired as interns. I'm wondering if Dofasco, when you were there, hired interns.

Mr. Tony Valeri: We actually have a very robust internship program. In fact, our interns are just starting their term. We provide eight-month internships for university graduates as part of their academic career, predominantly drawn from the engineering faculties but also drawn from professional faculties, in particular the faculty of business. Those would be the two areas.

We are very, very strong proponents of the experiential aspect of education. We find that experience serves two purposes. It provides the necessarily skill set for university students, but also, for us at ArcelorMittal Dofasco, it exposes to the next generation the opportunity in advanced manufacturing. We feel that advanced manufacturing is critical to the province but also to the country, and we're very dependent on people.

You may remember Dofasco's tagline or motto: "Our product is steel. Our strength is people." We continue to invest in our people with a lifelong training program. We do have an ArcelorMittal University located in Hamilton, which is the only university in North America for ArcelorMittal, the global organization.

So the answer to your question is that we support internship. We are proponents of internship and feel that

it's a two-way street: an opportunity for students, but also an opportunity for organizations to demonstrate what the future may hold in terms of a career path for a prospective university student.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I appreciate that. I'll just touch quickly on the advanced manufacturing part. It was during the crisis of 2008-09 when they talked about giving up on manufacturing. What a mistake that would have been, as we have moved into advanced manufacturing.

Just to follow up on the intern question, because it's an issue. I believe that companies like yours can play an incredible role in making sure our kids who go to university—my youngest daughter is at Brock right now—have that work experience. But I also think, equally important—I'd like to know your position on actually paying interns to do the work.

Mr. Tony Valeri: At ArcelorMittal Dofasco, we pay our interns very well. Our interns are coming in and are paid the same as employees for that period of time, in that particular classification. So depending on the job role, that job has a compensation attached to it, and that intern would also receive that remuneration for that period of time.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Well, I want to be clear: I believe that all interns should be paid. I think that—

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): You have one minute.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I appreciate that, yes. They have to pay for their schooling, and in a lot of cases, a lot of families can't. I think interns should all be paid, and I'm glad that the company that you're working for does that.

The last thing I'll touch on quickly in my last minute is: Colleges and universities are facing enormous pressure with enrolment, some of it because of cuts that are going to universities and colleges. In talking to the colleges—in my area I have Niagara College, which has a good relationship with Brock University as well. Going to get foreign students is one way that we're doing it; how can you see other ways that we can get higher enrolment from kids in our area, particularly in the Hamilton area that really is in a comeback? Quite frankly, Hamilton is doing quite well right now, I believe.

Mr. Tony Valeri: Sorry, I just want to make sure I understand the question. How do we increase enrolment?

Mr. Wayne Gates: Yes, how do you get more kids going to university in your community?

Mr. Tony Valeri: I think one of the key ways of getting higher enrolments at the university level is by reaching—

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Thank you, Mr. Valeri. Time is up now for the third party. We're now going to move on to the government for questions. You have six minutes and 36 seconds. Ms. Vernile?

Ms. Daiene Vernile: Thank you, Chair. Mr. Valeri, thank you very much for appearing before this committee this morning and for standing for a position with the McMaster University board of governors.

In answer to Mr. Gates's question, "How do you get more kids to go to university?", you offer free tuition to low-income students. I think we've already done that.

I want to talk to you about the role of manufacturing at McMaster and the importance that manufacturing has in Hamilton. Mr. Pettapiece made a comment on the migration of manufacturing out of the province, but with the global recession in the last decade, we know that this occurred everywhere. I will tell you that in my community of Kitchener–Waterloo, we currently have 2,000 jobs in manufacturing and advanced manufacturing that are sitting empty, that local manufacturers are trying to fill, and they're having good success with this with job fairs. So, I know that we are on the rebound.

I want to ask you about the future of manufacturing and the role that McMaster is going to play in that.

Mr. Tony Valeri: Well I think the future of manufacturing is found in the use of new technology in industry. I think Industry 4.0, which is driven out of Germany—I think organizations like McMaster who just a week ago had invited a professor from Germany, very much involved in 4.0, who talked about the evolution of advanced manufacturing, the use of sensors, the use of big data and the use of new technology in improving productivity and improving, I think, the way we manufacture in Ontario and in Canada.

So I would say that I view the future of manufacturing as being bright. I think there continues to be a need for more investment in technology. There continues to be a need for partnership. I think, with governments—specifically from the perspective of multinationals who look to invest in jurisdictions that are competitive, that can provide the necessary skills and people and also the regulatory environment for them to be able to compete and export not only to serve a domestic market but also use the domestic market in a country like Canada or a province like Ontario as a platform for further export into NAFTA, in our case, as a steel company.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: You also commented on the collaboration between McMaster and Mohawk and seeing this kind of union elsewhere in the province between universities and colleges. I can tell you that, as the parliamentary assistant to research and innovation, I was recently at Mohawk as they were unveiling a 3D printer in the engineering area. Talk to us more about the importance of collaboration between universities and colleges and what that can bring to the job market.

Mr. Tony Valeri: Well, I think the collaboration between universities and colleges is key, as I said earlier. I think the applied knowledge is critically important to manufacturing. Not only do the highly qualified individuals that organizations are looking to attract have the theoretical background to perform their role, but they've also experienced as part of their learning. They've also had a hands-on experience.

0930

I think that colleges are very much focused on applied research and the experiential opportunity for students. This continuum of education, where a student can come

in at a college level and then proceed right through to a higher learning institution like a university and obtain a master's or a PhD in a seamless fashion, is critically important.

We recruit a large number of technologists and engineers. The bachelor of technology program, the B.Tech. program, which is a collaboration between McMaster and Mohawk, has been very good and very key in ensuring that they are able to produce those highly qualified individuals.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: The day that we were at Mohawk, COM DEV from Cambridge was there using the 3D printer. They didn't want to buy one themselves, so they were using the college unit. The people who were working on the 3D printer became interns for that company.

Tell us about the importance of industry coming in and utilizing universities and colleges and the talent that they have.

Mr. Tony Valeri: I think that the opportunity to use research facilities that reside inside of universities or colleges is absolutely key. Many manufacturers do not have a research infrastructure. ArcelorMittal has approximately 1,200 researchers globally. We maintain a research facility at ArcelorMittal Dofasco in Hamilton. That research facility is collaborating effectively with researchers at McMaster University: researchers in process automation and researchers in metallurgy and materials. There's also the Canmet lab in Hamilton, which is the national laboratory—

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): There's one minute.

Mr. Tony Valeri: —for materials. So I think, for the innovation of new materials with respect to the steel industry, that collaboration between industry, universities, national labs and colleges is absolutely critical to ensure that we can meet the demands of our automotive supply chain, for instance, and also the energy market when it returns.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: Yes, it's absolutely critical for industry to tell universities and colleges directly: "These are the kinds of graduates that we need with these skills."

Mr. Tony Valeri: I would agree wholeheartedly. That's where I think the dialogue between industry and universities and colleges is absolutely critical in ensuring that we have the supply of the highly qualified individuals to ensure that we can compete here in Canada and also, I would say, globally, as advanced manufacturers.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: Last question: Do you miss politics?

Mr. Tony Valeri: Public policy is always an area that I've been very interested in. This position, actually, affords me the opportunity to continue to work in that area of public policy.

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Thank you, Mr. Valeri. Thank you, Ms. Vernile.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: Thank you so much.

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): This concludes the time allocated for this interview. Thank you very

much. You may step down and stay in the room when we consider the concurrences at the end.

Mr. Tony Valeri: Thank you, Madam Chair.

MS. AVIA EEK

Review of intended appointment, selected by the official opposition and the third party: Avia Eek, intended appointee as member, Lake Simcoe Coordinating Committee.

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Our next intended appointee today is Avia Eek, nominated as member, Lake Simcoe Coordinating Committee. Please come forward, Ms. Eek. I hope I'm pronouncing that correctly.

Ms. Avia Eek: No one ever does, but that's fine. "Avia"; "Hey, you"—just don't call me too late for dinner.

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Avia what, sorry?

Ms. Avia Eek: Avia Eek.

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Eek; okay. Avia Eek, please come forward and take a seat at the table. Welcome. Thank you for being here. You may begin with a brief statement if you wish. Members of each party will then have 10 minutes to ask you questions. Any time used for your statement will be deducted from the government's time for questions. Thank you, Ms. Eek.

Ms. Avia Eek: Thank you, Madam Chair and members of committee. I'm not going to take a little bit of time, because in order for you to understand exactly why I'm very excited about applying for this position with the Lake Simcoe Coordinating Committee, you need to have all of the information.

As you already know, my name is Avia Eek. I own and operate a farm in the Holland Marsh with my husband, William, who accompanied me today. He's a third-generation grower in the Holland Marsh. His great-uncle was one of the first settlers in the Holland Marsh, in 1934. So there's a bit of history there.

It wasn't until after Bill and I decided to start a family that I became more involved with our family operation, which resulted in my also becoming more vocal about agricultural issues, which culminated in my writing various letters to local newspapers to bring awareness to non-farming folks about the misinformation that abounds in agriculture. I'm not shy about providing factual information about the needs and oversights when it comes to agriculture.

Fast-forward to 2009, when I attended the annual general meeting of the Holland Marsh Growers' Association to find out what their meetings were all about. A director had stepped down, and there was a vacancy. The board had already decided on a replacement, but one of my farmer friends—I think he was being funny at the time, but whatever—decided to nominate me for the position. I allowed my name to stand, the election was held, and I became the only woman on the board of

directors for the Holland Marsh Growers' Association. I beat out the guy.

It was through this membership that I was encouraged to run for municipal election in 2010, which I won quite handily with two thirds of the vote, beating out the two-term incumbent. Following the 2010 election, I was appointed by York region to represent the portion of King township that is within the Lake Simcoe watershed on the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority board of directors in 2011, and I am serving my second term on this board.

Around the same time, I was also asked by York region's planning department if I would consider being the alternate for the regional council member sitting on the Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Committee. I accepted. As the alternate, I had voting privileges in the absence of the regional member but was not able to run for the executive.

Our Holland Marsh member stepped down and asked if I would take that seat and give up being the alternate for the region, which I did, because that allowed me to run for chair. I lost that vote by one vote.

When that chair stepped down last year, I was approached to run again, which I did, and I am now the chair of GTA AAC. I am proud to have had a hand in producing the food and farming action plan 2021, and I remain the alternate member for the York region council member on the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance. GTA AAC covers York, Halton, Durham and Peel. We have members from the greenbelt and OMAFRA. It's the only organization that we're aware of in Ontario that brings urban folks, agriculture and Toronto food policy people together to resolve food and farming issues.

Since 2011, I've been the Holland Marsh representative on the York Region Agricultural Advisory Liaison Group, working with other advisory liaison groups in other municipalities within York region to advise York region about agricultural matters.

In 2011, the township of King embarked on a sustainability initiative with a view to creating an integrated community sustainability plan. I was involved in the working group representing the economic pillar, and our ICSP was approved in 2012. Every single report that comes before council currently must tie back to our ICSP, so it's not just sitting on a shelf collecting dust.

Late in 2013, a tourism task force was created with a variety of stakeholders from King township to create a tourism plan. I was the agricultural representative, and our plan was completed in the spring of 2014.

I had an incredible opportunity to be part of the CanAgPlus board of directors in 2014. That's the arm of CanadaGAP that implements the food safety program for Canadian fruits and vegetables at the national level. I rounded out our board of eight; I was one of four representatives from Ontario—of course, it was a national board, so it was eight of us from across Canada.

In 2014, I ran for my seat on municipal council and was able to hold it with 80.1% of the vote. I am currently

servicing my second term on council, where my focus continues to be agriculture, economic development, and the health and preservation of Lake Simcoe. I'm really proud of this little thing too, because I'm the only woman ever to be elected in ward 6. The farmers have to like you.

I have spent my entire life in the Lake Simcoe watershed and I have a special attachment to it. I grew up in Keswick, right around the Cook's Bay area of Lake Simcoe.

In early 2015 I became the agricultural representative on the York Region Local Advisory Committee, helping to establish the electricity needs of York region for the next 20 years.

In 2012, I was approached by the organizers of Run or Walk for Southlake and was asked to be the King representative raising money for the needs of our hospital, Southlake Regional Health Centre. I accepted, and am still part of this incredible group of volunteers.

I am a member of the King Chamber of Commerce, Arts Society King, Ladies in Philanthropy for Southlake, the Holland Marsh Growers' Association and Equal Voice Toronto.

Last year, I was contacted by one of the producers on The Agenda with Steve Paikin, and was asked to come on the show and talk about the greenbelt from my perspective as a farmer. I agreed. If you want to watch it, you can go to YouTube and look up "Farming and the Greenbelt." I was actually interviewed by him, so it was very cool.

I am passionate about agriculture and our Lake Simcoe watershed, and as the local councillor I have a good understanding of land use policies. Actually, I've been really coming to enjoy them recently.

As a result of my involvement in all of the above committees, boards etc. and how they intersect, I possess what I feel is a unique skill set that can be utilized when resolving issues around implementation of the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan and potential threats, and that provides a level of continuous relationship-building with our agricultural community.

0940

That ends all my qualifications. If any members have any questions or comments, I'm here.

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Thank you, Ms. Eek. The questioning is going to begin with the third party: Mr. Gates.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Good morning. How are you?

Ms. Avia Eek: I'm just tickety-boo.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I can see that. You're all excited to be here—

Ms. Avia Eek: Totally. Except for the fact that I had to come to the city, I'm good.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Yes, it's always an interesting drive in, for sure.

I've got a number of questions, but I'll start with this one here—I think it's important to establish.

Since 2014, you have, according to Elections Ontario records, contributed more than \$2,000 to the Liberal

Party of Ontario. As a member of a non-partisan, arm's-length agency of the provincial government, are you committed to ensuring that you maintain a non-partisan status in all actions, both on and off the committee?

Ms. Avia Eek: I am, because it's all about the health of Lake Simcoe, and that's not a partisan issue; that benefits everyone. It benefits all the municipalities that are around the lake. We have a 65,000-acre watershed. Any decisions that are made are to the benefit of economic development for those businesses within those communities and for the residents who are taking their drinking water from that lake. So, definitely, it is not a partisan issue.

Mr. Wayne Gates: What is your position on the appropriate balance between development and environmental protection in the Lake Simcoe region? And it's interesting, because—

Ms. Avia Eek: We don't have enough time to answer that question. It's not—

Mr. Wayne Gates: You can take as much time as you like because, I think—I sat on city council in Niagara, and it's a very big issue in Niagara, with what's going on where they're trying to move wetlands, and biodiversity. I think it's probably one of the most important issues facing the province of Ontario today. As we continue to get rid of our wetlands, continue to get rid of our farms—a country that can't feed itself is in trouble. We have to protect our wetlands as well. It's an issue that would come up all the time on council when I was there. I'm sure, with you being a two-term councillor—congratulations. It's fun; I enjoyed it. I think it's probably coming up quite regularly at your council as well.

Ms. Avia Eek: Being a board member with the LSRCA, as well, it comes up regularly, because people think that they can just go in and harvest the peat and sell it with no mind to the environment and to flood control, and the impact that they will have. You need to know, right off the bat, that I'm not pro-development. I know we have all these wonderful development plans and growth plans and things. I'm not always a fan of them because I'm from King township. Some 99% of our municipality is greenbelt; the other 75% is Oak Ridges moraine. Then, part of our watershed—well, our watershed; what am I saying, "part of it"?—is in the Lake Simcoe—we have to answer to or try to implement or follow the rules in the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan. So, when it comes to finding a balance, that's very tricky because there is not one blanket solution for any municipality. You have to look at each individual application that comes forward, and you have to tweak it to benefit those municipalities.

To me, it's very difficult, and it's not an easy answer. I'm a communicator; you might have figured that out, and I really believe that you have to be talking to the people that are going to be impacted by these decisions. You have to have stakeholders around the table that are going to be providing solutions, and then you find some common ground, because not everybody's going to agree with everything, and then you find ways to work it out.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Okay. That wasn't bad.

Ms. Avia Eek: Did that answer your question, sort of?

Mr. Wayne Gates: Well, I'm going to go back to it. As an owner and an operator of a farm in the Holland Marsh, I'm sure you are well aware of the potential harmful effects of agricultural runoff on the natural ecosystems. Given your experience, the large number of farms around Lake Simcoe and the importance of these farms to our economy, for sure, I'm interested to know how you will balance the potential competing interests of farming as an important economic activity with the need to protect our environment.

Ms. Avia Eek: I think we need to be looking at the building industry because while a lot of—we can even go to phosphorus, if you like. Several years ago, there were all kinds of comments and people were coming down on agriculture because of the phosphorus. Well, when it comes to the Holland Marsh, that 65,000-acre watershed drains into the Holland Marsh. So, when it leaves through the river and goes into Lake Simcoe, we're getting all the phosphorus from the water and sewage treatment plants; there's a certain percentage that comes from the air. You're getting a small amount from runoff from farms, but look at all the pavement that's there that's not porous. We need to start pushing our building industry to be using more LID—low-impact development—measures, which is something the conservation authority is pushing actively. They're working with the BILD industry, and that's what we're trying to do.

I am excited by the project the conservation authority has, because we're looking at trying to put some kind of facility at the exit of the river to remove some of that phosphorus before the water goes into Lake Simcoe. But only 2% to 3% is from the Holland Marsh. I couldn't tell you what the percentage is from what we call other highland farms. But I think it's not just about agriculture; it's about everybody being responsible for what they are doing, and the development around us is contributing greatly to that.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'll touch on that, because our conservation authority actually wants to move some of our wetlands to do development, and it's become a very big issue in Niagara. I had a meeting with my fellow NDP councillor from Welland on a Sunday afternoon at 4 o'clock. We've been involved for a while. You know, it's tough to get people out on a Sunday afternoon at 4 o'clock, and we had 300 people. Moving wetlands is a very big issue in Niagara, and I think they didn't do their research on this particular issue. Again, it was for development.

As a member of the Lake Simcoe Coordinating Committee, part of your work will ensure that the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change continues provincial investment to support the implementation of the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan. Do you believe that the ministry is currently providing enough funds for lake protection and restoration, and do you have any proposals for how to increase the funding available from the ministry?

Ms. Avia Eek: I haven't seen the numbers, so I don't know, and numbers and I aren't friends anyway. I would have to get back to you on that one, because I really don't know. I would be pushing, if we're not getting enough. Currently, I have been harassing the federal government, and some of my other colleagues on the conservation authority who are of a different stripe have been pushing things from their end as well. So we're all working together to push to get funds federally, and if we need them provincially, you're darned right I'm going to be pushing.

Mr. Wayne Gates: That's very good. I'll just finish by saying that I can see why the farmers elected you and why they like you. Thanks very much for your time. I appreciate it.

Ms. Avia Eek: Thank you.

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): We're now going to move to the government side. You have three minutes and 40 seconds, Ms. Vernile.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: I'll talk quickly. Thank you very much, Avia—did I pronounce it correctly?

Ms. Avia Eek: Yes, you did.

Ms. Daiene Vernile:—for making the drive down from Lake Simcoe and for appearing before this committee and, really, for standing for the Lake Simcoe Coordinating Committee. It is a very selfless thing you are doing and a great public service.

You mentioned that you have a special attachment to the Lake Simcoe area, and I will share with you that I do too. Growing up in north-end Toronto, on Sunday afternoons our family, which did not have a lot of money, would drive up to Sibbald Point Provincial Park and picnic in the park there. My favourite thing was to go into the St. George's churchyard and look for the marker where Stephen Leacock is buried. It's a wonderful part of Ontario, one of my favourite places in Ontario.

The questions I want to ask you are, first of all, what are the goals you are going to have when you sit on this board? Are you taking anything specifically with you to this board?

Ms. Avia Eek: As with all the boards I sit on as an agricultural representative, agriculture is not represented well. I'm sorry, guys and ladies, but it's not represented well in government. Unless it's specifically an agricultural committee, agriculture is not represented well.

I'm not really one to sit back and, "Yeah, that's fine. They're going to do what they want." I believe that we can change things through dialogue and through having conversations and collaboration. My goal would be to share what is realistic from an agricultural point of view. Even today there is a lot of—and I'm not even going to get into this topic; I'm not even going to say the word. There is a whole bunch of misinformation about how agriculture should be controlled and what will work. Well, if you're not a farmer and if you're not experiencing it, I'm sorry, with all due respect; you don't know.

My goal will be to be that agricultural voice.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: What are some of your biggest concerns right now when it comes to agriculture and farming in Ontario?

Ms. Avia Eek: Crop protection materials, because the various levels of government continue to make knee-jerk decisions based on the non-farming public and their interpretation of how farming should be happening, without really having the information. So one of the big issues I have is that we're not going to go back to the way farming was 50 years ago. People seem to be pushing us to get rid of this chemical and get rid of that chemical. They are crop protection materials. We need those to feed people. Our population is going to be exploding and we're going to be adding millions more.

0950

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): You have one minute.

Ms. Avia Eek: One minute? Okay.

We need those tools. That's one issue that I have, but I also believe that it has to be done responsibly, so the research has to be done. And when it comes to our Lake Simcoe, it's very science-based.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: Having your voice at the table will increase that representation, so we're very fortunate to have you. Thank you very much for coming today.

Ms. Avia Eek: Thank you for having me.

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Thank you, Ms. Vernile. We're now going to go to the official opposition. Mr. Pettapiece.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Welcome. It's great to have you here.

I just moved off our farm about three years ago. I come from Perth county. We have some fruit and vegetable growers out there, but certainly not to the scope that you are involved with. What crops do you grow?

Ms. Avia Eek: Carrots and onions.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Carrots and onions?

Ms. Avia Eek: I've got my carrots on—and we grow potatoes for our local food bank in Bradford.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Okay. There were some decisions made over the last couple of years. One, which had a devastating effect on agriculture, was the cancellation of the Slots at Racetracks Program, on the racehorse business. It certainly affected my community because we had a lot of farmers selling straw and feed back to the racehorse business, and they lost that business. It was made, in my opinion, without any consultation with the industry or with people in rural Ontario.

I wonder—and I don't know this. I'm asking this because I really don't know the answer to this question—

Ms. Avia Eek: I may not know the answer, but carry on.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I'm not trying to set you up, but we had a decision made by the environment minister to limit the use of neonics on corn and soybeans. Do you use those products in your industry?

Ms. Avia Eek: Most agricultural people do. Yes; the short answer is yes. I was told that I shouldn't ramble. Yes, that's a harmful one. I made a comment about knee-jerk decisions; that was one of them, because people are not taking into consideration the fact that development is taking over natural foraging areas. You've got bee-

keepers who are not necessarily following best beekeeping practices: "Oh, let's blame things on neonics."

When crop protection materials are introduced by the PMRA, there's a label and there are directions on that label for how to use that product. When it's used properly—and it's an insecticide; of course it's going to kill stuff. My God, if you eat too much salt, it's probably going to harm you. It's in moderation.

I attended the Muck conference a couple of weeks ago, and we had a wonderful scientist from the University of Guelph. I loved the quote that she had: "The poison is in the dose." When it's applied properly, and if everybody's doing their part, that restriction does not need to be there. There were other ways that that could have been handled.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: My earlier part of my life, I should tell you, was spent in Essex county, where we get peach orchards. Spraying peach trees was my brother's and my summer job. Back then, the restrictions or the cautionary practices were not in place as they are now. We did some things that some people may say have affected our brain a little bit.

Better protective materials—the things that you're wearing, and whatever else, when you're using chemicals—certainly have evolved to a rate of safety that I think is quite good, from wearing masks to protective rubber gloves and whatever else when you're dealing with these chemicals.

I do agree that we've had some issues with these knee-jerk decisions affecting rural Ontario, with people making those decisions not really understanding what's going on out there.

Ms. Avia Eek: Bingo.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: You have touched on the appropriate balance between developments and environmental protection of the Lake Simcoe region. Is there anything else that you would like to add to what you've already said?

Ms. Avia Eek: No, because it's very complex. Like I said, it's a case-by-case issue. I don't believe that when it comes to wetlands being moved—leave them alone. If you want to engineer new ones, that's great, but you do not mess with a natural process and what's already there. It's already performing the function. It's there to perform and, in many cases, it's doing it properly. It's only when we start intervening that we start wrecking stuff.

Again, it's on a case-by-case basis, depending on where you are.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: There's always room for improvement, no matter what committee you're on or what you're doing, whether you're farming or being a councillor.

Ms. Avia Eek: Yes, constantly moving forward.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I was on a municipal council for a couple of terms too.

Do you see any specific challenges that you want to address as a member of this committee?

Ms. Avia Eek: Oh. Any specific challenges? Well, again, because I will be replacing the agricultural mem-

ber, if I'm fortunate enough to be, I would say yes, there are definite agricultural—it's bringing an awareness to people, so they understand what you're doing, that you might have to change it this way, or, from the development community, this is what you have to do.

Again, it's going to go back to having conversations, seeing what's working and what isn't working, and finding workable solutions that are not going to be too onerous, that people just can't afford to do what has to be done to protect the environment. We only have one environment. When it's gone, it's gone. It's not coming back.

I think my goal would just be to be the voice of agriculture, and to make the best decisions I can.

I'm fortunate enough now, with the LSRCA—we have an incredible team, whether it's our CAO and the senior staff, right down to the people who are wading around in the swamps and doing the scientific biological stuff. We have a tremendous team.

I'm not a scientist—this brain is not wired for science; not even close—but I trust in their ability. That's why they're hired. I trust in them giving us the right information. Yes, it's important to ask questions and make sure you understand and make sure everybody's on the same page.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Have you ever met with anybody from the environment ministry?

Ms. Avia Eek: No, oddly enough.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: No? Okay.

Ms. Avia Eek: That's why when the chair of the committee called me—she was our former CAO. When she contacted me, asking if I'd be interested in this position, I'm like, "Oh, my God, yes." Then I thought, "Wait a minute. I've never had anything to do with the ministry." In fact, sometimes, we clash, because of the agricultural component.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Yes. I had a conversation with a fellow who was speaking to people in the environment ministry. I'm not criticizing the people in the environment ministry, but some of the things that are going on in agriculture now would blow your mind. I'm talking about GPS mapping, planting your crops with GPS, robots milking cows and whatever else is going on—and nobody is aware of that. So I share with you maybe some frustration as to people making decisions, not knowing what is actually happening in the agriculture industry.

My son is involved with a lot of work with the GPS business. In fact, the biggest thing he does is spread manure, liquid manure, in Perth county. It's all GPS'd out, so he keeps away from streams and whatever else. He has to put reports in on all this stuff that goes on with it.

Ms. Avia Eek: Yes, very environmental.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: His biggest problem with that is that it goes very slowly—you only travel about two or three miles an hour when you're doing this; it's staying awake in these big fields, because it takes a long time to get from one end to the other.

Ms. Avia Eek: That's right.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I think I share your frustration with what has happened in the past. I would certainly like to see those things changed.

Do you have a question?

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Mr. Bailey.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yes, I wanted to comment—it's more comments than anything—on your views on science over rumours or knee-jerk decisions. I like your views on the wetlands. I certainly support those.

I had one question. Being that you live on Lake Simcoe or in that watershed, do you have any issues with the black cormorants? You know, the birds—do you know what I mean?

Ms. Avia Eek: I know what you mean.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Any issues with them down there?

Ms. Avia Eek: No. I've heard there have been some, but I don't think they're in my neck of the woods, because Lake Simcoe is big. I'm down by the Cook's Bay area.

We have lots of blue herons and we have lots of muskrats—because our local trapper passed away several years ago, so now nobody is trapping the damned things.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I was doing some reading on them, and I understand that they deplete the blue heron population. They go in and they eat the eggs in the nests or something.

I'm doing some research on it. That's why I asked.

Ms. Avia Eek: That's always good.

Mr. Robert Bailey: That's all I have, Madam Chair.

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Thank you very much. This concludes the time allocated for this interview. Thank you very much, Ms. Eek. You were very passionate in your deputation here this morning. You may step down while we consider the concurrences.

Ms. Avia Eek: Thank you very much, madam, and members of the committee.

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): We will now consider the concurrence for Mr. Tony Valeri, nominated as member, McMaster University board of governors. Would someone please move the concurrence? Mr. Qaadri.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move concurrence in the intended appointment of Tony Valeri, nominated as member, McMaster University board of governors.

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Any discussion? All in favour? Opposed? The motion is carried. Congratulations, Mr. Valeri.

We will now consider the concurrence for Ms. Avia Eek, nominated as member, Lake Simcoe Coordinating Committee. Would someone please move the concurrence? Mr. Qaadri.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move concurrence in the intended appointment of Avia Eek, nominated as member, Lake Simcoe Coordinating Committee.

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Any discussion? All in favour? Opposed? The motion is carried. Congratulations, Ms. Eek.

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Seeing that there are no other concurrences to—oh, we have a question. Mr. Gates?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I think we should add “New business” to that because I think it is twice now that I’ve had to jump in after that vote.

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Sorry about that.

Mr. Wayne Gates: No, I apologize. It’s probably—if we just add “New business,” then you could just do a quick look.

I’d like to get a list of all the boards that come before us and how many of those committees are actually full. I’ve gotten some complaints over the last few weeks that

some of our boards may have up to 10 members and some only have three or four. I’d like to get a list of all of them so that we can take a look at them and, who knows, maybe even bring some names forward or something to try to fill them up. Could I please get that—research, would you be able to do that for us? I’d appreciate it. Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mrs. Cristina Martins): Thank you. I’ll make sure that we have that for everyone in the committee.

Any further business? Seeing that there is no further business, the meeting is adjourned. Thank you.

The committee adjourned at 1003.

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