

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



Assemblée
législative
de l'Ontario

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

A-8

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

A-8

**Standing Committee on
Government Agencies**

Intended appointments

1st Session
42nd Parliament

Tuesday 26 February 2019

**Comité permanent des
organismes gouvernementaux**

Nominations prévues

1^{re} session
42^e législature

Mardi 26 février 2019

Chair: John Vanthof
Clerk: Jocelyn McCauley

Président : John Vanthof
Greffière : Jocelyn McCauley

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Hansard Reporting and Interpretation Services
Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
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

ISSN 1180-4335

CONTENTS

Tuesday 26 February 2019

Election of Acting Chair.....	A-49
Subcommittee report	A-49
Intended appointments.....	A-49
Mr. David Colfer.....	A-49
Mr. Graham Coveney.....	A-53

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
GOVERNMENT AGENCIESCOMITÉ PERMANENT DES
ORGANISMES GOUVERNEMENTAUX

Tuesday 26 February 2019

Mardi 26 février 2019

The committee met at 0900 in committee room 1.

ELECTION OF ACTING CHAIR

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Jocelyn McCauley): Good morning, honourable members. In the absence of a Chair, it is my duty to call upon you to elect an Acting Chair. Are there any nominations? Mr. Burch.

Mr. Jeff Burch: I nominate Catherine Fife.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Jocelyn McCauley): Thank you. Does the member accept the nomination?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I do.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Jocelyn McCauley): Are there any further nominations? There being no further nominations, I declare the nominations closed and Ms. Fife elected Acting Chair of the committee.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT

The Acting Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): Good morning. If only life was that easy, that I could be elected to the Chair that quickly in life.

The first issue this morning is to deal with the following subcommittee report, from February 21, 2019. We have all seen the report in advance, so could I please have a motion? MPP Natyshak.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I move adoption of the subcommittee report on intended appointments dated Thursday, February 21, 2019.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): Thank you. All in favour of receiving the report? Carried.

INTENDED APPOINTMENTS

MR. DAVID COLFER

Review of intended appointment, selected by official opposition party: David Colfer, intended appointee as member, Liquor Control Board of Ontario.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): We have Mr. David Colfer here this morning, nominated as a member of the Liquor Control Board of Ontario. You may come forward, Mr. Colfer.

As you may be aware, you have the opportunity, should you choose to do so, to make an initial statement. Following this, there will be questions from members of the committee. With the questioning, we will start with the

official opposition today, followed by the government, with 15 minutes allocated to each recognized party. Any time you take in your statement will be deducted from the time allotted to the government side.

Please start. Do you have some initial comments that you'd like to make?

Mr. David Colfer: I do.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): Thank you. Please go ahead.

Mr. David Colfer: Good morning, Madam Chair and members of the committee. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today and be considered for the position as a member of the Liquor Control Board of Ontario. I'm confident that I can apply my experiences to make a positive and lasting contribution to the board and the province.

I spent the first 18 years of my career in brand, sales and product development in the Canadian retail industry. For the past 10 years, I've held the position of president and general manager of Lagostina Canada, the leading cookware brand in Canada.

I have a passion for business and truly enjoy working on strategic visions, especially in the context of today's rapidly changing retail environment. I work with an entrepreneurial mindset and aim to make business more productive and sustainable.

I have a BBA in finance from Bishop's University and have attended the IMD Advanced Management Program in Lausanne, Switzerland, and Hangzhou, China.

I've been fortunate to travel extensively for work through Europe and Asia over past 20 years, sourcing product and developing manufacturing partnerships, which has given me a global perspective.

As members of the board, we are there to supervise the business affairs of the LCBO. Today's retail landscape is going through massive and rapid upheaval, and it is forcing everyone to face change. We see this change affecting everything, from how we shop to where we shop. This change is also occurring at the LCBO, where we see the business evolving from not just a retailer and a wholesaler to bars and restaurants; they are now selling wholesale to grocery stores.

The LCBO is also now advancing their digital and online offering, which is so critical in today's environment. I truly believe we are facing the fastest change in retail/wholesale business history as a result of digital transformation. I welcome the opportunity to be a part of

this ongoing change, where I can provide my past experience and industry know-how to continue the LCBO as a best-in-class organization.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): Thank you very much, Mr. Colfer. That was two minutes, and so that will come out of the question set from the parties.

We'll move right now to MPP Natyshak.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Thank you, Mr. Colfer, for being here, and congratulations on your imminent appointment to the liquor board.

I have a couple of questions for you. Mr. Colfer, we have found a disturbing pattern in this committee of appointments being of partisan nature and connections to either the Premier himself or the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario or their federal counterparts. Are you currently a member of the PC Party of Ontario?

Mr. David Colfer: No, I'm not.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Have you ever been a member of the PC Party of Ontario?

Mr. David Colfer: I may have been five or six years ago. I can't remember if I made a contribution or if I was a member. I don't know.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Sorry—

Mr. Roman Baber: You really should have some foundations for the things you say.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): Excuse me. Questions go through the Chair. If you have a point, then make it through the Chair. Mr. Baber.

Mr. Roman Baber: Chair, I can hold the member to account. To suggest that—

The Acting Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): Mr. Baber, it's not a point of order.

Please go ahead, Mr. Natyshak.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: The government is obviously sensitive on this issue, because we have seen a pattern here of appointments that are—we are in the 99% of appointments that are connected to the PC Party of Ontario here. It's what they railed against when the Liberals were in power. It's what they campaigned against. Now we're seeing it happen in real life. So I have to ask these questions. It's no offence to you, sir. It's simply a pattern that has been established and I want to make sure that it is what it is.

You said that you have been a member of the PC Party of Ontario.

Mr. David Colfer: I just wasn't clear if it was a contribution I made or if I was actually a member, but it was probably five or six years ago.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: It's either one of those for sure, you're saying—

Mr. David Colfer: Yes.

Mr. Taras Natyshak:—that certainly you either made a donation, a financial contribution—can you remember whether it was to a specific candidate or to the party in general? Or do you remember signing a membership card?

Mr. David Colfer: I don't. I'm sorry.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Have you ever supported an individual campaign as a volunteer for the election or endorsements of any sort or as a campaign worker?

Mr. David Colfer: No.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Do you have a connection to the Premier's chief of staff, Dean French? Do you have any relationship with him at all?

Mr. David Colfer: Yes, I do know Dean.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: How do you know Dean?

Mr. David Colfer: From school.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: What school?

Mr. David Colfer: Bishop's.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Bishop's: Is that a high school or a college?

Mr. David Colfer: A university.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: University. Did you attend classes together? Were you roommates?

Mr. David Colfer: No, we were just at the same university.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Do you have any fiduciary connection with Mr. French at all? Have you connected with him in any business relationships whatsoever?

Mr. David Colfer: There has been some business in terms of insurance that he used to work with. But there are no connections any more.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Did you purchase insurance from him, or did he purchase insurance from you or you were in the insurance business together?

Mr. David Colfer: No, I purchased insurance from him.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Okay. This appointment—did you sole-source this appointment? Were you investigating what appointments were out there and you applied on your own volition, as your own initiative?

Mr. David Colfer: Over the last year or two it's something that I've been wanting to get involved with. I have a passion for business and it's something that, if there was the right opportunity, I would like to put some time towards it. I had talked with Catherine Nicol, who had kind of outlined the position—

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Who is Catherine Nicol? Sorry.

Mr. David Colfer: She's with the Minister of Finance's office.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Okay, thanks.

Mr. David Colfer: She had indicated and explained some of the positions that were available. The LCBO was the one that I thought was most interesting to apply—

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Did Catherine Nicol reach out to you to inform you of this position being available?

Mr. David Colfer: I believe I had reached out to her.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Okay. Did Dean French do that as well? Did he reach out to you?

Mr. David Colfer: I haven't talked to Dean.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: You haven't talked to him about this appointment at all?

Mr. David Colfer: No.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Do you know what the term "gravy train" relates to? Have you ever heard that term?

The Acting Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): Mr. Natyshak, is that—

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm just asking a question. Have you ever heard that term in political vernacular?

Mr. David Colfer: Am I supposed to answer that?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: You can if you like. You don't have to.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): Mr. Colfer, you do not have to.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: It's not a court of law, but—

The Acting Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): You do not have to answer that if you don't want to.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Again, it's not directed to you, sir—

Mr. Roman Baber: Madam Chair?

The Acting Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): Are you raising a point of order?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: —it's directed toward the government.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): Mr. Natyshak.

Do you have a point of order?

Mr. Roman Baber: Yes.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): What is your point of order?

Mr. Roman Baber: Madam Chair, I believe that my friend's comments are out of order. The question he poses is inappropriate.

Furthermore, I would like to suggest that, to my best recollection, the opposition members in most cases abstained on most, if almost all—

The Acting Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): Mr.—

Mr. Roman Baber: Excuse me. May I just—

The Acting Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): Turn Mr. Baber's mike off, please.

Mr. Baber, I have already indicated to Mr. Colfer that he does not have to answer that question.

You do not have to answer that question, Mr. Colfer. Do you understand that?

Mr. David Colfer: I do.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): Thank you very much.

Interjection.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): I already made a decision on your point of order. A point of order, according to the standing orders, is not an opportunity for you to make a statement.

Mr. Roman Baber: I'm not making a statement.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): Please go ahead, Mr. Natyshak.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Thank you, Chair. My apologies, again, if it's sensitive to the government. That term is one that's used mostly by the government and the Premier himself. I just wanted to know if you were familiar with that term. It has been popular in political vernacular for quite some time, and what we are afraid of is that that's exactly what we're seeing in this House, that the Premier and the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario have turned this building into its own gravy train station where they are front-ends loading—

Interjection.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Well, if it's not parliamentary, then you should tell your Premier to stop using the term because it's in fact his own term. He's coined it.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): We're going to move on to the next question. I think we've established that Mr. Colfer is not going to comment on "gravy train." Please move ahead.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: You know what, Chair? I have no further questions. I've established, I think, the pattern that I've needed to establish, unfortunately, and I appreciate the time that Mr. Colfer has given to this committee. Thank you, Chair.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): Thank you. We'll move to the government side right now. You have 13 minutes. MPP Roberts.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: First of all, Mr. Colfer, it's wonderful to have you here today. Thank you for your interest in serving the province and bringing some of your phenomenal business experience to the table here to help with the LCBO control board. I'm just wondering if you can talk a little bit about your professional experience and how you think that might be able to contribute to your work on the LCBO board.

0910

Mr. David Colfer: Absolutely. As I elaborated, I've got 28 years in the retail distribution industry and it kind of starts from the bottom up. I can tell you that what I see right now, in terms of the disruption that's occurring in retail, is unprecedented. The digital transformation, in terms of what's going on with the Internet, AI and all of those things, is completely changing the way retail exists.

We've seen it. You've seen what has happened to Sears and Home Outfitters and all these kinds of established businesses that have fallen by the wayside. I think one of the most important parts of it is the strategy of the business and, directionally, where it's going. It needs to be sound. I think, with the experience that I've had managing the company that I run, which has very close ties with retail, that I can provide a lot of insight and guidance in terms of what's going to be going on and what is actually happening right now with the LCBO.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: For sure. I had the chance recently to meet with the LCBO in eastern Ontario, in my riding of Ottawa West–Nepean. They were talking a lot about how the LCBO has been increasingly moving into digital markets, as well. I understand that's something that you played a role in in your business career so far.

Mr. David Colfer: As it evolves, absolutely. It's something that has taken certain companies—they weren't expecting it to change as quickly as it has, but it is critical and it evolves. It's not only just the Internet and what a lot of people traditionally think about with consumers buying a product, but it's the back-end side of things, too. It's AI. There are a lot of points to digital. Strategically, again, it's really critical how it's mapped out and, directionally, where you're going to go, because there are a lot of forks in the road, and making the wrong turn could be really detrimental to the business.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Well, thank you so much. I think we are incredibly fortunate that somebody with your experience has decided to step forward to help to serve. So thank you.

Mr. David Colfer: Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): Thank you very much. Mr. Cuzzetto?

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Thank you for being here, Mr. Colfer. I noticed that you worked for Lagostina before. I wanted to know what changes you did or helped to implement there.

Mr. David Colfer: Our company imports and distributes products. I spent a lot of time in Asia, actually, in product development and sourcing. There are several ways you can look at business: You can look at the back-end in terms of where the products are coming from; the central is more how you're running the inner distribution of the products; and then the exterior is our clients. I spent a lot of time, actually, in all three areas, but focused a lot on the international side, where we were making relationships and developing products with the different manufacturers, mainly in Europe and in Asia.

I've really focused a lot on simplifying business. I think that we get so built up on different issues about what we can't do, when we should be focusing on what we can do, so it's been really important for me to help simplify the business.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): MPP Ke?

Mr. Vincent Ke: Hi. Good morning. Welcome to our committee. At the LCBO, we have 663 stores and 210 agency stores, and I know they're going to expand the online shopping, as Jeremy was just asking. I'm very interested in how your experience in your previous company would benefit how we get online shopping in the LCBO.

Mr. David Colfer: Sorry, if you can clarify—

Mr. Vincent Ke: Online shopping, and how your experience could be of benefit to the LCBO's online shopping.

Mr. David Colfer: It's absolutely critical. At the end of the day, and when I go through the report for the LCBO and the strategy, this is all about the customer, and giving the customer choice and opportunity and making it easy. That is the one thing that online does: It allows you to have a lot more and it makes it really easy.

I know that it's really in its infancy right now, what the LCBO is doing in terms of the online shopping. If you look at the parameters, in terms of their current sales that are done online versus their total, which is just over \$6 billion, they're at a fraction of where it should be or could be. So there's a lot of area for growth, and it will happen. As people get more and more comfortable with that and with the advances in technology and distribution systems, it's all going to come together. They've started; I would tell you they're not where they should be or could be. I think that's just a matter of time. But I would tell you that it actually can be beneficial to take your time initially to

really get the kinks out of the system before you explode the business in that direction.

Mr. Vincent Ke: Okay. Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): Any other further questions from the government side? Seeing none, thank you very much, Mr. Colfer, for coming here—

Interjection.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): Oh, MPP Khanjin.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I just wanted to thank you again for appearing at our committee. Your vast experience is really going to complement this position, and we're very fortunate to have you apply, based on merit alone. Certainly you're overqualified for such a position.

I just wanted to talk to you a little bit about shopper marketing and the disruption of markets. When you look at the shopper marketing strategy, where do you see, futuristic-wise, the LCBO going in terms of its modelling?

Mr. David Colfer: I think we're coming to an inflection point because, fundamentally, there are several pillars to the LCBO strategy. One which I just mentioned briefly in my statement was the shift to wholesale, and the wholesale in terms of the grocery stores. That's going to start affecting the demand also at the LCBO stores. They're working at it and looking at it. They have to become that much more important to the customer.

I think there's going to be an interesting balance—

Interjections.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): I apologize, Mr. Colfer.

Can this sidebar conversation end, please? I'm having a hard time hearing the delegate.

Please go ahead. Finish your sentence.

Mr. David Colfer: It's going to be an interesting balance as you divert resources to online, and then what does that mean to the bricks and mortar so that you can continue to grow with the business? It also affects the back end on the distribution side because you have to spend more time, money and effort to be able to get that to the consumer, whether it's through the grocery or the online side of business, and getting the products to the consumer in the right way.

We all know Amazon. We all know that we expect one-day shipping. It's amazing, the standards that are being given to us as consumers as to what is acceptable and what isn't anymore. It's moving really quickly.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): MPP Surma.

Miss Kinga Surma: I'm representing my colleague today, but I do have one question that he asked me to ask. How might your experience in brand and product development inform the LCBO's promotion of Ontario-made craft beer, wine and cider?

Mr. David Colfer: I know it's an important mandate in terms of getting the Ontario-made and -produced products into the LCBO. I think it's an important initiative. We're a corporation that's based in Ontario and for Ontarians, so I think we have to provide it, and I think they're doing a good job of devoting the right resources from a marketing

perspective in terms of highlighting the different craft breweries. There is a lot more that's occurring these days. I'm amazed that you see something like the gins that are coming out of Collingwood and different areas. It's really impressive.

There is a real, I would say, entrepreneurial spirit of these manufacturers that is occurring right now. It's almost a renaissance. I know that it can be quite complex, the process to get products into the marketplace. If there are ways without affecting what we're getting to make that a more efficient way, then I think that would be helpful to get that across. I think, in terms of what the LCBO has done from marketing perspective, it has been pretty solid.

Miss Kinga Surma: Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): Any other questions? MPP Dunlop.

Ms. Jill Dunlop: Good morning, Mr. Colfer. I, too, am filing in for one of my colleagues today, and I have a question. Are there any experiences outside of your professional career that you would like to expand upon? Is there any community service or volunteer work you've done that would inform your work with the LCBO?

Mr. David Colfer: To be very honest, I've been involved with my kids, my two boys, with sports where I have been involved with coaching on their teams with hockey and with basketball as they've grown up. To be very honest, I've devoted a lot of my time to my work. I would say, just in the last year or so, I've been reflecting a lot and looking at how I can now start to contribute outside of work, and that's one of the reasons why I'm here today.

Ms. Jill Dunlop: Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): Any further questions from the government side? Seeing none, thank you very much, Mr. Colfer, for your attendance here today. That concludes the time allocated for this portion.

MR. GRAHAM COVENEY

Review of intended appointment, selected by official opposition party: Graham Coveney, intended appointee as member, Niagara Parks Commission.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): We will then call on the next nominee, Mr. Graham Coveney. Mr. Coveney, as you may be aware, you have the opportunity, should you choose to do so, to make an initial statement. Following this, there will be questions from members of the committee. With that questioning, we will start with the government side this time, followed by the opposition, with 15 minutes allocated to each recognized party. As you know, any time you take in your statement will be removed from the opposition side in this instance.

Please go ahead.

0920

Mr. Graham Coveney: Thank you. I'm suffering from a bit of a cold, so excuse me if my voice goes out on me.

Good morning, Madam Chair and members of the committee. I'm honoured to be here this morning to tell you a little bit about who I am, my background and my qualifications, and to hopefully help assist you in determining my potential appointment to the Niagara Parks Commission.

I am a married gentleman with four children: three daughters and one son. My children are very active in our community of Niagara, with my daughters being involved in basketball, gymnastics and competitive dance, to name a few, and my son being involved in travel hockey and travel baseball. I have lived in the Niagara region for 20 years, and each of my children was born there. We love our community. It is such a great place to raise our family. We especially love the Niagara parks and have used them many times, and have many fond memories of all we have done there.

I have been involved in my community as a hockey coach and camp counsellor, to name a couple, and continue to volunteer with the organizations through all of my kids' activities. I have also been involved in volunteering with a program called Lunch Angels through an organization called Community Crew. This program provides lunches to children in schools in the Niagara region who may otherwise not get a healthy and nutritious lunch, or even a lunch at all. I have previous board experience, being on my church board for six years. Part of my role as a board member was as treasurer, with a focus on keeping the finances of the church on track and to consistently have a balanced budget each year.

My work experience has been 28 years working in the financial industry in various roles, but all 28 years with the same financial institution. When I began my career, I started as a loans officer in 1991. In this role, I would meet with clients and analyze their credit applications for larger purchases. My role was to determine the creditworthiness of each application and to approve or decline each applicant after a thorough analysis. Through this role, I was able to develop some strong analytical skills.

In 1993, I took on an expanded role as a financial adviser, where I was not only dealing with analyzing and approving credit but also providing investment advice to clients. I did this role for three years until I was promoted to the position of account executive with our private investment counsel division in 1996. In this role, I was dealing with high-net-worth clients of over \$1 million and assisting them with investment planning, estate planning and other financial planning areas that they needed assistance with.

In 1998, I was asked to help build, develop and launch a full-service financial planning division for the bank that would focus on clients of \$100,000 to \$1 million of investible assets. At that time, most banks did not offer this type of full financial planning service. It was mainly being offered by private firms. We built this division from the ground up, starting only in the GTA and Hamilton with 45 financial planners. Today, we have 978 financial planners across the country.

In 1999, the bank asked me if I would launch our financial planning division in the Niagara region, based out of St. Catharines, as a financial planner. I agreed to take on this challenge and I am very happy that I did. As a financial planner in St. Catharines, I have now been able to grow my business, where I manage over \$170 million in assets and 350 households.

As a certified financial planner, I also hold a CFP designation. I continue to provide full financial planning services to all of my clients in the areas of investment planning, estate planning, retirement planning and tax planning, plus other areas of advice that are related.

In closing, I want to say that I would like to use my lengthy experience and financial expertise to give back to my community of Niagara. Living in the Niagara region now for 20 years, I know what a big role Niagara Parks plays for the region and has played for my family. I want to ensure that it continues to be a viable place for people to come to from not only around the world, but for local residents also. I believe I could be a great asset to the Niagara Parks Commission based on my experience and my willingness to just help.

I want to thank you for your consideration for this opportunity, and I welcome any questions at this time.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): Thank you very much, Mr. Coveney. This question set comes from the government side. You have 11 minutes left in your cycle. MPP Cuzzetto.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Good morning, and thank you for being here today. I've noticed you've done a lot of community volunteering in the Niagara region. How might that volunteering experience help with the Niagara Parks Commission?

Mr. Graham Coveney: I think when I look at being involved in the community, it's just getting to know the community and getting to know what the community is about. The more you understand your community, the better you are at serving in whatever area you're going to do. The more you have a better understanding of what's involved in all of the community, I think you do a better job at what you're going to take on.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: Thank you very much for that.

The Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): MPP Ke.

Mr. Vincent Ke: Good morning, Mr. Coveney. Thank you for coming.

Mr. Graham Coveney: Good morning.

Mr. Vincent Ke: I know the Niagara Parks Commission is one of our agencies [*inaudible*]. It attracts 6.4 million people to Niagara Falls, and the expected \$21-million surplus is very important.

My question is, what is your experience in the Niagara region that really could be an asset for this Niagara Parks Commission?

Mr. Graham Coveney: Can you repeat the question? Sorry.

Mr. Vincent Ke: What experience do you have in the Niagara region that could be an asset to this Niagara Parks Commission?

Mr. Graham Coveney: I think it's just my financial experience. I know that going back a little while, the Niagara Parks did have some issues with financial issues, and it has done a good job at coming back. I really think that my financial experience, and my expertise that I've had for 28 years in all areas of that, can be a big asset to

the Niagara Parks, to make sure that it continues to be financially viable.

I know they don't take any tax dollars; I know they're self-funded. I want to make sure that we continue to do that, because Niagara Parks is such a great thing for the Niagara region. I want to make sure that it continues to be financially viable, and my experience, I think, can play a huge role in that.

Mr. Vincent Ke: Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): Any other questions from the government side? Mr. Roberts.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Connecting our two presentations today, we had the LCBO before, and now Niagara. Obviously, the Niagara winery chain is a key aspect of your region. I've taken some relatives on a number of tours down there, back in the day. Can you talk a little bit about the importance of this sector in the region, and how you think that the Niagara Parks Commission can help to support and collaborate with the wine industry?

Mr. Graham Coveney: Yes. Obviously, the wine industry is very important to the Niagara region. I think the key thing with the Niagara Parks is that we continue, or they continue, to build partnerships with these areas. When we can build partnerships with the wineries and build them with the Niagara Parks, I think that just helps everybody. I think you can draw more people to the Niagara Parks, and you can draw more people to the wineries, and just help the region as a whole.

The more we can work with partnerships with these individuals, or these areas, I think, can be a huge role for the Niagara region.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: Wonderful. Well, it sounds like you bring some phenomenal experience to the table. Thank you once again for stepping up to serve.

Mr. Graham Coveney: Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): Any other questions from the government side? Seeing none, thank you. We'll move on to the official opposition. MPP Burch.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Welcome, Mr. Coveney, and congratulations on your appointment. I think your financial experience will be very valuable to the parks commission.

Mr. Graham Coveney: Thank you.

Mr. Jeff Burch: I have to ask this: As my colleague has mentioned, we have seen a disturbing trend of partisanship when making appointments to committees, with this Niagara Parks Commission in particular. All three of the failed Conservative candidates—Sandie Bellows, Chuck McShane and April Jeffs—have been appointed recently to the Niagara Parks Commission. So I'm wondering: What are your connections to the Conservative Party of Ontario?

Mr. Graham Coveney: I've been a member in the past; I'm not currently a member. I have been a member in the past. I have helped out on campaigns. But over the last so many years, raising four kids, to be quite honest—17, 14, 12 and nine—my time has been mostly dedicated to that. But I have helped out and volunteered in the past.

Mr. Jeff Burch: What's your connection to Dean French?

Mr. Graham Coveney: Dean and I worked—I met Dean about 20 years ago, through some political campaigns. I haven't had a lot of contact with him lately, but we've always stayed in touch a little bit.

Mr. Jeff Burch: So you have worked on Conservative political campaigns with Mr. French?

Mr. Graham Coveney: Correct, yes.

Mr. Jeff Burch: You're a financial planner. What are your fiduciary connections to the Conservative Party or Conservative members of provincial Parliament?

Mr. Graham Coveney: None.

Mr. Jeff Burch: None. Are you currently a member or have you donated to the Conservative Party of Ontario?

Mr. Graham Coveney: I'm currently not a member, but I have made donations in the past, yes.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Okay. Were you approached to seek this appointment, or did you seek it out yourself?

Mr. Graham Coveney: I'll tell you the story. Because Niagara Parks has played a huge role for my family, I've always somehow wanted to be involved in my community. The Niagara Parks really impacted me—I had mentioned that my son is a travel hockey player. This whole winter, we were actually travelling across—and you would know this—the Rainbow Bridge to play at Hyde Park in Niagara Falls. Every time that I would drive over this, my son would always comment on how beautiful the falls were and how much he loved to go there. I did approach and just say that I'd like to somehow be involved in the Niagara Parks, because it meant so much to my son and my family. That's how I came out to this and asked if there was anything that I could do.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Okay, good. One of the big issues in Niagara right now—a burning issue—is Bill 66 and the greenbelt. The Niagara Parks Commission obviously has a very strong connection economically and recreationally with the greenbelt. What are your opinions on the protection of the greenbelt and the Greenbelt Act?

Mr. Graham Coveney: Obviously, that's part of the mandate of the Niagara Parks Commission. It's very important to continue to keep that. That's part of what makes Niagara Parks what it is. But I think what Niagara Parks' goal is, too, is to continue to work in partnership with areas and businesses around while preserving that—the greenbelt and what we've talked about—but also trying to work with partners to make the Niagara Parks a place for people still to come.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Do you see economic prosperity and the greenbelt as being contradictory or complementary to each other?

Mr. Graham Coveney: No, I really believe you can work with both. I think you have to take both into consideration. I still think that if we want the Niagara Parks to be financially viable and with no tax dollars going to it and self-sustainable, we need to consider all avenues to do that, while truly keeping in mind that greenbelt aspect and what truly makes the Niagara Parks what it is. It's Niagara Falls. It's the beauty of the parks. It's the beauty of the trails they have. It's all of those things that tie together.

Mr. Jeff Burch: So if there was a proposal to locate a quarry or a factory or something on the greenbelt, what would your opinion of that be?

Mr. Graham Coveney: I guess my opinion—I would have to take a look at everything. But still, I think the greenbelt is very important to sustain that and, like I said, keep the beauty of the parks. To put a factory right beside Niagara Falls? I don't think that would be something that I'd want to entertain.

Mr. Jeff Burch: Thank you very much

The Acting Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): Any other questions from the opposition? Seeing none, thank you very much, Mr. Coveney, for your attendance here today.

We will now move into the discussion of the appointments. I'm looking to Mr. Roberts to move concurrence.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: I move concurrence in the intended appointment of David Colfer, nominated as member for the Liquor Control Board of Ontario.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): Any further discussion on this appointment? Seeing none, all those in favour of this appointment? All those opposed? The motion is carried.

We will now consider the intended appointment of Mr. Graham Coveney, member for the Niagara Parks Commission. Mr. Roberts, will you move concurrence?

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: I move concurrence in the intended appointment of Graham Coveney, nominated as member for the Niagara Parks Commission.

The Acting Chair (Ms. Catherine Fife): Any discussion on this appointment? Seeing none, all those in favour? All those opposed? The motion is carried.

Thank you very much for your attendance here today. This meeting is now adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 0934.

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