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(Hansard)**

A-34

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(Hansard)**

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**Standing Committee on
Government Agencies**

Intended appointments

1st Session
42nd Parliament

Tuesday 17 November 2020

**Comité permanent des
organismes gouvernementaux**

Nominations prévues

1^{re} session
42^e législature

Mardi 17 novembre 2020

Chair: John Vanthof
Clerk: Julia Douglas

Président : John Vanthof
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

Tuesday 17 November 2020

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

COMITÉ PERMANENT DES
ORGANISMES GOUVERNEMENTAUX

Mardi 17 novembre 2020

The committee met at 0900 in committee room 2 and by video conference.

The Chair (Mr. John Vanthof): Good morning, everyone. I would like to call this meeting to order. We are meeting to conduct a review of intended appointments. We have the following members in the room: myself and MPP Nicholls. The following members are participating remotely: MPP Bouma, MPP Natyshak, MPP Martin, MPP Pang, MPP Stiles, MPP Tangri and MPP Crawford. Did I miss anyone? We are also joined by staff from legislative research, Hansard and broadcast and recording.

To make sure that everyone can understand what is going on, it is important that all participants speak slowly and clearly. Please wait until I recognize you before starting to speak. Since it could take a little time for your audio and video to come up after I recognize you, please take a brief pause before beginning. As always, all comments by members and witnesses should go through the Chair.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS

The Chair (Mr. John Vanthof): Our first item of business is the subcommittee report dated November 5, 2020. We have all seen the report in advance, so could I please have a motion? MPP Nicholls.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I move adoption of the subcommittee report on intended appointments dated Thursday, November 5, 2020, on the order-in-council certificates dated October 27, 2020, and October 30, 2020.

The Chair (Mr. John Vanthof): Is there any further discussion? Seeing none, I'd like to ask for a vote. All those in favour? Opposed? Carried.

Next we have the subcommittee report dated November 12, 2020. Again, we have all seen the report in advance, so could I please have a motion? MPP Nicholls.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I move adoption of the subcommittee report on intended appointments dated Thursday, November 12, 2020, on the order-in-council certificate dated November 6, 2020.

The Chair (Mr. John Vanthof): Any further discussion? Seeing none, all those in favour? Opposed? That carries.

I see we have another member who has joined us. MPP Miller has joined us. MPP Miller, could you please confirm that you are indeed MPP Miller and that you are in Ontario?

Mr. Norman Miller: Hi, yes, I'm at Queen's Park. Norm Miller, MPP, Parry Sound–Muskoka.

The Chair (Mr. John Vanthof): Thank you very much.

INTENDED APPOINTMENTS

MS. SUSAN PRODANIUK

Review of intended appointment, selected by official opposition party: Susan Prodaniuk, intended appointee as member, Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corp.

The Chair (Mr. John Vanthof): We will now move to our review of intended appointments. First, we have Susan Prodaniuk, nominated as a member of the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corp. Welcome.

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, followed by the official opposition, 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.

Welcome to the committee. The floor is yours.

Ms. Sue Prodaniuk: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Can everyone hear me?

The Chair (Mr. John Vanthof): Yes.

Ms. Sue Prodaniuk: All right. I do have a prepared statement, so I just want to begin a bit with that.

Good morning. I do want to thank you for the opportunity to meet this morning. My name, as was outlined, is Sue Prodaniuk. As you know, I'm currently a candidate for the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corp. board of directors.

Just to begin, you do have some background on me, but I wanted to emphasize a couple of points. I retired from Confederation College over five years ago. At that time, I held the senior position of executive director, advancement, marketing, communications and strategic enrolment management. I was a graduate of this institution way back in the early 1980s. I returned later as an instructor and advisory committee member, and I also was the president of the alumni association.

I strongly believe in college institutions and their strong mandate to service their respective region by providing the appropriate workforce at the right time. It's critical to the

positive economic climate, and I've been an advocate for the same.

Prior to this, I was employed within pulp and paper. The forest products industry is complicated, yet it is a very important economic and employment driver in our community and our region. You may be well aware of the government regulatory and the community engagement required within the harvested areas, many of which are directly adjacent to Indigenous communities. This industry is responsible and sustainable. It is my experience that companies operate within one of the most progressive government guidelines in the world. This includes a balance of protection, sustainability and economic growth.

Employees within the industry are in fact some of the most vocal advocates for the environment. The innovations in growth and protection actually come from these same people, because we live in these areas. This is our backyard. This is our home. We understand the needs and care deeply about the future of land use and our healthy forests. I have advocated for on-the-ground involvement when instituting practice and policy that may impact this industry, and I hope to continue to support the resource-based businesses in this regard.

I have also always been interested in becoming an entrepreneur, and actually I formed a company on May 1, 1987. This company has been active off and on for over 30 years. As a result, I've had the opportunity to work with a wide variety of individuals, companies and industries that, for the most part, had an emphasis in marketing and advertising, but moved through to a national food franchise and to international sport event operations. All have, in their own way, made a positive contribution to this region. International sport, specifically, supported capital and volunteer development while attracting positive attention for the north. This positive attention is very important when we look for the future recruitment of employees and their potential relocation.

The career development opportunities I had I believe resulted in large part because industry and head office decisions were made here. They were made in the north. Over time, with mergers and acquisitions, right-sizing and improving efficiencies, we have lost a lot of that. I do see things improving slowly, with the resurgence of resource-based industry diversification into knowledge-based organizations and the need for skilled trades, as well as many other careers in medicine, research and many more.

Young families are looking for the opportunity to move home or to a more relaxed quality of life, although it's really unfortunate that COVID-19, if anything, has brought the remote workforce opportunities to light. This has not gone unnoticed in the north, where we have historically relied on communication over a variety of modes, including hybrid teaching models and remote mining out of sheer necessity. I have to tell you, the first time I taught over 20 years ago, I did it over a phone line and I would say things like, "Please let me know if you're there, Geraldton?" That's literally how we actually taught then, and marking was done over Purolator at the time.

Developing economic growth and employment opportunities is an area in which I have been working for some time. Whether with the chamber of commerce, the local development corporation or even the United Way, I've always looked to support our region in a manner that will make it an even better place to live and work. I believe that the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corp. will allow me to fulfill my personal mandate in a very positive way.

Thank you for your time.

The Chair (Mr. John Vanthof): Thank you very much for your opening statement. The first round of questioning will go to the government. Mr. Nicholls.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Good morning, Ms. Prodaniuk. It's a pleasure to have you here with us this morning. Thank you for taking the time.

I'll cut right to the chase: How will your diverse communications background in northern Ontario businesses provide value for the NOHFC board?

0910

Ms. Sue Prodaniuk: Thank you. Through you, Mr. Chair: Obviously a very diverse background by virtue of the fact that I have been around that long, but communications have really become pivotal within specific governments and businesses—not just because of COVID. I have seen a resurgence of the need for strategic communications in the last five years. The reason for it is because of the broad employee bases that are all over the world, the work through Internet etc. that's being done, which was done well before COVID-19, and the misinterpretation that can result.

I am a very strong advocate of over-communication. I believe that people make decisions because they lack the knowledge or the information, and whether that information is good or not is something that has to be relayed. Transparency—you hear it everywhere now. It's become such an important thing, and that's because today's youth, today's workforce are really looking for the truth, are looking for information, and not for platitudes. For that reason, I think I can provide a very skillful approach to communications. I would certainly be a proponent to communicate more, not less.

The Chair (Mr. John Vanthof): The next: Mr. Miller.

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you, Ms. Prodaniuk, for volunteering for this position. Certainly, you have got a lot of experience. Your background at Confederation College—I think the last time I was there was at the forestry sector, trying out the feller-buncher simulator there at Confederation. Certainly, the forestry industry is obviously one of the key industries in northern Ontario. But where would you like to see the support from the NOHFC grow in the next few years—thoughts about that?

Ms. Sue Prodaniuk: Through you, Mr. Chair: Thank you, Mr. Miller. Yes, I do recall the feller-buncher. Everyone loves the feller-buncher. But anyway, I think that the forest industry's biggest challenge in the next few years is going to be in the residual products that can be produced out of a tree. In my opinion, the industry has been very slow to move in that regard.

We have been studying lignin, which is a glue that, you may know, once you boil a tree—you end up with this very sticky glue. It goes into varnish and other things, but can be used to manufacture other items, items that, right now, may be produced through plastics. For that reason, and because plastics are a petroleum-based product, a product that is finite, and yet a tree is a sustainable product that can grow forever, we look at that as a real opportunity.

Yet, for whatever reason, we're not that good, perhaps, in the north to manufacture, to quickly find the process to manufacture. Someone once said, and I'm sure you heard it at the conference, that what we need is a connector. We need to connect the research to the manufacture, and right now, we're missing that connector. How do we make that product or that potential product viable, in terms of manufacturing, cost-effective and environmentally efficient? And how can we do that here in the north?

I would suggest that that link needs to have more emphasis, because I do believe that the market is there for this. I believe that it would really help the sustainability, quite frankly, of our forests and using more of the product that we manufacture.

Mr. Norman Miller: Great, thanks.

The Chair (Mr. John Vanthof): Next question: Ms. Tangri.

Mrs. Nina Tangri: Thank you, Ms. Prodaniuk, for joining us here this morning. As you know, currently the province of Ontario is facing an unprecedented crisis amid the COVID-19 pandemic. I'd like to hear from you: In your opinion, what do you think would be important to consider when making investments in the north as we start to move towards and head into our recovery phase? If you could give us some insight of what you would like to see.

Ms. Sue Prodaniuk: Again, through you, Mr. Chair: Thank you for the question. I've had a lot of thought about this because we've had a huge number of discussions around recovery. Of course, small business is a very significant factor in all of our worlds, whether you live in a rural remote community or whether you live in downtown Toronto. They are the lifeblood of our corporations, but even more so a lifeblood, I would argue, of smaller communities, where these are our neighbours, these are our friends. You really are very close-knit.

To really facilitate recovery, I think that we have to look at smart cities, and not just cities; regions. You may know that we have Tbaytel here, which is our local mobility and web provider. It's owned by the city of Thunder Bay. It operates as an independent body, but it also allows us the opportunity to grow our services to our city, with the provision of things like 5G. All of those are so important to remote northern communities.

Although everyone has been trying—and believe me, I understand the issue of rough terrain and having to run cable through it—we really do need to speed that process up. We've seen some announcements by the province and by the feds in regard to this.

It is so critically important, where the geographic area doesn't have a 401. We have one highway that goes in, much of it just two-lane, and one highway that goes out,

much of it two-lane. We don't have the ability to quickly access what we need. Therefore, looking at a smart city, a smart region, a smart community will enhance all of that. It will help small business look at international and national markets. It will help education, actually being able to teach in a true hybrid model where the teachers there are teaching people in the classroom and teaching people online, doing that internationally and nationally. And it will help our industry's ability to actually access innovation without the fear of losing power and losing web or whatever.

Our terrain, if you've driven through the rock that's here in northwestern Ontario and northern Ontario, does not lend itself well to WiFi and others. There are pockets where we lose people. I always warn people if I'm on the highway, "Okay, I'm going to lose you now." There is one spot in Thunder Bay; everyone knows it's there. For some reason, everybody drives through it when we're having a meeting and I always say, "Oh, they're at KOA." Sure enough, five seconds later they will be back online.

We can't afford to have that happen. We need a strong basis of communication. It's very important to us. The more investment, the better we can do with that, the stronger we can grow.

Mrs. Nina Tangri: Thank you very much. I'll move to my colleague.

The Chair (Mr. John Vanthof): You have one and a half minutes left.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you, Ms. Prodaniuk. I understood what you've been saying about communication. Quickly, how can your experience at Resolute Forest Products really help to communicate to audiences in the north, which is critical for this role?

Ms. Sue Prodaniuk: Thank you for the question. Through you, Mr. Chair: I do acknowledge one thing about our industry and something where, if you ever went to where I worked, you'd hear, "Oh no, there goes Sue again." I believe the industry has done a mediocre job in educating and having people understand its value—not just its job value, not just its purchasing value, but its actual value to the forest, to the understanding of the ecosystem, to the environment. For whatever reason, because it has been basically a very conservative industry, they really don't want to stick their head out of the sand—or out of the woods, if you will, or the chip pile.

I've been a huge advocate that that has to change. I finally have seen some light by some of the companies that have acknowledged that they are not able to even recruit people, because people want to go work at Google or they want to go work at—you know, wherever; at Apple. To work in a forest products industry doesn't sound all that attractive. I would argue that it uses some of the most innovative technology ever, wherever. Actually, our sawmill here in Thunder Bay—which is now almost 15 years old, if you can imagine that—uses NASA technology. I used to bring people there to say, "Hey, take a look at this." People would be just absolutely awestruck at the amount of technology that's used just in that one sawmill alone. So we haven't done—

The Chair (Mr. John Vanthof): Okay, thank you.

Ms. Sue Prodaniuk: We haven't done it service. I'm sorry, Mr. Chair.

0920

The Chair (Mr. John Vanthof): That's okay. You're obviously very enthusiastic about that.

The next round of questioning will be going to the official opposition. Ms. Stiles.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you for your presentation. We very much appreciate it. As the Chair said, I appreciate your enthusiasm as well about the appointment and about the industry, the forest product industry in particular. It's very important.

I'm not sure if you've been able to follow some of the goings-on here at Queen's Park over the last two years, but we have noticed, in this committee certainly, a really extraordinary number of partisan political appointments over recent years. The MPP from Eglinton-Lawrence is shaking her head but I think if you look at the numbers, it's pretty extraordinary. I won't say it's unprecedented, because with the previous government, we also saw a lot of political appointments.

I'm going to apologize in advance, but one of the things that we have to do in this committee is try to understand a little bit about why people are being appointed. We generally find that the people who are being appointed are interested in the issues and such, but our questions are: How did you come to this place? How did you come to this appointment? It's very important from a transparency and accountability perspective and for the public that we do ask some of these questions.

With that, I do want to ask you, first of all, if anybody approached you to apply for this position, and if so, who?

Ms. Sue Prodaniuk: Mr. Chair, through you: Thank you for the question. I completely understand the need for transparency.

No, actually. To be honest, I've been working in the political field off and on for over, again, 30 years. I have colleagues who are Liberals, friends who are NDP, and friends who are PC. Often, our ability to collaborate is one of our best attributes.

I actually went onto the website and filled in the application. It was quite some time ago. Since then, I filled it in again; I adjusted it and whatever. It has only been just recently—actually, it's been three months or so that I was approached by, if I remember, an administrator who said, "Are you still interested?" and I went through this process.

I did a bit of research, obviously, before that with some people who I knew were on the board and asked them some questions. I think that's common, certainly for me. But at the same time, I have to tell you, I also applied to municipal boards; I've applied to the corporation.

It's not that I haven't received response. The reason I did it is I'm in a women in politics group where I act as a mentor. It's terrible to think that I've reached the age of mentorship, but having said that, I kept on saying to them, "You need to garner experience, no matter what your politics are, through boards and committees." I believe not enough women are on boards and committees, and not

enough of them take a leadership role. From that perspective, I thought if I'm telling them to do this, I really have to do this. So this is what I've done in I guess what could be my 10th career, and I've now decided that I'd like to serve on a board. That's how I approached it.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you. I don't think you could be too young or too old to be a mentor.

I do want to ask you—you mentioned you'd been working in the political field, and I appreciate that. We certainly all understand that people have political roles and get involved in local political work. I understand. Can you confirm that you have donated to the provincial Conservative Party in Ontario?

Ms. Sue Prodaniuk: Yes, I have. I've also attended fundraisers for the Liberal Party and I've donated to the Liberal Party as well, particularly the Canadian Liberal Party. Again, Patty Hajdu, the Minister of Health, is a colleague and a friend of mine, and I support women in politics, so I also support her.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I think, according to public records, you've donated over \$1,200 to the Progressive Conservative Party in the last few years and, as you mentioned, also to the federal Liberals and Conservatives.

Ms. Sue Prodaniuk: Yes, and provincial Liberals as well. Michael Gravelle is a colleague of mine, a long-time friend, and when he has events etc., I've also contributed to that.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Do you recall which provincial Conservatives you donated to?

Ms. Sue Prodaniuk: The closest to us would be Minister Rickford, of course, who is again a colleague of mine. Of course, Michael Gravelle, being our representative on the Liberal side, I've donated to. I'm trying to recall when minister—while Bill Mauro was in, I think I focused most of my attention on my side of the city. We have two representatives here in one city, so it's a little confusing. From that perspective, I focused a lot on Michael Gravelle.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Are you currently or have you ever been a member of the provincial Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario?

Ms. Sue Prodaniuk: Yes, I am.

Ms. Marit Stiles: You are currently?

Ms. Sue Prodaniuk: Yes, I am currently.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Okay. We have noticed, as I mentioned, that there's been a very large number or percentage of the people that we've—we don't get to see many of you, so I appreciate you being here, actually. We've tried on numerous occasions to call forward people, but we find there is some resistance on the part of the government members to find additional time—because there have been so many appointments. We're trying to get as many people forward for that public—and I appreciate your transparency too, may I just say, because I think that, again, this is a really important part of the process of vetting appointees for these roles.

There have been some cuts over the years to the heritage fund. I know that in the recent budget, I believe—and maybe you can tell me a little bit more about this—that the heritage fund is shifting right now into supporting

businesses more in the kind of emergency moment around COVID. Could you talk for a little bit about what you think some of the issues are that businesses, particularly in the north, are facing in this moment?

Ms. Sue Prodaniuk: Again, thank you for the question. Through you, Mr. Chair: I do know about the recovery fund in a limited way, certainly from what I have read, heard, and I have gone obviously on the website and looked it up. Many of my friends and colleagues—again, we're a small community, so we talk. Small business is really, really struggling in this environment, partly because, again, it connects to that whole smart cities. Many of our small businesses have not perhaps brought themselves forward in the technological age as they should. They've relied on the customer walking in through the door, purchasing their product and going. Many of them have never moved into a grocery or shopping-type e-commerce that is so important today, whether you're buying locally or afar. From that perspective, I could see that the recovery fund will support small business in developing web-based commerce, which many of them need.

And it isn't just small business. I support an art gallery in Thunder Bay, and I can tell you, to make a donation to that art gallery requires a huge amount of patience if you want to do it online. I think that that is really resultant of the fact that we are used to just walking in a door, saying hi to Jackie or whatever and buying a product. That isn't going to happen today.

One of the biggest things about this fund that I have certainly been asking people in our community and others: Have you looked at this fund and will it help you look at e-commerce in a bit more fluid way?

Ms. Marit Stiles: The government has talked, I believe, a little bit as well about re-envisioning the heritage fund. In this moment, obviously everything has kind of shifted in this emergency, as you point out, this very essential mode. I think many of us on the opposition might argue that there could be so much more done. Certainly one of the things that we've noticed in our conversations with small business, in particular, is that direct relief has come very slowly, that oftentimes the communication around guidelines and protocols and expectations have been very unclear. In fact, I have to say that many businesses are more concerned about that piece above anything else, but also feeling like they need that direct relief and support really urgently.

I know many small businesses in my riding have been applying for similar funds, as you just mentioned, but aren't getting anything. They haven't had any word at all, in many cases, for months now. So what about that? How do we have better, clearer communication and actually make sure these funds flow in a reasonably fast way when they can be of use to people while this pandemic is taking place?

0930

Ms. Sue Prodaniuk: Thank you for the question. Again, through you, Mr. Chair: I think that one of the benefits of this fund is that it does have a retroactive aspect

to it, from what I understand. Again, I only have the information that's available to the public at this point. I don't have any secrets that I can share.

What I mean by retroactive is that many businesses, to stay afloat, have already made very expensive purchases of things like protective coverings—I'm thinking of a hairdresser or a nail salon or whatever—and really at the expense of their own small business after having been shut down for a period of time. So some of these funds, my understanding is that they can look at them and say, "We purchased all of this," or "We made this improvement"—or whatever—"and therefore, can we be compensated for that?" My understanding of this fund is yes, you can.

Now, do you want me to say—I don't know right now off the top of my head someone who has already received the funding. It has been relatively very new, and I can imagine it's very hard to process in terms of the fact that we have to be responsible and you can't just give money away without really having due diligence. But at this point, I think it has to be said that providing people an opportunity for compensation as well as for development is very important. For many people, I think they're looking at this as an opportunity to recover. That has certainly been my experience.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Yes, I do certainly hope that that works. I know that for a number of businesses I'm familiar with, it was the opposite. They just couldn't come up with—they tried to make the shifts, they installed the Plexiglas, they did all that work, and then they applied for government assistance and couldn't get any. There was no attempt there. I think that's extraordinarily unfortunate, because we're going to lose so many small businesses, particularly in this period. But I certainly hope that this program actually works, and that it works efficiently and effectively.

The government has announced plans to launch, as I had mentioned, a new and improved heritage fund program in January of this year. What role do you see yourself playing in coming up with and perhaps feeding into that plan? Or do you see the board actually being involved in those conversations?

Ms. Sue Prodaniuk: Again, thank you for the question. Through you, Mr. Chair: I don't have a lot of detail as to what the new up-and-coming is. I'm not a board member yet and therefore, for that reason, I don't really think I should, but I don't know. Depending on the sector, my understanding is—and this is through rumour and innuendo—there is a sector interest, so there's going to be some specific sector expertise at the table.

My expertise is varied, as you can see: a strong background, yes, in forest pulp and paper resource development, and also a strong background in education, a strong background in commercial, in tourism. I think that I could probably provide a lot of historic information, as well as innovative—I'm what they call a disruptor in Fortune 500 companies. I always look for the opportunity to do better, more: best practice, but beyond. That's what I bring as a value to a board. I really do. I always ask the question, how can we do better?

I hope that that's what I bring to this board.

The Chair (Mr. John Vanthof): You have one minute left.

Interjection.

Ms. Sue Prodaniuk: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. John Vanthof): Okay. That concludes the questions from the official opposition. I would like to thank you for coming before the committee. You're welcome to stay on for the rest of the meeting. Thanks very much. Coming from New Liskeard and having been asked to attend a meeting in North Bay and Thunder Bay within two hours, we need all the help we can get in northern Ontario.

Ms. Sue Prodaniuk: Thank you.

MS. JANET ALLAN

Review of intended appointment, selected by government party: Janet Allan, intended appointee as member, Niagara College of Applied Arts and Technology—board of governors.

The Chair (Mr. John Vanthof): Next we have Janet L. Allan, nominated as a member of the Niagara College of Applied Arts and Technology's board of governors. Welcome. 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 official opposition, 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.

Welcome to the committee. The floor is yours.

Ms. Janet Allan: Good morning, Mr. Chairman, and good morning to the other members of the committee. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to speak about my qualifications to serve on the board of governors for Niagara College of Applied Arts and Technology. When I was approached by Sean Kennedy, the president of Niagara College, on behalf of the board's nominating committee to ask if I'd be interested in putting my name forward for consideration, I gave it some thought. I don't volunteer unless I feel like I have the time to do a good job and it's the right fit.

Niagara College's success was and continues to be founded on its commitment to unparalleled learner experience. The student experience and graduation success are the centrepieces of their mission. Their commitment has been reflected in a consistent very high ranking among the Ontario colleges for student satisfaction. Their commitment to students is expressed through their DNA factors. Specifically, the three DNA factors are "trail-blazing," "welcoming" and "passionate." I've certainly seen those factors demonstrated by the college, the Niagara community and beyond. As an accountant, I've also been impressed by the entrepreneurial approach to meet evolving needs of students and employers alike in finding different opportunities. So to me, it's the right fit.

A little bit about myself: As you've read from my resumé, I'm a fellow of the Chartered Professional Accountants, an FCPA, who has lived and worked in the Niagara region for 40 years. In 2017, I retired after 40 years with KPMG. As a KPMG partner, I dealt with a variety of clients, including not-for-profit organizations, municipalities, school boards, higher education and entrepreneurial businesses. In 2010, I became part of KPMG's national office, dedicating half of my time to serve as the firm resource on accounting issues for not-for-profit organizations and government entities. Government entities, of course, include both colleges and universities, and I regularly consulted on accounting issues with Canadian partners who serve in that sector.

I've also been very involved in the Niagara community, serving on a number of volunteer boards. The boards range from the local Rotary club to the United Way to the hospital, all very different experiences. I'm just completing my term on the board of Gillian's Place, a women's shelter in St. Catharines. With the reality of COVID this year, I experienced first-hand Niagara College's commitment to the community when they donated college-made sanitizer to the shelter.

One of the things I admire most about Niagara College is the fact that it offers a handsome learning environment that's supporting a unique model of applied education. I'm impressed by their work in applied research, where Niagara College has assisted small and medium business, many in the Niagara community, to innovate and develop new products and processes.

In preparation for this potential appointment, I've attended the good governance for college boards program, through which I've completed the good governance certificate and am working towards obtaining the advanced good governance certificate. This is an excellent program run by Colleges Ontario for board members and senior staff of Ontario colleges. The more I read, the more I learn about Niagara College and the college sector, the more excited I am about this opportunity.

As post-secondary education faces its most significant shift in decades, the college is leveraging their strength to adapt to the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. I believe that my credentials and qualifications will make me a valuable addition to the Niagara College board of governors. My leadership and extensive experience in the field of accounting and finance would make me an asset to the board and help Niagara College achieve its three key strategic directions that value innovation and entrepreneurship in all the programs and operations.

I would ask for the chance to use my time, talent and treasures for the benefit of Niagara College and the students of Ontario. I'm asking for the privilege to serve on the board of Niagara College. Thank you.

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. John Vanthof): Yes, go ahead.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Ms. Allan, thank you very much for your presentation, and welcome. We appreciate this opportunity. As we noted in the previous questioning, we

have a very important role to play here, I think, as a standing committee of the Legislature in ensuring there's some public accountability and transparency process in place.

0940

I appreciated your comments. I actually wanted to go straight to some of the more urgent issues that we're dealing with, of course, around the COVID-19 pandemic. I know you're new to the board, but I wanted to ask you what your thoughts were right now about what college students and particularly post-secondary students generally are coping with right now and how colleges can actually help address some of those challenges that students are facing in this pandemic moment.

Ms. Janet Allan: Certainly, Niagara College has—and you're right: I'm new to the board. I've been in a couple of meetings on an informal basis, but I certainly have heard what the college is doing.

With respect to the existing students, about 80% of the learning is being done online; 20% is being done in person. They're still trying to do labs, specifically in areas such as culinary, automotive, environmental. In fact, when I was out there one day, I saw a number of students with the professor down by the river or the creek, doing something environmental—I have no idea what it was. But they're also putting all the precautions in place to allow the students to be there.

I know there's concern about how the students are handling it, because a lot of post-secondary is your interaction with other students. I believe they're working pretty hard to try to deal with that and allow students to interact appropriately. It's a tough time.

Ms. Marit Stiles: It is a tough time.

What are some of the other ways that you think that colleges could be supporting students? I tend to work more, in my critic portfolio, with K-to-12 students, but my own daughter is in post-secondary, so we've been talking a lot about these issues. I'm actually really concerned as well about the number of students who may choose to drop out of university or college right now as they head into the second term and face this again. I wondered if you had any thoughts on the kinds of supports that colleges and universities could be providing and really, ultimately, the province's role in that.

Ms. Janet Allan: I think they've done a lot with respect to allowing some physical activities at the college itself by putting in the plastic dividers and all the security when you walk in, and they double-check on the masks. Certainly, they're doing that. But the biggest thing that they're working on right now is how to allow the students to safely interact, to not only learn the academic side of their career, but also to get the learning interaction. A big part of post-secondary is learning to work together, learning to meet new people, learning to balance social life and academic life, and they're not experiencing that as much because it's all academic life. I agree with you.

So they're working on it. They're working with the student council and trying to find ways that the students can safely have some kind of a relationship.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mr. John Vanthof): Any further questions from the official opposition? No? We will now switch to the government. Mr. Nicholls.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Good morning, Ms. Allan. It's nice to have you here with us this morning. Listening to some of your responses to the official opposition questions was very informative as well. But as you know, you are a fellow chartered professional accountant. Can you tell us what this designation means, when this designation is made in your field and, basically, how this will help you in your appointment to the college?

Ms. Janet Allan: Absolutely. I am an FCPA, a fellow chartered professional accountant, and I've been that since 2013. It's a designation that's selected by our peers. Other accountants get to determine who becomes an FCPA. Less than 5% of accountants in the province of Ontario have that designation. It's a recognition for outstanding accomplishments in your career, your community and your profession. Basically, from the college's standpoint, it demonstrates pretty loud and clear that I've been very involved in the community and have been successful in, as I said, the career, the community and my profession. So I think it's a positive thing from that standpoint.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Good. Thank you very much.

Ms. Janet Allan: You're welcome.

The Chair (Mr. John Vanthof): Mr. Bouma.

Mr. Will Bouma: Chair, through you: Thank you, Ms. Allan, for joining us today. I have to say, on behalf of the committee, that it's been such a thrill over the past few weeks to have so many incredibly talented people putting their names forward in order to serve the people of Ontario. From your resumé and your responses so far today, I can tell you're in that group also.

I'd like to focus a little bit more on some of your extracurricular activities. I was wondering if you could say—you've had experience serving on various local boards and professional associations outside of your typical professional life. Can you tell us more about your time volunteering in your community?

Ms. Janet Allan: Certainly. I volunteer in my community in a wide variety of areas and really believe in giving back. For example, I have been an active Rotarian for almost 30 years. That's a big commitment. I'm now treasurer of Rotary, but if anybody has been involved in a service club, being treasurer means you're also head book-keeper. So I've been doing that.

I've been a volunteer for FIRST and VEX robotics and served on the boards of the United Way, the hospital, the YWCA, Gillian's Place, and that's just naming a few. I invariably end up as treasurer, or chair of the finance committee. I'm contacted by a few organizations every year, but I want to make sure that the organization is one I care about, where I can make a difference and I have time to do a good job.

Mr. Will Bouma: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. John Vanthof): Further questions? Ms. Tangri.

Mrs. Nina Tangri: Thank you for joining us this morning. I just wanted to go back to something you spoke

about. You completed the good governance certificate at Colleges Ontario. I'd like you to tell us how you think this training will help you in providing strategic direction in corporate governance.

Ms. Janet Allan: Okay. A little bit about the training: The first part of the training is telling you more about the college structure, what our responsibilities are under legislation, common tools and practices for good governance, the difference between an operational board and a policy board. The second part focuses on risk management and has college case studies. I have a session on Thursday, actually, which is called Building Resilience Skills for Uncertain Times—somewhat relevant to the first question I was asked. I think COVID is certainly uncertain times.

A big thing about this is the training is held with board members and senior management for colleges in other colleges in Ontario. The discussions, including the case studies, are fabulous. They broaden my knowledge of the risks held by colleges and how other colleges address them. This knowledge will allow me to better assess the strategic direction of Niagara College and hopefully provide good input both to the board and to management. It's a fabulous course.

Mrs. Nina Tangri: Thank you.

Ms. Janet Allan: You're welcome.

The Chair (Mr. John Vanthof): Further questions? Mr. Pang.

Mr. Billy Pang: Thanks, Ms. Allan, for putting your name forward. I just heard, when you replied to MPP Bouma, you mention about FIRST Robotics. The information in my hand reads that you also served with VEX Robotics. Can you tell us more about your time working with FIRST Robotics and VEX Robotics in your various roles and how that experience will serve you in the role with Niagara College?

Ms. Janet Allan: These organizations, FIRST and VEX, both work with high school students. Every year, they're given a different challenge and, with guidance from mentors, they have to design and build the best robot to meet that challenge. They attend various competitions where they're judged on the success of the robot, the creativeness of their approach, the final business plan to fund the program and their outreach to other teams.

But you asked how this ties to the college. How this ties to the college is in dealing with high school students. For the high school that I'm most involved with specifically, there are over 30 students involved in this program, and 80% of them go on to take post-secondary, a lot of them in the STEM programs: science, technology, engineering and mathematics. So I'm interacting with students who want to learn and want to know how to learn. I also connect with students across Ontario when I judge the programs throughout Ontario, and that allows me to meet students and interact with them.

I'm learning what's important to these students, and these students are the ones who are going to be coming to Niagara College, so I think it's important for me to stay connected with them and understand what they want to do. This program is very hands-on, and so is the college. So I think it connects really well, actually.

0950

Mr. Billy Pang: Thank you, Ms. Allan.

Ms. Janet Allan: Sorry, if I can make one more comment: One of the people who judged with me is actually on the faculty from Niagara College, so that's really important too. You get all the connects.

The Chair (Mr. John Vanthof): Further questions from the government? MPP Martin.

Mrs. Robin Martin: I didn't want to push my way in, but seeing an opportunity, I'm not averse to doing that.

I want to thank you again, Ms. Allan, for putting your name forward. I know you said you only take on commitments that you can do a good job on. It's quite clear that you take your responsibilities very seriously and you've done a lot of wonderful things professionally and volunteering in your community. This, I think, will be a great service to the college and to all Ontario. So thank you again.

I wanted to ask, one of the volunteer commitments you mentioned—and maybe it's because we were speaking with Ms. Prodaniuk earlier and she talked about mentoring women. One of the volunteer commitments that you mentioned was with Gillian's Place, which I think is a women's shelter, as I understand it. Maybe you could just talk to us a little bit about that organization and what your experiences have been there.

Ms. Janet Allan: I'm currently still on the board. I've been on the board for five years. I've served as treasurer; I've been involved with strategic planning. Gillian's Place has amalgamated with an organization called Niagara West Second Stage Housing, which is precisely what it sounds like: second-stage housing. It has recently expanded also into renting some apartments for women who are leaving the shelter and looking for a safe place to live. It's an amazing organization. I don't have a lot of direct connection—because of confidentiality—with the women who are in the shelter, but a lot of connection with the policies and the work that's done.

I also participate in their fundraisers. An interesting story: A couple of years ago, I was walking in one of the major fundraisers, which is called Walk a Mile in Her Shoes, where men wear high heels for a mile, which is sort of cool. Anyway, I was walking with an older man, and he was obviously in a lot of pain. Obviously, walking in high heels was not something he was used to doing. I said to him, "You're in pain." And he says, "Yes, but I think the pain I'm experiencing right now is a lot less, nothing compared to the pain that women experience when they're abused." I thought to myself, "And that's why I volunteer."

Mrs. Robin Martin: Yes, what a great point. I love that fundraiser. I've heard about it many times. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. John Vanthof): That concludes the time for questioning. Actually, the Chair made a mistake and I added a bit of time because I forgot about your opening statement, but you did a very good job. You're welcome to stay on for the conclusion of the meeting, but thank you very much for taking the time to appear before the committee.

Ms. Janet Allan: Thank you. Have a good day.

The Chair (Mr. John Vanthof): You as well.

We will now consider the intended appointment of Susan Prodaniuk, nominated as member of the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corp. Mr. Nicholls.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I move concurrence in the intended appointment of Susan Prodaniuk, nominated as member of the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corp.

The Chair (Mr. John Vanthof): Concurrence in the appointment has been moved by Mr. Nicholls. Any discussion? Seeing none, I'd like to call for a vote. All those in favour? Opposed? It carries.

Next, we will now consider the intended appointment of Janet L. Allan, nominated as member of the Niagara

College of Applied Arts and Technology board of governors. Mr. Nicholls.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I move concurrence in the intended appointment of Janet L. Allan, nominated as member of the Niagara College of Applied Arts and Technology board of governors.

The Chair (Mr. John Vanthof): Concurrence in the appointment has been moved by Mr. Nicholls. Any discussion? Seeing none, I would like to call a vote. All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed? That carries.

And that concludes our meeting. Any further business? Seeing none, the meeting is adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 0954.

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