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Standing Committee on Government Agencies

Intended appointments

Comité permanent des organismes gouvernementaux

Nominations prévues

1st Session
44th Parliament

Thursday 23 October 2025

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44^e législature

Jeudi 23 octobre 2025

Chair: Mary-Margaret McMahon
Clerk: Vanessa Kattar

Présidente : Mary-Margaret McMahon
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
GOVERNMENT AGENCIESCOMITÉ PERMANENT DES
ORGANISMES GOUVERNEMENTAUX

Thursday 23 October 2025

Jeudi 23 octobre 2025

The committee met at 0900 in room 151.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Good morning. Welcome to the friendliest committee in Queen's Park. Welcome back, everyone. It seems like a lifetime, so we may be—or I may be—a little rusty today, but bear with me. I'm glad to see everyone.

Welcome to the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. It will now come to order.

As always, all comments by members and witnesses should go through the Chair.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): So, first up—we have a big agenda, P.S. Get ready; fasten your seat belts. The first item of business will be the adoption of subcommittee reports. We have nine reports on the agenda today.

The first one we have is the subcommittee report dated Thursday, June 5, 2025. Could I please have a motion? MPP Scott—

Interjection.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: It's okay. It's all right. It's all good.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): That was a compliment.

Ms. Laura Smith: Good morning, Madam Chair.

I move adoption of the subcommittee report on intended appointments dated Thursday, June 5, on the order-in-council certificate dated May 30, 2025.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Any discussion? MPP Gates.

MPP Wayne Gates: You hit it on the nail when you said it's been a long time since this committee met. The committee has been extremely busy, even though we weren't here, as there's been a total number of 119 appointments during the time that we weren't sitting.

As you recall, Chair, I put forward a motion to ask to sit during the summer so that we wouldn't run into this case where people were being appointed without coming to this committee. I think this committee is extremely important. I think the people that get appointed to committees are important, and it's important for this committee to meet.

Here's a perfect example where the Conservative government rushed through these appointments. Even the

people that supported the PC Party, that 119, 53 of them had ties to the Conservative Party, whether that be with the riding association, whether that be formal candidates—including the candidate that ran against me has already been appointed to a committee. So, one way to get a good job on a committee is, run against Wayne Gates, lose and the Conservative government will appoint you. It's happened now five times.

I think it's terrible. I'm going to give you a couple of examples, because it's one thing to say that they did it; it's another thing to prove it. We have Sean Martin, who donated \$4,276 to the PCs; Ryan Aarts, \$111,000 to the PC Party; Sue McArthur, \$10,000 to the PCs since 2018, and a former federal Conservative candidate; Geoffrey Lind donated \$4,000 to the PC Party in 2019; David McFadden, \$10,174 since 2018—just happens to be the year that the PCs came in power.

I can't say the last guy's correctly, so I'm not going to, but the family was involved with the developer for the greenbelt scandal.

Cheryl Fort: \$8,000 to the PC Party. Ruth-Ann Nieuwesteeg, nominated to the Destination Ontario board—who was the former candidate that I beat in the last election—she donated \$3,600 to the PC Party.

I guess the reason why I'm saying this is, it seems to me that the PC Party is using this committee to appoint their friends, family members, riding associations. This has gone on for a long, long time in this committee, and certainly since 2018, when the PC Party came in place. I don't believe that a government agency is the place that we should be doing this. I don't care whether you're a Liberal, a Conservative, an NDP or an independent; we need to fill up our committees, but we should be doing it with the right person. You should have to come to this particular committee to give us the opportunity to ask questions: "Why do you want to do this job? What expertise do you have on this job?"

It's absolutely ludicrous that we didn't sit. But to appoint 119 people during the summer months, I think, does a total disservice to this committee. Quite frankly, if it got out in the media—I don't know whether the media would pick it up—it would be disgraceful. We're going through it with the Skills Development Fund. We saw what's happening there, where the money is going to your friends and other people. This has to stop.

I think my colleagues on the other side—I know the Liberals are here and my colleague is here—I think we

should all say, “Do you know what? I got appointed to this committee to do my job and to make sure that our committees are protected, that people that are appointed are worthy, not just because I ran for a certain party.” I think it’s wrong. I think it’s disgraceful, quite frankly, and I want it to stop. I know my colleague is hopefully having a motion put forward soon, but this is embarrassing to the committee.

Everybody on that side of the House should be embarrassed—119 appointees during the summer months. When we put a motion forward and said, “We want to sit. We want to make sure that people are qualified,” they continued to vote it down. We found out the reason why: because they wanted to appoint their friends, family, members of riding associations and, worst of all, failed candidates. That’s absolutely disgraceful to the committee, and you should be ashamed of yourselves.

Thank you very much for giving me a couple of minutes.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you for your comments, MPP Gates.

Any further discussion? Are the members ready to vote? All those in favour? All those opposed? It carries.

We have a subcommittee report dated Thursday, June 12, 2025. Could I please have a motion? MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: I move adoption of the subcommittee report on intended appointments dated Thursday, June 12, 2025, on the order-in-council certificate dated June 6, 2025.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Any discussion? MPP Pasma.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I want to express my disappointment and disapproval that the committee did not have the opportunity to meet for 19 weeks over the course of the summer. This is the second year in a row that the government has adjourned the Legislature for this long, and government members of the committee refused to allow the committee to meet to review appointments over the course of those 19 weeks.

People in Ontario need to know that the people who are getting government appointments, who are sitting on our tribunals, who are deciding really important cases that affect their access to housing, their access to driver’s licences, to building permits, to many other things are appointed on the basis of their merit and their qualifications and that they will make impartial decisions. When the government does not allow these appointees to come to appear, that affects the confidence that the people of Ontario have in appointees, that they have in these people who are making incredibly important decisions.

It’s especially concerning when you look at the numbers and you look at the kinds of people that the government did not allow to come over the course of the summer. We’re talking about 119 appointments that were made without any opportunity for this committee to question those appointees on their qualifications.

We’re talking about nearly half of those appointees having connections to the government, whether it’s a donation track record, whether it’s that they ran for the Conservative Party, whether it’s that they volunteered for

the Conservative Party at a riding association or during an election campaign. We’re talking about some incredibly egregious cases, Chair, such as Julian Michael De Gasperis, who is a member of the De Gasperis developer family that was involved in the greenbelt scandal, who was nominated to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection board, or Cheryl Fort, who was nominated to the Ontario Energy Board, who’s a former PC candidate and donated \$8,745 to the Progressive Conservatives just since 2018.

These are the kind of appointments that Ontarians, I think, have great concern about. And when we are not allowed to even ask any questions whatsoever of these appointees, that certainly undermines the confidence of the people of Ontario.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you very much for your comments, MPP Pasma.

Any further discussion? Are the members ready to vote? All those in favour? All those opposed? That carries.

We have a subcommittee report dated Thursday, July 3, 2025. Could I please have a motion? MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: I move adoption of the subcommittee report on intended appointments dated Thursday, July 3, 2025, on the order-in-council certificate dated June 27, 2025.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Any discussion on that? Are the members ready to vote? All those in favour? All those opposed? That carries.

0910

We have a subcommittee report dated Thursday, August 7, 2025. Could I please have a motion? MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: I move adoption of the subcommittee report on intended appointments dated Thursday, August 7, 2025, on the order-in-council certificate dated August 1, 2025.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Any discussion? Are the members ready to vote? All those in favour? All those opposed? That carries.

We have a subcommittee report dated Thursday, August 21, 2025. Could I please have a motion? MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: I move adoption of the subcommittee report on intended appointments dated Thursday, August 21, 2025, on the order-in-council certificate dated August 15, 2025.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Any discussion? Are the members ready to vote? All those in favour? All those opposed? That carries.

We have a subcommittee report dated Thursday, September 4, 2025. Could I please have a motion? MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: I move adoption of the subcommittee report on intended appointments dated Thursday, September 4, 2025, on the order-in-council certificate dated August 29, 2025.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Any discussion? Are the members ready to vote? All those in favour? All those opposed? That carries.

We have a subcommittee report dated Thursday, September 18, 2025. Could I please have a motion? MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: I move adoption of the subcommittee report on intended appointments dated Thursday, September 18, 2025, on the order-in-council certificate dated September 12, 2025.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Any discussion? MPP Gates.

MPP Wayne Gates: This is Thursday, September 18, correct?

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Yes.

MPP Wayne Gates: This is the subcommittee report where Ruth-Ann Nieuwesteeg got appointed to the board of directors of Destination Ontario. She's a failed candidate in the riding of Niagara Falls—Fort Erie, Niagara-on-the-Lake—who made a substantial donation to the PC Party.

My question is—we're approving a report of the subcommittee, and it might be a good time to explain. When did the subcommittee meet to go over these appointments? We're saying "report of the subcommittee." I believe I'm on the subcommittee. I never got notified of any meeting. So maybe you can explain how we're doing the report of a subcommittee when I don't believe we had any meetings. Maybe you can explain that to everybody who's watching. I think that would be very helpful for the people who are interested in this committee—and to highlight the fact that if you donate or run against Wayne Gates in the provincial election and lose, you'll get an appointment by the Conservative Party.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Was that actually a question?

Interjection.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Okay.

MPP Wayne Gates: Yes, I appreciate the Chair answering—and she got some direction from the Clerk.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Yes. As you know, the subcommittee does not meet in person. We meet over email. People weigh in their votes in that manner, and then it is decided—majority rules.

As you know, people make their selections on Friday, and it is—well, the names are circulated, we make our selections, and then it is filed into the subcommittee report by email, not in person.

MPP Wayne Gates: I guess that's my point. So from June 6 or 7, whatever the time the last meeting was, because the Conservatives turned down my motion, the subcommittee never did really meet—

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): In person.

MPP Wayne Gates: We had conversations through email. I think we called the office a few times to get clarification. But the subcommittee didn't meet over the course of the summer because the PCs didn't support the motion to meet during the summer. That's why we got 119 people who are being appointed through subcommittees that never met. I just wanted to clarify that.

We do meet in person when we're sitting. I don't want anybody to be confused—that we always do it by email. That's not completely what we do when we are sitting here at Queen's Park. Right, Bob?

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yes.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): As you know, that is the practice for the committee—but duly noted, MPP Gates. I know you like people and you like to appear in person and you feel that committees should be in person.

MPP Wayne Gates: It's an important committee, and I think we should make sure that we're giving it the credit that it deserves and the importance that it deserves—and I think sometimes they use this as nothing more than appointing their friends. I think that's wrong no matter which party it is.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you; duly noted.

Are the members ready to vote on the subcommittee report for September 18? All those in favour? All those opposed? That carries.

We have a subcommittee report dated Thursday, October 2, 2025. Could I please have a motion?

Ms. Laura Smith: I move adoption of the subcommittee report on intended appointments dated Thursday, October 2, 2025, on the order-in-council certificate dated September 26, 2025.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Any discussion? Are the members ready to vote? All those in favour? Opposed? That carries.

Last one: We have a subcommittee report dated Thursday, October 16, 2025. Could I please have a motion? MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: I move adoption of the subcommittee report on intended appointments dated Thursday, October 16, 2025, on the order-in-council certificate dated October 10, 2025.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Any discussion on that? Are the members ready to vote? All those in favour? Opposed? That carries.

Now we are going—sorry?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Chair, I have a motion I'd like to move.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Okay.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I move that the following individuals—

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Oh, sorry. Can we wait for the motion until after we interview the people who are here?

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I would prefer to move it now, because I think we're going to run out of time before the allotted time of the committee.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): I was thinking afterwards just because we have people waiting here.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: But the committee has to end at a set time because of members' statements. If there's not enough time left for discussion of the motion because of that, then I'm just out of luck. So if we take the time now to discuss the motion, then we'll know how much time we have left to divide among the witnesses so that they each have their opportunity to be questioned.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): I think it's respectful to the guests here—they're here for a certain time—that we have them first and we do the motion afterwards. I will try to make time for it. If it's worst-case

scenario and we don't have time, we'll absolutely do it the next meeting. But I feel that it's disrespectful to the guests who are here. It's their free time coming here to serve in this role. That's my ruling.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: This is a time-sensitive motion. So if we don't get to it until next week, that affects the timeliness of the motion.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): There's no debate on my ruling. I just want to go ahead. I think we're taking up time here, so let's go as quickly as we can. Thank you.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Madam Chair?

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Yes?

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Would it be possible for me to make a comment on the proceedings at all?

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): When the motion is moved, you can.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: No, not that motion.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Oh, okay.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: My colleagues were able to comment on the concerns of the committee not meeting for all, what, 19 weeks over the summer, and I just have to echo my complete displeasure with what's happened with the lack of accountability and transparency when it comes to interviewing the candidates for these positions. It is something of deep concern when we don't have an opportunity to publicly be on the record questioning the people, the appointees to these committees, and be able to display any concerns, that the public will then have the record to read and see. I just wanted to make sure that that was understood on the record from me as well.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you very much.

INTENDED APPOINTMENTS

MS. ARLENE O'NEILL

Review of intended appointment, selected by third party: Arlene O'Neill, intended appointee as member, Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario board of directors.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): We will now move to the review of the intended appointees. Our first intended appointee is Arlene O'Neill, nominated as member of the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario board of directors.

Welcome, Arlene. Thank you very much for coming today. You may make an initial statement at your discretion. Following this, there will be questions from members of the committee.

Ms. Arlene O'Neill: Good morning, members of the committee. My name is Arlene O'Neill. I'm with the law firm of Gardiner Roberts. I'm a practising lawyer in the city of Toronto.

I live in the city of Toronto. I was born in the Toronto Beaches neighbourhood and I'm the youngest of a family of five to a father who worked for Massey Ferguson in Toronto and a mother who also worked as a bookbinder.

I'm self-made. I have worked hard all my life and I continue to do so.

0920

In my teens, my family moved to Don Mills, where I resided throughout my high school and university years. I've lived in Toronto my entire life, except for three years when attending law school.

I'm a single mother of three children, two of whom attend Ontario universities. My youngest is currently completing high school at a Toronto public high school.

I attended York University for my undergrad degree in business administration, from what is now known as the Schulich School of Business. I attended Western law school, where I completed my law degree. Most recently, I also completed the Directors Education Program at the Rotman School of Management.

As I mentioned, I'm a practising lawyer of over 25 years. I have extensive expertise in corporate and commercial law, with a strong focus on mergers and acquisitions, corporate governance and corporate finance. I work with clients across a broad range of sectors, and I work extensively with technology-based companies such as software, media, AI and other technologies. I also advise international and domestic clients on cross-border business structurings, transactions, investments, expansions into Ontario and Canada, and other business vehicles.

I sat for 10 years on the Ontario Bar Association and chaired the business law section. I also sat for five years on the Canadian Bar Association and chaired that business law section as well. I'm also a regular speaker and organizer for corporate law programs within the Ontario and Canadian Bar Association.

I work and have worked for over 10 years with Toronto Metropolitan University developing the business law segment and continue to work as the business law expert for TMU's law practice program, as part of training young lawyers and students to complete their articles.

As a recognized specialist in corporate governance, I have advised numerous not-for-profit and charitable boards and I have served on several not-for-profit boards, including Canada's National Ballet School and Hot Docs documentary film festival. I recently served on a public board on the TSX company in the auto-finance sector, where I participated in special committee matters and strategic review, committee-related matters. I also advise clients on corporate governance matters across the board.

I've served for several years as a volunteer on the Business Law Advisory Council with the Ontario government and its successor committee, which advised on corporate law changes to the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services with the goal of modernizing the province of Ontario's corporate law statutes so that it would remain competitive across Canada and with the Canadian business laws.

I thank you very much for the opportunity to appear before you this morning.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you very much for your words, Arlene.

We will now go to the Conservatives. They have six minutes and 20 seconds. MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: I appreciate you coming here and bringing not only your expertise but your time to interview at this committee.

You talked quite a bit about your professional background and the different organizations you've worked with, both professional and not-for-profit. How do you see your experience in all of these different organizations helping you solidify this role within the AGCO?

Ms. Arlene O'Neill: I feel that my board experience and my corporate governance experience will help from a legal and corporate governance standpoint on the operations of the board, in considering matters to ensure that proper consideration is given before the board makes any decisions, and acting in the best interests of the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario.

Being familiar with multiple business structures and how businesses operate locally and internationally, I think, as well, will assist in understanding matters that come before the gaming commission.

Ms. Laura Smith: Thank you.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): MPP Sabawy.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much, Arlene, for your time and for your interest in serving the community.

I would like to ask you, since you have an extensive experience in government, serving on multiple boards: What lessons from your past experiences—dealing with government and public work—do you think you can bring to the AGCO, specifically?

Ms. Arlene O'Neill: One of the benefits of serving in a government capacity is that you do have people from different backgrounds with different experience, and everyone is there for a common purpose. I think that that wealth and diversity of experience and backgrounds contributes to solid decision-making. So I do think that being able to recognize that—work with multiple people from different backgrounds and experience that I have also will help me contribute and navigate the waters of whatever decision needs to be made.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): MPP Triantafilopoulos.

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: Thank you, Ms. O'Neill, for being with us today and also for your interest in serving on such an important board of the government.

Being a fellow lawyer, I can attest to the kind of deep experience you have professionally as well as in the not-for-profit sector.

I wonder if you could give us an example of where you have made a very difficult decision—requiring an impartial decision—in a professional setting and how you were able to balance and ensure fairness and objectivity.

Ms. Arlene O'Neill: In a professional setting, I think there are circumstances, for example, where I've assisted companies that are in financial difficulty and trying to decide what's best in the organization from a go-forward standpoint, while preserving as much as possible the interests of the various stakeholders, so ensuring that the long-term interests of the organization plus—I'll call it

“safeguarding” and making sure that the less vocal people in that organization are given adequate weight in the decision-making.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Any more questions? MPP Dixon.

Ms. Jess Dixon: Thank you for coming, Ms. O'Neill.

What is motivating you to look for this role, and what is it that you're hoping to contribute during your term, if appointed?

Ms. Arlene O'Neill: A few things. Personally, as a professional woman, I think it's important that members of every profession give back to the community and give back to—and I prefer to give back in ways that I have experience and knowledge and can contribute in a meaningful way. I'm not comfortable giving back in ways where I'm not experienced and have the—and I think it's worthwhile to do so, as a member of the profession, to give back in a way that you can contribute the expertise you've built up over the years.

The Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario, obviously, regulates industries that are subject, potentially, to abuse by individuals if they're not properly regulated, and I think that's important. I think it's important that the province has that role and that we're able to capture the revenue, making society better. I think it helps make society better.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): MPP Firin, you have 54 seconds, so that's going to be pretty tight, but go ahead, if you have a quick one. You don't get another round.

MPP Mohamed Firin: No problem.

Ms. O'Neill, I can see here that you have significant board and governance experience. How has that experience shaped your understanding of effective oversight and decision-making at the board level?

Ms. Arlene O'Neill: You have to ensure that your executives are doing their job and that they're reporting properly to the board—making sure that the board itself has adequate information before it exercises its business judgment. As a board member, you want to make sure that you have all of the information in front of you so that you're making any decision on a fully informed basis.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Over to the NDP: MPP Pasma. You have 10 minutes.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you very much, Ms. O'Neill, for being here this morning. I know it's not the most comfortable process, but it's an important part of our public process.

0930

I have three kids who are, like many kids in Ontario, chronically online. When I see what they are watching, many of them are oriented toward children—YouTube, Reddit—but when they're there, they're being served with iGaming ads. I'm wondering if you think it's appropriate for gambling websites to be advertised where children and teens are seeing them. If not, how will you use your role on this commission to protect our kids?

Ms. Arlene O'Neill: I think my role on this commission to protect kids will be based on what matters come

before the commission. I believe iGaming is actually being moved out from under the Alcohol and Gaming Commission, so I'm not sure that iGaming will be something that I would be able to assist on. But whatever comes before the Alcohol and Gaming Commission, I think ensuring that adequate rules and regulations are in place and reviewing those rules and regulations is what part of my role would be.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you. As you heard earlier, one of the reasons why it's so important that people come before this committee is so that the people of Ontario have confidence that appointments are being made based on merit and not on ties to the government, that people can expect that the decisions will be made with impartiality and the best interests of Ontarians at heart. In that vein, I'm wondering, are you a member of the Progressive Conservative Party?

Ms. Arlene O'Neill: I have contributed to the Progressive Conservative Party in the past. I don't know if I'm a card-carrying member, but I have contributed.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Do you know how much you've contributed?

Ms. Arlene O'Neill: I think I contributed \$3,000 last year.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Okay. According to Elections Ontario, you've contributed \$6,446 over the past four years.

Ms. Arlene O'Neill: That's quite possible. Obviously, that's accurate.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Do you see how that could raise questions with people that perhaps your appointment isn't being made on the basis of impartiality?

Ms. Arlene O'Neill: I think I've also contributed to the Liberal government in the past. I'm brought up and raised in Ontario, Canada. I have made political donations in the past where I feel that the issue at hand or things need to be supported. Just as I donate my time on boards, I do my best to contribute where I can.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I just want to state for the record it's not the Liberals that are making the appointment; it's the Conservatives.

No further questions, Chair.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you very much, MPP Pasma. Any further questions from the NDP? No? Okay, thank you very much.

Over to the Liberals: MPP Smyth.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Thank you for being here.

I just wanted to follow up on the question from my colleague here. How did you learn about this board appointment? Were you approached by anyone to sit on this board?

Ms. Arlene O'Neill: Paul Stoyan, who was a former board member, advised me that he was ending his term and knew that I had qualifications and asked if I would like to apply.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: The AGCO has a mandate to, as you know, regulate alcohol and gaming industries in a manner that's in the public interest, focusing on integrity and social responsibility. The PC government has often

campaigning on reducing the regulatory burdens on businesses. How do you reconcile basically upholding regulation with the government's push for deregulation? And where do you believe the line should be drawn?

Ms. Arlene O'Neill: I think the line should be drawn—well, actually, I think lines should be considered in the context of any particular case scenario and in each regulatory environment. Honestly, in order to comment on that thoughtfully, I would need to review the regs and see how deep they are in that context and consider what is being proposed.

If I was presented with proposals, I would look at how that balances the interests of the community and the stakeholders and consider whether the deregulation, as you call it, was warranted in the circumstances. I would have to consider that on a case-by-case basis.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: As we know, you have a great résumé and a lot of history working with a variety of business clients. Can you assure this committee that none of your former clients or any company that you've had a relationship with currently or in the future is going to create any kind of conflict of interest with your responsibilities on the AGCO board? And what measures would you take to ensure that there's complete transparency when it comes to that to avoid any kind of perceived or real conflict?

Ms. Arlene O'Neill: Certainly. First off, I'm not aware of any client I've ever been involved with who has any current conflict or conflict with the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario.

As a practising lawyer, I'm very familiar with dealing with conflicts. As a profession, I'm required to disclose and avoid conflicts, so I would continue to do so in that environment and of course disclose. I'm very familiar with how to remove myself from a conflict situation.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: As a board member—a future board member—what do you see as the most pressing issues right now facing the alcohol and gaming commission, for example, oversight? We just were talking about iGaming, we were talking about all kinds of things. That sector faced a lot of scrutiny. How do you plan to address the challenges of responsible gaming and consumer protection? You mentioned yourself you've got those kids, and we all see it everywhere. Whenever you're scrolling, something comes up now in gaming—and I'm not even a better.

Ms. Arlene O'Neill: I think gaming actually is coming out from under the alcohol and gaming commission. But I think as a board member I would look at what comes before and the issues of the day that are raised and current. It's hard to comment on the future. As you know, the future is changing every day. It's becoming faster. So I think the role of the board and my role would be to ensure that thoughtful consideration is given at the time to the issues of the day presented to the board.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Thank you for that. I was talking about transparency; we all have been. I'm just wondering about your position on making board decisions and rationale surrounding those decisions transparent to

the public. Would you support efforts to increase transparency and accountability, disclosing, say, information about government lobbying efforts related to the AGCO?

Ms. Arlene O'Neill: To be honest, I think lobbying is more of a political issue than a board issue. I think transparency at the board level is appropriate, I would say, at any board level. I face these questions with clients on a day-to-day basis in advising them at board levels. So long as the transparency does not impede the ability of the board to exercise its business judgment—so, I think in any board and where there's a public-facing element, there should be transparency. The idea of a board member is to come to the table and be able to have free and open discussion and be able to give their opinions thoughtfully and without reprisal or fear of reprisal. So I would want to make sure that it didn't impede the board's functionality to make the proper decision and exercise their business judgment, but I think the transparency of the board decisions should always be there.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Thank you very much.

Ms. Arlene O'Neill: Thank you.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you, Arlene. That concludes your time in committee proper.

Ms. Arlene O'Neill: Thank you all for your consideration.

MR. NICHOLAS POZHKE

Review of intended appointment, selected by official opposition party: Nicholas Pozhke, intended appointee as member, Ontario College of Art and Design University board of governors.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): We will move to the review of the second attended appointee, Nicholas—I didn't get to see you beforehand, but I'm going to try—Pozhke?

Mr. Nicholas Pozhke: Pozhke, yes.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Pozhke. Nicholas Pozhke is nominated as a member of the Ontario College of Art and Design University board of governors.

You may make an initial statement at your discretion. Following this, as you have seen from the member before you, there will be questions from the members of committee. The questioning will start with the government. They have 10 minutes minus your time speaking, and then the official opposition 10 minutes and the third party 10 minutes. Thank you very much. Go ahead.

Mr. Nicholas Pozhke: Good morning. My name is Nicholas Pozhke—so, very well done, Chair.

I would like to first and foremost commence my remarks today by thanking the committee's Chair, Mary-Margaret McMahon, Vice-Chairs Bailey and Gates and all of the members of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies present here this morning. I am appreciative of this committee for the opportunity to present my credentials for this appointment as a member of the Ontario College for Art and Design—OCAD—Univer-

sity's board of governors and for this opportunity to introduce myself further and address your questions.

0940

To start, I'm a native Torontonian, a proud Ontarian and Canadian. My background includes professional and volunteer experiences gained across the public sector, non-governmental organizations—NGOs—and the private sector. I've acquired a decade and a half—approximately 15 years—of experience working in public policy and public affairs roles, working federally in Ontario and in jurisdictions across Canada.

I currently serve as the vice-president for a national sector-leading public affairs firm offering multinational organizations, corporations and associations strategic public affairs counsel and solutions in key international markets, including Canada and Ontario. Prior to my current role, I worked as a vice-president at an Ontario-based boutique public affairs consultancy.

I have past experience working in an Ottawa-based national advocacy association, the Canadian Association for Defence and Security Industries, CADSI, where I served in a role as the lead for the organization's security portfolio. I was very proud of this work supporting our country's defence and security industrial base and, by extension, Canada's Armed Forces.

Previously to CADSI, I worked at the Parliament of Canada, serving members of Parliament, and the government of Canada, serving both Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada and the Treasury Board of Canada.

Additionally, as someone of Ukrainian Canadian heritage—my last name—I consider myself to be fortunate to be able to contribute to international peace and international security through deployments with CANEOM, the Canadian Election Observation Mission, to Ukraine, monitoring elections outside of Canada.

I have also previously served on and chaired boards, committees, working groups and professional, charitable and political organizations both at the provincial and federal level.

In terms of educational background, I'm very proud I have earned my degree here in Canada at an Ontario-based post-secondary institution. I earned a bachelor of arts degree in interdisciplinary studies from Western University. At the time of my graduation, it was then referred to as the University of Western Ontario.

Thank you very much. Thank you for your time. I'm happy to answer any questions. Thank you, Chair.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you very much for your presentation, Nicholas.

Over to the government—they have seven minutes, 36 seconds. MPP Bailey.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you for your presentation this morning. I guess we've got some time here, so I'll make sure I move along fast.

How do you think that you can leverage your career experience to ensure that the Ontario College of Art and Design University continues to meet its lofty and organiz-

ational goals that we would expect from an institution like that in Ontario?

Mr. Nicholas Pozhke: Great question. Thank you very much, Vice-Chair. I think that the main thing would be to strategically understand the current priorities and goals of the institution—not what was but what is, what needs to happen going forward into the future—to tactically getting involved, whether it's joining subcommittees, to really implement and execute on those goals once I have a better understanding as a member of the board of governors.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Okay.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): MPP Dixon.

Ms. Jess Dixon: Thank you, sir, for coming today.

A hot topic of conversation is the idea of bridging that gap between education and actual career skills. What steps do you think are necessary to sort of prepare our students for those in-demand careers of the future?

Mr. Nicholas Pozhke: Another excellent and timely question. I believe that more and earlier direct exposure to possible career paths is something that has to occur. People refer to “ivory towers,” thematic programs that may be relevant or may not. I think especially in very, very pragmatic programs that OCAD offers, early exposure to actually show students what is out there, what is available and how it aligns with what they're doing, quite frankly, is absolutely critical. It's to understand those avenues and opportunities, and seeing those opportunities lets people really fit themselves into what that could mean later.

Ms. Jess Dixon: Thank you.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you, MPP Dixon.

MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: I appreciate you coming here today. One of the things I'm finding is, so many of our employers are not having connections with universities, and there's a disconnect. I wonder about the current focus of Ontario's post-secondary institutions to ensure that students are graduating into in-demand labour market fields where they can really pursue rewarding careers and advance both their local economy and Ontario's economy. I actually talked with parents about this directly.

Can you talk about the importance of ensuring that there are strong partnerships between the educators, the university people and also the employers?

Mr. Nicholas Pozhke: Absolutely. Again, another excellent question. I think it's a two-way street. I think employers need qualified, skilled workers who can help them get their jobs done, who can fill their roles, who can help their organizations grow and, by extension, help Ontario's economy grow. I think students need viable career paths when they graduate. I don't think you can have one without the other. I think by bringing the two together—by marrying those two needs together—you can unleash something potentially wonderful. Showing that early upstream alignment and connectivity between the programmatic activities of a university and the actual, real needs of a job or a sector or even a full economy are actually vital for success.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): MPP Firin—more time.

MPP Mohamed Firin: Thank you for being here today.

As you are aware, a university's board of governors is responsible for making large decisions on behalf of the institution, including selecting the president, passing budgets and approving plans for future initiatives.

As a potential board member, what do you hope to do to ensure the continued success of the Ontario College of Arts and Design University and the post-secondary education sector as a whole?

Mr. Nicholas Pozhke: I think there's a few things here, but it's understanding the past, the legacy of that institution—the culture, its identity and understanding. You don't want to throw the baby out with the bathwater. It's a wonderful institution, but things change. There is a dynamicism there.

Understanding what that past is and what can be carried forward is very important. It helps shape the relevancy of what's needed now, in the present. So, is it cutting-edge work? Is it alignment of programs for grads? Is it finding those employers that want to find that direct corollary of the programs? And then, ultimately, the future: What does this mean for relevance in this sector, in Ontario, in the world? What does this mean for the sustainability, both operationally and financially? It is all very important that these things align.

Really, I think one of the key things is making sure that students are supported throughout the process. It's making sure, as the board, you have put things in place to ensure that students are getting value for their hard-earned money—their hard-earned money that they're going to have to pay back, perhaps in a loan—and ultimately giving them those tools they need to be successful in the workplace.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): MPP Triantafilopoulos.

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: Thank you for your interest in serving on this important board.

Drawing on your past board and volunteer experiences, could you share with us a situation where you've helped an organization navigate through a tough conversation or decision?

Mr. Nicholas Pozhke: Yes. Absolutely. Applicable to everybody in this room, I'll give an example with COVID. You can go to quarterly board meetings, biweekly subcommittee meetings. You can have plans; you can have binders. And then something happens that is well beyond everybody's scope of control. Even this institution was not immune: The OLA itself had to adapt, which it did wonderfully.

I would say, like so many organizations, that business as usual didn't exist. You had to create a new business as usual. So, this involved a lot of quick thinking, a lot of quick meetings, a lot of sometimes late-night Zoom calls or Teams calls, or whatever people are sort of tired of now. But it was an imperative, because there was an immediate need to reset, to find a new path.

So whether it was the impacts on programmatic activities for the organization that have already potentially been paid for; whether it was the operational footprint of the staff, who had already made plans for things; whether it was fundraising strategies, where it's there but it's not going to work anymore; and then, ultimately, the result in organizational impacts on budgets—things that you had also forecasted based on those past examples of activities. But again, it was really to identify that quick need to pivot, rebuild and just go with it. Make sure that your plans were tested and that they can work.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): MPP Sabawy. We have one minute and 12 seconds.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Perfect.

Thank you very much for your time. I would like to ask you your end goal: What's the impact? If you receive this appointment—years down the line, your term comes to an end—what is the one lasting impact you would like to see, or change that you had made, on this board?

Mr. Nicholas Pozhke: I would want to leave the institution in a better place than when I found it. I think that's the bare minimum. You leave something better than how you found it—whether it's enhanced reputation, whether it's sectoral relevance or ongoing financial and operational sustainability.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thirty seconds remaining. MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: Really quickly: Can you provide an example of where your board experience allowed you to navigate through a tough situation?

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Eighteen seconds.

Mr. Nicholas Pozhke: I felt like, in some examples, every single meeting—diverging points of view. But ultimately, it's an example where, whether it's a switch of an executive director, budgetary shortfall—like I said earlier, you have to pivot. It's open discourse. It's—

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you very much.

We'll have to move to the official opposition. Sorry about that; we're on a tight schedule.

MPP Gates.

MPP Wayne Gates: I just wanted to start—you mentioned the fact that you're from a Ukrainian heritage. I just want to say that I admire the Ukrainian country and also the incredible bravery that they're showing to fight for democracy around the world. I just wanted to get that out real quick.

0950

You worked in real estate, lobbying and defence. How does that background prepare you to represent the arts community?

Mr. Nicholas Pozhke: On a personal level, I have a deep appreciation for the arts. I've been a member of galleries since I was a child. When I travel, I go to galleries around the world. I take great pleasure in seeing artistic works and what they represent to culture and society. I think that, sometimes, arts and culture are really the soul of a civilization as well.

To address your direct question, though, I would say my specific experience in those sectors has exposed me to a wide swath of people, through different backgrounds, different understandings, different goals and pursuits. And by understanding that diversity of approaches, I think that's how the arts interprets people, as well, because everyone has their own interpretation of what the arts means to them—but ultimately, it's to provide real-world experience that can then be applied to a new scenario, like a university of OCAD's stature.

MPP Wayne Gates: Equity, diversity and inclusion are core mandates of the OCAD. You come out of a political and security background—not an environment rooted in those values. How do you plan to prove you can lead in that space?

Mr. Nicholas Pozhke: I'm on boards now—merit-based boards that have a diverse background and composition. For me, it's ideas, it's execution—full stop.

MPP Wayne Gates: I want to get into what we talked about prior to this meeting starting. I appreciate the fact that you're coming to committee and will answer questions—some are easier than others, depending on who's answering. But they're tough questions. So I want to say thank you for doing that. It's what we should do. Whether we agree or disagree shouldn't matter.

Have you ever donated to the Conservative Party?

Mr. Nicholas Pozhke: Yes.

MPP Wayne Gates: Do you recall how much it was?

Mr. Nicholas Pozhke: I don't, off the top of my head.

MPP Wayne Gates: Would it be fair to say that it was in the thousands?

Mr. Nicholas Pozhke: Cumulatively? Probably.

MPP Wayne Gates: Have you ever sat on a riding association?

Mr. Nicholas Pozhke: I have.

MPP Wayne Gates: What riding association was that?

Mr. Nicholas Pozhke: Toronto–St. Paul's.

MPP Wayne Gates: For what riding association?

Mr. Nicholas Pozhke: So I was the past—the current ex officio president of the federal board.

MPP Wayne Gates: The federal Conservative?

Mr. Nicholas Pozhke: Correct.

MPP Wayne Gates: Did you ever work for a political party?

Mr. Nicholas Pozhke: I did.

MPP Wayne Gates: What party would that be?

Mr. Nicholas Pozhke: I previously worked for the federal Conservative Party.

MPP Wayne Gates: Federal—

Mr. Nicholas Pozhke: The Conservative Party—federally, for a member of Parliament.

MPP Wayne Gates: Have you ever done any work with the provincial Conservative Party?

Mr. Nicholas Pozhke: Other than volunteering on a campaign, no.

MPP Wayne Gates: Did you work for Loyalist Public Affairs?

Mr. Nicholas Pozhke: That was one of my previous employers.

MPP Wayne Gates: Were you aware, when you were working for that—that's headed up by Premier Doug Ford?

Mr. Nicholas Pozhke: Sorry?

MPP Wayne Gates: Were you aware that that's headed up by Doug Ford?

Mr. Nicholas Pozhke: I don't think I can speak to that question.

MPP Wayne Gates: You don't think you can answer that question?

Mr. Nicholas Pozhke: No.

MPP Wayne Gates: It's too hard, or you just didn't know?

Mr. Nicholas Pozhke: No. I don't think I can speak to that question.

MPP Wayne Gates: I think it's fair to say that you have clear ties to the Conservative Party federally, provincially, and that you're a Conservative.

Mr. Nicholas Pozhke: Ideologically, I am Conservative.

MPP Wayne Gates: So is it fair to say that one of the reasons why you're here today is—with the full support of the Conservative Party, knowing they have a majority government and you will probably get appointed to the committee?

Mr. Nicholas Pozhke: I submitted through the open portal. I indicated my willingness to volunteer for a position, a board—I didn't specify; I didn't ask for one. I put my name forward to volunteer to give back, and this is the process, and I'm here today before you.

MPP Wayne Gates: I've just got one more question. The board of governors holds significant responsibility, such as hiring or removing the university president and approving their annual budget. How prepared are you to engage in this level of high-stakes oversight? For example, can you share, very quickly, the experience you have with financial management or tough leadership decisions that will inform your approach to approving budgets and guiding the OCADU executive team? The reason why I'm saying that is how our universities and our colleges are facing severe cuts, including to programs—and it may be programs such as the arts that I'm concerned about—and how important the arts are to our overall vibrant communities right across the country, but particularly in the province of Ontario.

Mr. Nicholas Pozhke: Yes. I can provide an example. When I worked for the federal government, I worked with the Treasury Board of Canada, where one of the core elements of the role was specifically oversight, expenditure management and cost control.

MPP Wayne Gates: All right. Thank you.

I've got no further questions.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you very much.

Over to the third party: MPP Smyth.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Thank you for being here.

I just wanted to carry on with this line of questioning. We know that your career has seen you in various roles as a federal Conservative operative, a lobbyist at Crestview

Strategy, previously employed by a former leadership adviser to Premier Ford, as you've discussed.

Can you explain what measures you would put in place to ensure that your political and lobbying ties won't influence your decisions at OCAD?

Mr. Nicholas Pozhke: Absolutely. It's a board of governors, plural. I think plurality of voices, opinions and viewpoints; having the governance structure in place for oversight of those discussions; and having the regular reporting process, as a board would be expected to have, are absolutely functional ways to force that to happen.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Do you think that the Ontario PC government, including the Premier's office, would have any expectation that you would advance a particular agenda, as we've been discussing with a viewpoint of the OCAD—

Mr. Nicholas Pozhke: I'm not on the board yet. I can't speak to that.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: No?

Ms. Laura Smith: Point of order.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Sorry. Point of order?

Ms. Laura Smith: The purpose of this interview process is to ask them about their capability to make decisions and their ability to talk about what they've done in the past. I don't think that these questions align with interviewing this individual on the capacity to do their job.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): The question should be relevant to the intended board that they are applying for.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: You mentioned that you just put your name in the portal. OCAD just happened to come up as a board that you would sit on?

Mr. Nicholas Pozhke: I submitted through the PAS portal system for this role.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: So you didn't go specifically for OCAD?

Mr. Nicholas Pozhke: Negative. No.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Okay. I think I'm done. Thank you.

Mr. Nicholas Pozhke: Thank you.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you very much, MPP Smyth, and thank you very much, Nicholas, for your presentation and for joining us today, taking the time. You're off the hot seat.

Now I will consider the intended appointment of Arlene O'Neill, nominated as member of the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario board of directors. MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: I move concurrence in the intended appointment of Arlene O'Neill, nominated as member of the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario board of directors.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Concurrence in the appointment has been moved by MPP Smith. Any discussion? MPP Gates.

MPP Wayne Gates: Recorded vote, please.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): A recorded vote has been requested.

Are the members ready to vote?

Ayes

Bailey, Dixon, Firin, Sabawy, Laura Smith, Triantafilopoulos.

Nays

Gates, Pasma, Smyth.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): That carries.

We will now consider the intended appointment of Nicholas Pozhke, nominated as Ontario College of Art and Design University board of governors. MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: I move concurrence in the intended appointment of Nicholas Pozhke, nominated as member of the Ontario College of Art and Design University board of governors.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Concurrence in the appointment has been moved by MPP Smith. Any discussion? MPP Gates.

MPP Wayne Gates: Recorded vote, please.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): A recorded vote has been requested.

Are the members ready to vote?

Ayes

Bailey, Dixon, Firin, Sabawy, Laura Smith, Triantafilopoulos.

Nays

Gates, Pasma, Smyth.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): That carries.

Congratulations to Arlene and Nicholas for their new appointments. Good luck.

We have another couple of bits of business. Certificate extension: The deadline to review the intended appointments selected from the September 26, 2025, certificate is set to expire on October 26, 2025. Is there unanimous consent to extend the certificate by 30 days? Yes? I hear a yes over here. And there's a no.

Now the motion—MPP Pasma, you have a motion. Let's go.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I move that the following individuals, who were appointed by the Minister of Education with the approval of the Lieutenant Governor in Council, be invited to appear before the committee on Thursday, November 6, 2025:

—Rohit Gupta, supervisor for the Toronto District School Board;

—Frank Benedetto, supervisor for the Toronto Catholic District School Board;

—Robert Plamondon, supervisor for the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board; and

—Rick Byers, supervisor for the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you very much, MPP Pasma, for your motion. The motion is being circulated.

I've taken a look at the motion. Committee members, at this time, I would like to reserve my ruling on the orderliness of the motion until we can clarify some details regarding the motion, so I will deliver my ruling at the next committee meeting.

Any further business? Seeing none, thank you very much for joining us today, and have a great day. Meeting is adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 1002.

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