

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



Assemblée
législative
de l'Ontario

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

A-18

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

A-18

**Standing Committee on
Government Agencies**

Intended appointments

1st Session
44th Parliament

Thursday 28 May 2026

**Comité permanent des
organismes gouvernementaux**

Nominations prévues

1^{re} session
44^e législature

Jeudi 28 mai 2026

Chair: Mary-Margaret McMahon
Clerk: Vanessa Kattar

Présidente : Mary-Margaret McMahon
Greffière : Vanessa Kattar

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Hansard Publications and Language Services
Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



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

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

COMITÉ PERMANENT DES ORGANISMES GOUVERNEMENTAUX

Thursday 28 May 2026

Jeudi 28 mai 2026

The committee met at 0900 in room 151.

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): Good morning, everyone. The Standing Committee on Government Agencies will now come to order. As always, all comments by the members and witnesses should go through the Chair.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): Adoption of the subcommittee reports?

Ms. Laura Smith: I move adoption of the subcommittee report on intended appointments dated Thursday, May 14, 2026, on the order-in-council certificate dated May 8, 2026.

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): Any discussion? Are the members ready to vote? All in favour? Opposed? Carried.

We have a subcommittee report dated Thursday, May 21, 2026. Could I please have a motion? Again, go ahead.

Ms. Laura Smith: I move adoption of the subcommittee report on intended appointments dated Thursday, May 21, 2026, on the order-in-council certificate dated May 15, 2026.

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): Any discussion? Go ahead, MPP Gilmour.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I'm a little unsure if this is the moment for this discussion, but I do want to raise that we are potentially in our last meeting if we rise early, and we have seen a pattern of letting certificates lapse that really should be coming before this committee. Anyone who is serious, as our interviewees are here today, should take the time to come and be properly vetted by this committee. It's part of our democratic process.

So I'm quite concerned with this pattern that we have—that the government has—of allowing committees to lapse. We're seeing at the moment a pattern of individuals whose experience doesn't always match the job that they're seeking, so we don't, on our side, have a way of knowing why this government has made a decision to appoint them, and it would be really important to have a chance to vet them.

What we do see is that they have deep ties to the government. We saw one today, Mr. Diamond, who is not coming before us, who has deep ties to the Conservative Party, and yet we don't know how his experience matches up and lines up with the Niagara Parks Commission. Yet he's being appointed and it will just pass and we have no options, no way of ensuring the best for our residents of Ontario.

So I'm quite concerned with this pattern, and I would like to see us moving to a pattern of meeting over the summer and of ensuring that no certificate lapses. If people don't come before the committee—which I'm afraid now we're going to see more and more people, more and more individuals who don't have the qualifications deciding to skirt the system and not come before us to explain why they might be the right fit. Because they know that, over and over again, this government—if you say, "I'm busy, I'm sick, I'm away," and wait 30 days, then you are automatically appointed to high-paying, high-levels-of-responsibility jobs in our province.

It's undemocratic, it is not good for Ontario, and it will be the legacy of this government for years and years to come. These people will be sitting on these committees, on these councils, on these tribunals. We're already seeing a pattern where these members—Tribunal Watch has talked about the degradation of the tribunal system because people are not experienced and qualified for those jobs.

So, Mr. Chair, I hope that we change this pattern of simply approving reports and letting certificates lapse and that, going forward, this committee takes its job far more seriously and ensures that every individual—especially those who have any sort of peculiarities to them. We have a wonderful individual before us who, on paper, seems perfect. We have many other ones who are a bit of a head-scratcher, and I think we need to make sure that they come before the committee.

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): Is there any further discussion? Are the members ready to vote? All those in favour?

Mrs. Michelle Cooper: In favour of what?

Ms. Laura Smith: This is the adoption of the subcommittee report.

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): Yes, that's what we're doing.

So I'll do that again: Any further discussion? Are the members ready to vote? All those in favour? Opposed? Carried.

INTENDED APPOINTMENTS

NOMINATIONS PRÉVUES

MR. IAN MCMILLAN

Review of intended appointment, selected by government: Ian McMillan, intended appointee as member, Destination Ontario board of directors.

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): We will now move to the review of the intended appointees. Our first intended appointee today is Ian McMillan, nominated as a member of the Destination Ontario board of directors.

You may make an initial statement at your discretion. Following this, there will be questions from the members of the committee. With the questioning, we will start with the government, followed by the official opposition and then the third party, with 10 minutes allocated to each recognized party. Any time you take during your statement, sir, will be deducted from the time allocated to the government.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Point of order.

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): Yes.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: I think they shifted the seatings, but the mikes are still not shifted, so my mike is saying “Steve,” and his mike is saying “Dowie.” So that means the recording will not be matching—

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): My direction here is saying we can get that fixed after, so we’re good.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: That’s okay. I’m just saying, because the recording will be not matching.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Vanessa Kattar): It will be fixed.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you.

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): Okay, thank you.

Go ahead, yes.

Mr. Ian McMillan: Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

I have to tell you, it’s certainly an honour to be considered for an appointment to the board of directors of Destination Ontario. Tourism has been my life’s work. I have spent my entire career in this industry, beginning with northern Ontario’s largest attraction—hopefully some of you are familiar with it—called the Agawa Canyon Tour Train. From there, I went on to serve as executive director of both the Algoma regional tourism bureau and the tourism bureau for Sault Ste. Marie.

Today, I operate my own consulting company and have worked with organizations such as the Great Lakes cruise coalition—the organization responsible for bringing all of those wonderful ships onto our Great Lakes—and a number of tourism-related businesses across the province and beyond.

Over the past eight years, my primary focus has been on the development of the international market opportunities for northern Ontario. That experience has reinforced for me just how important international travel is, not only for the north, but for all of Ontario. International visitors bring new spending into our province, support businesses large and small and help strengthen local economies in every region.

To make sure I keep my skill sets current, I constantly engage with the rather youthful staff at our Destination Northern Ontario. To develop content for posts on various social platforms, I make use of the most current research available through Destination Canada’s data collective to make informed and targeted marketing decisions.

Our efforts directed at growing international travel to northern Ontario have certainly paid off, as when I started this program in 2018, international tourism receipts to northern Ontario were \$7 million. Those grew to \$48 million in 2023, and grew again in 2024 to over \$81 million.

Throughout my career, I’ve had the privilege of serving in a number of leadership roles. I was chair of the Great Lakes cruise coalition during its formative years. I also served as chair of Attractions Ontario and as a board member and committee chair with one of the province’s designated administrative authorities, TICO, which gave me valuable insights into the travel and the travel agency sector.

I was also fortunate to serve on the inaugural board of the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario and chaired their first provincial tourism industry conference, an event that continues annually to this day. And most recently, as you know, I completed two terms as a board member and vice-chair of Science North.

Other than TICO, all of these boards that I have served on were completely volunteer boards. Closer to home, I continued my volunteerism sitting on the board of our local winter carnival for 10 years and was a Rotarian for 10 years. I made sure to get my municipal commitments in before I got married and had three incredible daughters that took up much of my spare time after that.

I have also taught a variety of classes at our Sault College and spent three years as a professor at Algoma University, teaching tourism-related courses in the geography department.

0910

When the Ministry of Tourism moved towards creating an arm’s-length tourism marketing organization, I served on several industry committees for what was then called OTMPC, helping provide input on key issues and priorities, and continued that involvement as the organization evolved into what it is now: Destination Ontario.

During my time leading Tourism Sault Ste. Marie, our community became the first municipality in northern Ontario, and only the third in the province after Toronto and Ottawa, to introduce what was then called the “destination marketing fee,” now known as “the municipal accommodation tax.” That initiative allowed us to reinvest directly into tourism industry through capital infrastructure, product development and digital innovation, including northern Ontario’s first online reservation system.

Being from northern Ontario has given me a deep appreciation for how tourism and our natural environment work hand in hand. Our forests, our waterways, our trails and outdoor experiences are the foundation of industries such as fishing, snowmobiling and adventure tourism that attract visitors from around the world.

At the same time, my province-wide involvement has also given me a strong understanding of tourism sectors that may not be as prominent in the north but are critically important to Ontario’s growth overall. Markets such as Toronto, Ottawa and Niagara Falls rely heavily on meetings, conventions, major events, concerts and internationally recognized attractions, such as the Royal Ontario Museum, the Art Gallery of Ontario, Science North and Fort William Historical Park.

Politically, through my career, I have remained non-partisan. In municipal and regional tourism roles, I have worked with ministers, MPs and MPPs from all party and political backgrounds. I always believed that remaining neutral allowed me to build productive relationships on advancing tourism and supporting the industry as a whole.

So what would I bring to the board of Destination Ontario? I believe I would bring a broad perspective, shaped by decades of experience, in local, regional, provincial, national and now international levels. Those experiences have allowed me to see the tourism industry from many different angles and have given me a strong understanding of how successful boards operate: through collaboration, accountability and shared purpose.

Equally important, I understand the responsibility that comes with stewarding taxpayer dollars. Transparency, fiscal responsibility and sound governance are essential to maintaining public trust and ensuring long-term success.

There is no question that these are challenging times, particularly in relation to our largest tourism market, the United States. We cannot ignore that market—nor should we—but we must also continue encouraging Ontarians to explore their own province and to support domestic travel, while increasing visitation from across Canada.

At the same time, I believe Ontario has tremendous opportunities internationally. We have world-class experiences, natural beauty, vibrant cities and cultural assets that position us to compete globally. Expanding international visitation brings an entirely new spending to Ontario.

I've always been a glass-half-full person and, while I recognize the challenges ahead, I'm genuinely excited about the future of tourism in Ontario. I believe this province is exceptionally well-positioned to become an internationally recognized destination, and I would be truly honoured to contribute to the vision as a member of the board of Destination Ontario.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): Thank you very much for your presentation, sir.

We will start the questioning with the government. You have three minutes and 51 seconds. MPP Dowie.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Mr. McMillan, thank you so much for your opening remarks and for putting your name forward. I'll concede, I have a bit of an attachment to this; I used to serve on Destination Ontario myself. Your CV is truly tailor-made for this role, so I'm grateful that you put your name forward and that your qualifications have been very, very well laid out.

I'm hoping that you can share with the committee further why you believe that you are well suited to meet the expectations of Destination Ontario and the potential that you see for growing, especially within our province, the tourism delivery.

Mr. Ian McMillan: Thank you. Mr. Chair, through you, with the mandate of Destination Ontario to market and promote Ontario as a true destination, I think the skill set that I bring to the table fits quite well. I've been involved in the development of marketing plans, the delivery of marketing plans and tactics on a local, regional, provincial

and national level, and I just think I have a good understanding of where we have been but, more importantly, really a good global perspective of where we can be and where we're going. I just think, from a strategic point of view, my skill sets would be well suited to help work with that board and guide Destination Ontario for the future.

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): MPP Cooper.

Mrs. Michelle Cooper: Thank you for being here, especially in person, which was very nice.

Mr. McMillan, your résumé is quite impressive, with a focus on northern Ontario, which is terrific, meets that need. I imagine you will serve that region well. How do you envision contributing to Destination Ontario?

Mr. Ian McMillan: Again, I think I come from a bit of a unique perspective, partly because, as you say, I am from northern Ontario. I always like to remind people when I sit on various boards, whether it was Attractions Ontario or TICO, "You're Attractions Ontario, not attractions southern Ontario. You're Travel Industry Council of Ontario, not southern Ontario." I just think I bring a bit of a yin to the yang of understanding the needs and the wants, because our industry is made up of small and medium-sized businesses. Many, many of them are located in northern Ontario. I just think my understanding of working with the private sector in smaller municipalities augurs well with working with the bigger picture, the Torontos, the Ottawas and the Niagara Fallses. So I think I'd bring that unique perspective to help deliver programs and strategic direction to Destination Ontario.

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): MPP Sarrazin.

Mr. Stéphane Sarrazin: Thank you very much for being here. I have to say, I'm quite impressed. I was looking at your LinkedIn profile and now realizing that not half of it is on there, and what you've been—and no doubt that you're passionate about this.

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): One minute.

Mr. Stéphane Sarrazin: You've been involved since 1982. That's quite impressive.

Maybe you can talk a bit more about your involvement with Science North, what you brought to the table. Maybe talk a little bit more about that.

Mr. Ian McMillan: Sure. I really enjoyed my time with Science North. The board was made up of an interesting dynamic of people from the science background, mining background. What they didn't have a lot of at the time was a tourism background.

First and foremost, we were always reminded by one of your ministers that we are, again, Science North, not science Sudbury. So it was important to try to go out and reach out to communities that were not in the Sudbury area and bring science and STEM to communities right across northern Ontario. So I found it very interesting—and again, my connection is with the tourism industry—to keep reminding Science North that they were many things, one of them being a tourism attraction, and that they could have a really good economic impact.

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): I'm sorry. Time is up.

We'll now move to the official opposition. MPP Gilmour.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you so much for being before us.

I want to begin by saying something that doesn't often happen in this committee: It's a genuine, refreshing pleasure to be reviewing an appointment where the qualifications speak for themselves. Chair, Mr. McMillan clearly brings decades of real, hands-on experience to Ontario tourism. Inducted into the Festivals and Events Ontario hall of fame in 2017, recognized with a lifetime achievement award from the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario in 2019—I mean, this is how order-in-council appointments are supposed to work. You are demonstrating that one of the few times and, perhaps, certainly the most obvious time in my entire year of sitting on this committee.

So I want to congratulate the government side for bringing this appointment before us. I know that it feels good. You guys are actually saying the same thing we are: What great qualifications; what a great track record. I hope that this feeling kind of moves us towards this more often, because it serves the people of the province well.

With that, I did want to ask some substantive questions of the witness—we do always start with some standard questions—and then I'll move more into the qualifications piece.

Are you a member of or have you donated to any political party in the past?

Mr. Ian McMillan: I am not, and I have not.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Thank you.

Did anyone suggest that you apply to this appointment?

Mr. Ian McMillan: As you know, I sat on the Science North board. As my term expired, it came up in discussions. I enjoyed my time on TICO, I enjoyed my time on Science North, and I thought I still had more to give, and I just started to explore what potentials were out there related to tourism. I had no desire to find some strange board to sit on. I was made aware that this potentially was available, and I just submitted my résumé and application through the process.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Well, I hope you continue to enjoy your time on these boards that you sit on and in the ways that you serve.

Mr. McMillan, you've spent a couple of decades as the executive director of tourism for Sault Ste. Marie, an area I've been to many times—it's absolutely stunning—and before that, as the brand manager for Northern Tourism Marketing Corp., executive director for Algoma Kinniwabi Travel Association.

0920

This is an extraordinary depth of northern Ontario experience which I think is one of those spaces that we are always trying to expand. Toronto sees 28 million tourists just to its waterfront alone, but Algoma in the fall is unbelievably stunning, right?

One of the questions that I had was around the Auditor General's 2023 value-for-money audit. It was specifically

noted that the marketing dollars may be better directed outside of Ontario, including, at that time, the United States—although things have changed dramatically with our relationships there.

I'm just wondering, given your background promoting northern Ontario to a broad audience, what's your view on how Destination Ontario should be striking that balance between the domestic and the international marketing investments?

Mr. Ian McMillan: Well, not being on the board at the moment and seeing how the decisions are made, it's a little bit difficult to speak to that. But I will say that what I have seen from a partnership approach with Destination Ontario—because I do work with them. I'm here right now, actually, for Rendez-vous Canada, which is the big international marketplace. So they have been very forthcoming in recognizing that outdoor nature, fresh air, fresh water, the Great Lakes are an important part to your point of the overall promotion of Ontario, and I think there is a nice balance and one of the reasons that Ontario is the biggest destination in Canada, for visitors, is because we have that nice balance. We have the Torontos, we have the Ottawas, we have the Niagara Fallses, but we also have some incredible outdoors and the Great Lakes up in northern Ontario. So I think they have done a good job of managing that perspective and understanding and shifting when shifting is needed to focus on either domestic, US or international travel.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Destination Ontario recently established this north marketing committee drawing precisely on the regions that you know best, right?

Mr. Ian McMillan: Yes.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: So I'm wondering what gaps you might see in northern Ontario and how northern Ontario is currently being marketed to travellers, and what you might bring to close those gaps?

Mr. Ian McMillan: It's funny. I am the person for international market development for northern Ontario, and that's what my contract is. I get feedback first-hand from tour operators that have come here. In fact, when we leave here, I'm taking 24 tour operators and touring them around northern Ontario for four days.

So the standard issues with northern Ontario are size, scope, distance between markets and connectivity, whether it's WiFi or Internet. Those kinds of things are just general issues. But they're more than offset by the will and the need for people to come and see nature first-hand. I think that trumps everything. There are some great opportunities.

We'll never have 28 million people in northern Ontario like the waterfront in Toronto. But even if we do several thousands that tour through northern Ontario, the economic impact up into that market is great.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Yes, it's significant. Thank you so much.

And now you've spent, as you just described, a great part of your career building those partnerships with the private sector operators, with the regional tourism organizations and others, and in that Auditor General report, they found

that Destination Ontario and the regional tourism organizations have overlapping responsibilities and they haven't always been in marketing in partnership with each other.

So I was wondering how you might use your experience to push the board towards a more genuine collaborative model with the RTOs, rather than something that sort of overlaps but doesn't always go hand in fist together.

Mr. Ian McMillan: Sure. It's a good question. I guess what I would do is bring in my anecdotal experience in terms of how the northern RTO, which I think is looked at as one of the more successful RTOs in the province—I think I can bring the approach that we use in northern Ontario and relate it to the rest of the province and see how that fits. But I just know we have a very good, strong track record of partnerships, collaboration and delivery of with programs with RTO 13 and I can speak to that and perhaps the successes can be reflected to some of the other areas.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: We've spoken a lot about the north. I'd like to bring us—because, of course, Toronto is part of Ontario—

Mr. Ian McMillan: Of course.

MPP Alexa Gilmour:—and we've got some new legislation. This government is proposing legislation that's going to allow the province to declare parts of Toronto's waterfront, including potentially significant portions of the Toronto Islands—in fact, the bill that we're debating in the House today will give the province the entire Toronto Islands, and the Premier has declared that he's going to make some of them a special economic zone where the provincial, the municipal laws could be suspended, all in service of expanding Billy Bishop airport.

Now, the city officials, the waterfront secretariat and others have warned this plan would have substantial implications for those 28 million tourists, for the residents. Gridlock and transit congestion would lead to a degradation of water quality in the harbour.

And Toronto's waterfront—its parks, its beaches, its public spaces—is one of the province's signature tourism destinations—

Interjection.

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): Excuse me, MPP Gilmour.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Yes?

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): MPP Smyth—or Smith; sorry. Smyth; Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: Point of order, Mr. Chair. If we could keep the questions aligned with the qualifications of the candidate and this particular role, please.

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): I appreciate that. Try to keep your question in line.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I believe talking about the 28 million tourists at Toronto's waterfront is in line. I'm surprised—shocked, just amazed—that my colleague MPP Smith is bringing that question yet again.

Back to the beaches, the parks, the public spaces: This is one of the province's tourist assets. As someone who has spent a career understanding what draws visitors and what drives them away, what is your assessment of the tourism risk if public waterfront spaces are displaced in

the name of an airport expansion, and what do you see as the board's role in that?

Mr. Ian McMillan: I appreciate your question. I would just say that looking at the mandate of Destination Ontario, it's a marketing organization, and I think any policy decisions as you are referring to are kind of—

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): One minute.

Mr. Ian McMillan:—at the higher level, at your folks' level. I think as a marketing organization, we would deal with what we have in terms of an asset, whatever that looks like or whatever it becomes. The policy and the decision-making are at a different level, and I don't think we would deal with that.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Would it be harder to market a waterfront destination that has jets coming by every two minutes?

Mr. Ian McMillan: Again, I'm not qualified to make that type of decision. I would market what I was handed—that kind of thing.

MPP Alexa Gilmour: I appreciate that. What do you see as the biggest opportunity or challenges for Ontario tourism in this present moment, and how might you respond as a member?

Mr. Ian McMillan: As we know, generally speaking—not necessarily on behalf of the board of Destination Ontario, but just the tourism industry in general—one of the obvious challenges is our relationship with our neighbours to the south, and how that will play out and what impact it has on travelling both directions. But I think as one door closes, one door opens. I think there's an opportunity for Ontarians to travel within Ontario—

The Second Vice-Chair (MPP Wayne Gates): Time's up. Thank you, MPP Gilmour.

We'll move on to—I'll try to get this one right—MPP Smyth.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Lovely to meet you today, and thank you for coming here. Going over your vast experience, especially in the north, it is great to see someone with such experience looking to take on this new role, which is really exciting. I am very excited myself to take the canyon tour train, maybe in the fall. It's just so incredible.

Mr. Ian McMillan: Absolutely.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: And I have to admit: I'm an Ontarian, obviously, but the first time I did the drive from Wawa to Sault Ste. Marie—

Mr. Ian McMillan: Beautiful drive.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Like, it's spectacular. I'd like to do my own tourism commercial for that. I had no idea. We all spend time—I do—in the north, but more up Highway 11, so that was an absolute treat, and Sault Ste. Marie, that region of the north, is phenomenal.

Getting to your experience, which is very vast and wonderful to see: As we look for this appointment for you, I wanted to just ask, when we're talking about the north—and you're such an expert there—for me it was a surprise, what was going on in Sault Ste. Marie and the gorgeousness of the province, having seen it first-hand in that way for the first time. What do you see, when it comes to the

north now having this new position—potentially, likely—as the biggest on-tap tourism opportunity maybe in the north or in Ontario right now?

Mr. Ian McMillan: Again, I would have to do a bit of a deeper dive to better understand where this board sits in terms of making decisions, which I'm not privy to at the moment. But I think, again—I sound like a broken record—the opportunity is people are now looking at reconnecting with nature, outdoors, a safe destination, clean water, fresh air: all of those pieces that we have in little pockets in southern Ontario, but in large quantities in northern Ontario.

I think there's a great opportunity. Toronto is going to be where all international travel comes into the province, but it's our role to try and spread that business around the province—or at least my role—and so I see a great opportunity for that, of using that natural, as you say, beautiful setting, and helping people travel around the province.

0930

MPP Stephanie Smyth: I know—and you can confirm—do you think that tourism operators are struggling right now with staffing shortages and rising costs and affordability pressures? You can confirm or conflict with what I just said in that statement, but what role do you think Destination Ontario could play in supporting local businesses beyond simply attracting visitors?

Mr. Ian McMillan: Again, I'm not completely familiar—the general mandate, I understand, of Destination Ontario is marketing and delivering visitors. I think that's their primary role. In my role currently I do work very directly with small operators in terms of training and upgrading and teaching them, if they're interested in the international markets, so that they can expand their business into the shoulder seasons. I do that first-hand currently right now, so I do have that kind of skill set.

I'm not sure—again, because I'm not really familiar with the workings currently of the board; I'm not on the board—how that would fit with that board, with the mandate of marketing, mainly.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Right. I think some smaller, rural communities might feel provincial tourism dollars and promotions are concentrated around larger urban centres. Working in the north, would you agree with that statement over the years?

Mr. Ian McMillan: I think it's a fair statement that every destination would love to have more money to market and promote their destination. I think you would get that across the board, period.

I think the MAT tax has given the opportunity for smaller and rural communities to generate funds to start doing marketing and product development. I think that has been a positive step, and I see bigger activities as a result of doing that.

So there are challenges, but I think good things are happening.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: That's good to hear. Just going back to Toronto right now and talking about waterfront development decisions that are currently being debated as we look at the House right now, as my colleague mentioned, Bill 110 and development—not to get out of line

here—do you think tourism development should ever come at the expense of local community consultation and public access?

Mr. Ian McMillan: Again, I can't relate to the board of Destination Ontario because I'm not privy to that yet. But I think just in general terms, all through my career, whether it was on a local or a municipal level, transparency and communication are important in whatever we do in tourism. You're never going to necessarily make everyone happy, but I think as long as you have the dialogue and the communication and the transparency, it augurs well for whatever you decide on at the end of the day.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Should you join the board, what responsibility then do you think that Destination Ontario would have to ensure that tourism growth is actually sustainable and community-driven and not mandated by government, driven that way?

Mr. Ian McMillan: Again, at the risk of sounding like a broken record, I'm not familiar—because I'm not on the board—with the process of how they make their decisions. But I would have to believe that any discussion and decision-making along that line would follow in that, in understanding whatever decision is made and how it will impact on municipalities or private sector, those kinds of things.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Do you think that you would see yourself, as a board member, considering protections for Ontario's waterfronts, being preserved and accessible for future generations? Just the protection of them, would that be something that you would always consider? I'm sure working in the north you've considered the beautiful spaces that you have, and you want to keep those for everyone, for generations to come.

Mr. Ian McMillan: I certainly have my own personal opinions on all of that, but again, with Destination Ontario being generally a marketing-mandated board, I don't know whether that falls under the purview of their process and their decision-making. It's more around the marketing efforts than anything.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Do you think that communities themselves should have a say—you've worked with smaller municipalities throughout your career as well—in major tourism challenges and things to come or ideas or potential developments?

Mr. Ian McMillan: As it relates to the Destination Ontario board?

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Yes.

Mr. Ian McMillan: I think there's a process in place, MPP, related to the RTOs. I think there is a process in place holistically in Ontario where it starts from the private sector and can have a pipeline to their regional DMO, a pipeline up to the Ontario level. I think there is a mechanism in place to have that conversation. How well it works, again, I'm not privy to at this level yet until I get on the board. But I think it's there to have.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Maybe you can help answer this question for me, because I'm not exactly sure how this would work. But let's take Niagara Falls as an example, and let's take a Ferris wheel at Niagara Falls as an example.

At first blush, I'm thinking out in my mind, "What a fantastic way to see Niagara Falls, on a Ferris wheel, potentially." You think of the London Eye in the UK.

But then you think, "Okay, what is this going to do? Is this going to be a blight? Is this going to cause more of a block, a detriment, to seeing Niagara Falls?" That becomes an issue.

How would Destination Ontario deal with that kind of situation if there was a great divide over such a tourism idea?

Mr. Ian McMillan: Again, understanding that the mandate of Destination Ontario is primarily a marketing mandate to drive visitation, I don't believe it's the responsibility of them to make that determination. I think that determination would be made on a local level—

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Sorry; point of order from MPP Smith.

Ms. Laura Smith: If we could just keep the questioning in line with his particular role with Science North and his application to his position, that would be better.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you. Basically, a one-minute warning.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: So, would your focus just be on the north, then?

Mr. Ian McMillan: Not at all, no. As you can read, while I was based in the north, my experience is really province-wide and even Canada-wide, so I think I bring a much broader perspective than just northern Ontario. That's always kind of my background, but no.

I've worked with Niagara Falls Tourism, Toronto tourism, Ottawa Tourism. To this day, I'm at, as I said, Rendez-vous Canada down at the convention centre here in Toronto for the past three days, where we have 500 tour operators from around the world and a thousand tourism people from across Canada. We're selling Canada down to Ontario and that kind of thing.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: At the risk of being a broken record, if you get on the board with your incredible experience, what's the first thing you would do on Destination Ontario? I know you haven't sat on the board yet, but you have worked with people on it. You know people. You might have an idea how it works. What's one thing you'd want to do immediately to have an impact?

Mr. Ian McMillan: You know what? Not to be dodgy, but my honest answer would be to, for the first while, listen, to better understand, because it's better to understand than just speak out about things you don't know about. So, listen, learn and then see where I can contribute.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Thank you so much. I really appreciate it.

Mr. Ian McMillan: A pleasure.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you very much, Ian. Sorry I missed your story, but I'm sure I will hear about it. I had to debate in the House.

Thank you very much for your time today and for your willingness to serve. We will now go on to our next candidate. You are welcome to stay and eavesdrop and then hear whether you are selected or not at the end, or you can leave us, depart and enjoy the sunshine. It's up to you.

Mr. Ian McMillan: I would love to stay, but as I was saying, Madam Chair, I'm working at Rendez-vous Canada down at the convention centre. I have appointments in dealing with tour operators for the rest of the day, so I will take leave. I'm sure I'll hear from somebody at some point.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Okay. Well, best of luck, and thank you very much.

Mr. Ian McMillan: Thank you very much for the opportunity. Thanks, everyone.

MR. HAROUNA SALEY SIDIBÉ

Review of intended appointment, selected by official opposition: Harouna Saley Sidibé, intended appointee as member, Social Benefits Tribunal.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): We will now move on to the review of the second intended appointee.

I also should thank MPP Gates. I am sure you are spectacular in this chair, but thank you for subbing in.

We welcome Harouna Sidibé, who is nominated as member of the Social Benefits Tribunal. He will be appearing virtually, as you can see.

You may make an initial statement. Take as much time as you like to share your story, your background.

The government gets 10 minutes, but they will have their time deducted from the time you use, which is fine. They're okay with that, so don't worry about that. We also have 10 minutes for the official opposition and 10 minutes for the third party.

The floor is yours. Welcome.

M. Harouna Saley Sidibé: Bonjour, madame la Présidente, mesdames et messieurs les membres du comité. Je vous remercie de m'avoir donné l'occasion de comparaître devant vous aujourd'hui. Je m'appelle Harouna Saley Sidibé et je suis honoré d'être considéré pour une nomination en tant que membre à temps partiel du Tribunal de l'aide sociale.

Mon parcours professionnel combine une formation juridique et une expérience pratique, acquises à la fois en France et au Canada. Tout au long de mon parcours, j'ai été guidé par un engagement constant envers le service public, l'équité et l'accès à la justice.

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Avant d'immigrer au Canada, j'ai exercé le droit en France et occupé diverses fonctions juridiques tant en cabinet d'avocat qu'en compagnie d'assurance. Pendant plus d'une décennie, j'ai développé une solide expérience en analyse juridique, en règlement des différends et en évaluation de la preuve tout en appliquant des cadres législatifs et réglementaires complexes.

Depuis mon arrivée au Canada, j'ai poursuivi ce parcours par des études juridiques au Canada et par un engagement continu au service public. Je suis titulaire, de ce fait, d'un « certificate in law » de l'Université Queen's et je termine actuellement une maîtrise en droit canadien de la common law à la faculté de droit Osgoode Hall à York University.

Depuis juin 2024, j'occupe les fonctions—

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Apologies. Does everyone have their ears?

Je m'excuse. Sorry, Harouna, everyone was trying to get their translation pieces on their ears. Just pause for one moment, if you don't mind. It's a new system for all of us in this snazzy, newly designed room, so I think members on that side were—

Interjections.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Is everyone ready? Pretty much? Okay. Would you like the candidate to start again? Sorry.

Mr. Harouna Saley Sidibé: Should I start from the beginning?

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Yes, if you don't mind. Thank you. Merci.

M. Harouna Saley Sidibé: So, as I was saying, bonjour, madame la Présidente, mesdames et messieurs les membres du comité. Je vous remercie de m'avoir donné l'occasion de comparaître devant vous aujourd'hui. Donc, je m'appelle Harouna Saley Sidibé et je suis honoré d'être considéré pour une nomination au Tribunal de l'aide sociale.

Mon parcours professionnel combine une formation juridique et une expérience pratique, acquises à la fois en France et au Canada. Tout au long de ce parcours, j'ai été guidé par un engagement constant envers le service public, l'équité et l'accès à la justice.

Avant d'immigrer au Canada, j'ai exercé le droit en France et occupé diverses fonctions juridiques, tant en cabinet d'avocat qu'en compagnie d'assurance. Pendant plus d'une décennie, j'ai développé une solide expérience en analyse juridique, en règlement des différends, en évaluation de la preuve et en application de cadres législatifs et réglementaires complexes.

Depuis mon arrivée en Ontario, plus précisément à Toronto, où j'habite, j'ai poursuivi ce parcours par des études juridiques au Canada et par un engagement continu au service public. Je suis titulaire, de ce fait, d'un « certificate in law » de l'Université Queen's et je termine actuellement une maîtrise en droit canadien de la common law à la faculté de droit Osgoode Hall de York University.

Depuis juin 2024, j'occupe les fonctions d'arbitre à temps plein au Tribunal d'appel en matière de permis, plus précisément au sein du service d'aide aux victimes d'accidents automobiles. Dans le cadre de ces fonctions, je tranche des différends découlant du régime ontarien d'assurance automobile, notamment des questions touchant à l'interprétation législative, à la preuve médicale et d'experts, ainsi qu'à l'équité procédurale. J'ai la responsabilité de gérer des instances et de rendre des décisions écrites ayant une incidence directe sur les droits et les intérêts des Ontariens et des Ontariennes.

Plus tôt cette année, mon mandat a été renouvelé pour une période supplémentaire de trois ans. Je considère ce renouvellement à la fois comme un privilège et comme une marque de confiance à l'égard de mon travail et de mon engagement envers l'excellence décisionnelle.

Je suis particulièrement enthousiaste à l'égard de cette nomination croisée, puisqu'elle me permettrait de contribuer davantage à l'accès à la justice pour la communauté francophone de l'Ontario. Les francophones ontariens ont droit à des services publics accessibles et de qualité dans la langue officielle de leur choix. Je suis convaincu que les

décideurs bilingues jouent un rôle important pour garantir une participation pleine et entière des justiciables aux procédures des tribunaux administratifs et pour s'assurer qu'ils puissent être entendus dans leur langue.

Ayant moi-même choisi de bâtir ma vie professionnelle et personnelle en Ontario, je mesure l'importance d'accéder aux institutions publiques et à la justice dans la langue officielle de son choix. Cette réalité renforce mon engagement envers le service de la communauté francophone de notre province.

Mon expérience dans des environnements de travail en droit civil et en droit de la common law m'a également permis de développer une appréciation de diverses perspectives et de l'importance d'aborder chaque dossier avec ouverture d'esprit, impartialité et respect. Peu importe la nature du litige soumis à un tribunal, les principes demeurent les mêmes : l'équité, l'indépendance, l'examen attentif des preuves et la rédaction de motifs clairs permettant aux parties de comprendre comment et pourquoi une décision a été rendue.

Si je suis nommé, j'assumerai mes responsabilités au Tribunal de l'aide sociale avec la même rigueur, le même professionnalisme et le même respect de la primauté du droit que ceux qui guident actuellement mon travail décisionnel.

Je vous remercie de nouveau pour votre temps et votre considération. Je serais heureux de répondre aux questions que les membres du comité pourraient avoir. Je peux répondre aux questions dans la langue officielle de votre choix.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Merci beaucoup. We will now go over to the government side. There's five minutes and 35 seconds. MPP Sarrazin.

M. Stéphane Sarrazin: Merci beaucoup, monsieur Harouna, pour votre présentation. Je dois dire que c'est rafraîchissant pour moi d'être complètement bilingue puis de pouvoir suivre cette conversation sans avoir le système de traduction.

Je dois dire que j'étais impressionné par votre expérience. J'ai consulté LinkedIn et j'ai pu voir que vous avez fait beaucoup de choses—beaucoup d'expérience. Puis, évidemment, j'imagine que le bilinguisme, ce n'est pas un problème pour vous. Vous aurez sûrement la chance de vous adresser en anglais à mes collègues.

Dans toute cette panoplie d'expérience que vous avez, comment est-ce que vous voyez que ça a été en mesure de bien vous préparer pour, justement, le Tribunal de l'aide sociale? Peut-être juste élaborer un peu là-dessus—vous pouvez répondre en anglais ou en français. C'est à votre discrétion.

M. Harouna Saley Sidibé: Oui, je pourrais répondre à cette question en français. En fait, comme je disais, j'ai une expérience aussi bien en France qu'au Canada. Mon expérience en France est une expérience d'avocat et de juriste en entreprise où j'ai eu l'occasion, par exemple, de participer à des négociations ou de conduire des négociations, aussi de faire du contentieux juridique auprès des juridictions en tant qu'avocat, donc je représentais des parties.

Ici au Canada, depuis pratiquement deux ans, j'exerce à ce moment en tant qu'arbitre. Donc j'arbitre des dossiers. Ce sont les mêmes compétences qui sont demandées, en effet, aussi bien au tribunal dans lequel je suis actuellement que dans le Tribunal de l'aide sociale.

M. Stéphane Sarrazin: Juste pour renchéir, ça dit bien que vous êtes présentement arbitre bilingue, membre à temps plein pour le Tribunal d'appel en matière de permis, c'est ça?

M. Harouna Saley Sidibé: Exactement, c'est ça, au service des accidents automobiles.

M. Stéphane Sarrazin: Superbe.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you very much, MPP Sarrazin. Over to MPP Dowie.

M. Andrew Dowie: Bonjour. Merci pour votre candidature aujourd'hui.

On connaît que les partis qui s'en vont au tribunal n'ont pas toujours une représentation légale avec eux, et ça pose des problèmes parce qu'on ne connaît pas les procédures, et ça va éloigner la procédure de l'impact dans le temps.

Comment est-ce que tu vas travailler avec ceux qui se présentent sans représentation pour s'assurer que la réunion soit juste, même si les procédures ne sont pas bien connues par ces individus?

Mr. Harouna Saley Sidibé: I can answer in English that question.

That happens a lot before the SBT. Before the tribunal I'm working on now, the parties are almost always represented by a lawyer, so that problem doesn't show up. But before the SBT, it happens to have a person coming by themselves. So here, how I'm doing things, I'm becoming more responsible because here, the process of fairness must be strictly applied.

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I need to be able to explain to that person what's happening at the moment, what stage we are at in the hearing, what he should give us as information. Here, my role will not just be as an educator, but I need to be in active education to be able to ask the relevant questions if the party didn't bring the information, to ask the question to have that information.

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

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you very much, Mr. Harouna, for taking the time and expressing interest to serve the public.

I want to ask you a very generic question. All these engagements I can see in your résumé in multiple capacities and multiple areas, volunteer work etc.—what have you learned from them, and how will this inform your work with SBT? How can it influence that?

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): One-minute warning.

Mr. Harouna Saley Sidibé: Can you just be more specific? Influence in which way?

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: From the activities you did before, your past activities, do you think they're going to apply and contribute to your work in the SBT?

Mr. Harouna Saley Sidibé: Yes. I took everything I've done, even in France and here. As I was saying earlier,

I was a lawyer in France, so I was able to represent parties before tribunals. I was also working in some business capacities, so negotiation and arbitration. Here, I've been a full-time member of the LAT since 2024, and I've just been renewed for three more years. I'm bringing all those skills to be able to help parties to explain when writing my decision, to give reasons explaining why and how I came to that outcome.

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

We will now go to the official opposition. You have 10 minutes, MPP Gates. Take it away.

MPP Wayne Gates: Good morning. How are you today?

Mr. Harouna Saley Sidibé: Good morning. I'm good.

MPP Wayne Gates: I'm going to speak in English, if that's okay.

Mr. Harouna Saley Sidibé: Okay, no problem.

MPP Wayne Gates: My French is not very good, although it's getting better.

I ask these questions to everybody. No disrespect to yourself, but I think they're fair; they're reasonable. I think when you come to committee, we want to make sure that we understand exactly where you are politically.

Have you ever joined a political party?

Mr. Harouna Saley Sidibé: No, not in France, and not here. The only thing I'm doing politically is just to use my right to vote—the one thing, yes.

MPP Wayne Gates: Have you ever donated to a political party?

Mr. Harouna Saley Sidibé: No, never.

MPP Wayne Gates: None? Zero?

Mr. Harouna Saley Sidibé: No, zero, not in France, and not here.

MPP Wayne Gates: Did you watch the Montreal Canadiens get beat last night?

Mr. Harouna Saley Sidibé: No.

MPP Wayne Gates: You're not a hockey fan? Okay, all right.

Mr. Harouna Saley Sidibé: I'm learning. I'm just learning because I'm more a soccer fan, so I'm learning.

MPP Wayne Gates: Well, I can tell you all of Canada was disappointed last night watching the game.

Mr. Harouna Saley Sidibé: I can understand.

MPP Wayne Gates: Hopefully they'll find a way to get more shots on net.

Public record shows that you've been serving as a full-time member of the Licence Appeal Tribunal. Can you confirm whether the SBT appointment is in addition to your LAT role or whether it replaces or changes that role?

Mr. Harouna Saley Sidibé: It will be in addition to that role because I'm full-time at the LAT now. So if I'm cross-appointed, I will be cross-appointed part-time at the SBT.

MPP Wayne Gates: Thank you. The LAT often deals with licensing, regulatory and insurance matters. The SBT deals with social assistance appeals, often involving people living in poverty or with a disability. What do you see as the key difference between the LAT and the SBT?

Mr. Harouna Saley Sidibé: The key difference to me is that before the LAT, it's accident benefit services. When the person comes to us, the respondent is an insurance company, so someone who can pay, someone who has the money to pay for that person to have a treatment. It's endless.

Here, at the SBT, it's mostly government benefits. So we need to be mindful when rendering a decision because it's taxpayer money also being there. I have said that balance between hearing the person and helping that person to access the benefits and also, at the other end, being mindful that it's taxpayers' money we are using.

MPP Wayne Gates: Thank you for your answer.

Can you identify one specific way your approach as an SBT member would differ from your approach as an LAT member?

Mr. Harouna Saley Sidibé: It's difficult to answer to that question because I'm not sitting at the SBT now. I need to go through the onboarding process to have all those relevant tools to be able to apply them in my work, so I don't have a specific answer to that question. I'm sorry.

MPP Wayne Gates: What in your background directly prepares you for the OW and ODSP appeals?

Mr. Harouna Saley Sidibé: It's something I've done in France. It's slightly different, but I did those kinds of files in France.

Also, here, when I was interested by that position, I did some research. I went on the tribunal website to have the information on the statutes, the regulations. Also, I've seen some decisions on panels.

MPP Wayne Gates: Have you received any SBT-specific training on ODSP, Ontario Works, disability evidence, accommodations and self-represented clients?

Mr. Harouna Saley Sidibé: SBT? I had a short onboarding when I was interested in that specific tribunal, but it was not the complete onboarding. I need to go on some onboarding.

Regarding accommodation, it's the same throughout all the tribunals, so I have training. I'm being trained regularly on those situations.

I have the occasion to apply that at the LAT when someone is asking for an adjournment, for instance, or asking for an in-person hearing in lieu of a video conference hearing.

MPP Wayne Gates: If the ministry loses a high percentage of ODSP appeals, what should concern us more: the tribunal's overturn rate, or the quality of the minister's original decision?

Mr. Harouna Saley Sidibé: I'm not sure I'm qualified to respond to that question. But what I can say is, as an adjudicator, my role is to apply the procedural fairness to be able to hear the matter before me in the language which is chosen by the party.

MPP Wayne Gates: This is an interesting question. What matters more in an SBT appeal: speed, consistency or getting the decision right?

Mr. Harouna Saley Sidibé: I think it's a matter of several things. As I was saying, there's procedural fairness, which means that the party should be heard properly and also by a decision-maker who is independent and impartial. I think that is the most important thing for the parties and the

public, to see that they are being heard with what they have to say and that the person who is hearing that is also someone who is impartial and making his decision independently.

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MPP Wayne Gates: Tribunals Ontario has said that the SBT backlogs have been eliminated. That can be a very dangerous political goal. How do we know that speed has not come in at the expense of fairness? I know you talked about fairness, even in some of the cases that you've already done with being a lawyer and stuff. I think fairness is probably the most important word here.

How do you feel about speed compared to fairness? How do you think that would work?

Mr. Harouna Saley Sidibé: I think fairness would always be the most important thing in assessing a case because we have the public before us. It's not just a file or a number; it's a person asking for something, and we need to hear that person. All those are within the procedural fairness component: hearing that person, as I was saying, by an impartial and independent decision-maker.

MPP Wayne Gates: Would you consider lack of Internet access, lack of privacy or disability-related difficulties using technology to make sure that it's fair?

Mr. Harouna Saley Sidibé: To answer that question, this is why we have a process for accommodation. We use the charter to be able to accommodate a person who cannot, for instance, have access to Internet. I know that the LAT does that; I don't know about the SBT for now because I'm not sitting there. I know the LAT would do that to send the person some electronic devices so the person can join the hearing.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): One-minute warning.

Mr. Harouna Saley Sidibé: Regarding the accommodation, we can also accept to have an in-person hearing so that the person can be heard in our offices.

MPP Wayne Gates: Thanks very much, and thanks for being here again. I've got no further questions.

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

Over to the third party. MPP Smyth.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Thank you, sir, for being here today. Apologies; I'm not as fluent as I would like to be in French, so I'll have to ask you my questions in English.

I wanted to start just understanding your background in France. So you were working on cases primarily involving insurance issues, correct?

Mr. Harouna Saley Sidibé: Not just that, but, yes, it's a part.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Also, some social benefits cases as well?

Mr. Harouna Saley Sidibé: Yes, as well.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Okay. I guess, in France, affordability was an issue as well during those times—social issues and people dealing with access to social benefits at a difficult financial time?

Mr. Harouna Saley Sidibé: Yes. It depends on the benefits, because there are several kinds of benefits in France. It depends on that.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: We know that the Social Benefits Tribunal hears cases of some of the most vulnerable people in Ontario. You speak about fairness and compassion, which is absolutely critical. What exactly does that look like to you in a tribunal setting?

Mr. Harouna Saley Sidibé: In a tribunal setting, to me, fairness is, for instance, if the party is self-represented, to be able to ask the relevant questions in order to have all of the information I need to make my decision. Because when the person has a lawyer, the lawyer is doing the job, but as a self-represented party, and someone who is, I'd say, in a difficult position, it's important to ask those questions to be able to fully understand the case and render a fair decision.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Right. And many who are there probably find it a really intimidating system and difficult to navigate regardless, especially without legal representation. How would you help ensure that people feel heard and respected throughout the whole process, especially if they don't have legal representation?

Mr. Harouna Saley Sidibé: The first thing for me is being able to let them speak in the language they chose to speak in; for instance, French. As a French-speaking person who's living here in Ontario, it's important to be heard in your language in some situations. Also, when you are before a tribunal, it's always stressful. It's important to be able, yes, to let the person speak in the language she is more comfortable in. I think that this is the first step.

All those steps are what I was saying, being able to ask the relevant questions so that person knows that I'm here, I'm listening to what they have to say. I need to balance that responsibility I have when the person is not represented by asking questions with the fact that I need to be neutral when I'm rendering my decision.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: I guess you're kind of experiencing first-hand what it's like to be at a tribunal without speaking your first language. You're speaking English right now, so it must feel a little—

Mr. Harouna Saley Sidibé: I speak English, yes, but if I need to go differently—for instance, in a case before a tribunal—it's not sure, with the stress and everything, that I have the English to just use that English.

I think it's being mindful, putting myself in that person's shoes and also remaining neutral because I'm making a decision that will impact that person's life.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: We've talked about delays and backlogs, and those can have serious, real-life consequences for people relying on benefits. How would you balance efficiency with that fairness in the decision-making?

Mr. Harouna Saley Sidibé: I'm someone well organized. As I've said at the beginning of my presentation, I'm doing several things. I'm at law school. I'm doing the NCA's process in order to become a lawyer here.

So I'm someone well organized, and I think it's important in my role to have that skill because, after the hearing,

you need to manage your time and the deadline to render a decision. The thing is not being speedy and rushing a decision out; the thing is having the necessary time to review all the file and render the most fair decision.

I think, yes, I have those skills to be organized, to respect the deadlines—I think so, yes. I think this is the important thing because it's ensuring efficiency and fairness at the same time.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: This position on the Social Benefits Tribunal really affects whether someone can afford rent, can afford food, medication. How do you approach that responsibility with making the decisions that you have to make?

Mr. Harouna Saley Sidibé: I agree it's a high responsibility. We have the public before us and someone in a difficult position.

I'm sorry. I just lost the question.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: I guess it's such a big decision, when you're talking about people receiving funding to just exist and balancing that with all the other things you're keeping in mind in a tribunal. How will you reconcile that? How will you approach that? Because it can be pretty difficult to hear these stories and then have to make that kind of balanced, fair decision.

Mr. Harouna Saley Sidibé: As I was saying, the most important thing is—I'll just repeat myself—the process of fairness. This is the key, to be able to hear that person, to say, "I'm here. I'm listening." "So, this is what happened, the situation I'm dealing with." I recognize that; I'm not doubting anything.

I will ask questions to that person to have the relevant information because it's about weighing the evidence before me. I need to have that evidence in the file, be directed to that evidence. This is why it's important, asking questions and weighing the evidence to come to a decision which is fair. I think it's just all in the process of working on the file.

MPP Stephanie Smyth: Finally, you've worked in both French and Ontario legal systems. Do you think there's any approach or lesson you can take from your international experience to the Ontario tribunal system?

Mr. Harouna Saley Sidibé: Yes. I think that the system is pretty different, because in France, as you know, it is civil law, so the system is not the same as the system we have here. The most important thing as a lawyer, as someone who was called to the bar in France, is to go to the bar by ensuring that I will do my work—I will use some French here—avec probité, humanité et respect. Those core values, I'm finding them here at the Ontario tribunals, because Ontario tribunals' core values are accountability, excellence, inclusion, integrity and respect. So what I used to apply in France, I am using it here because it's all in a democratic society, and they are democratic societies.

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MPP Stephanie Smyth: Thank you very much for putting yourself forward and for your time today. It's very much appreciated.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Thank you very much, MPP Smyth, and thank you so much, Harouna, for coming in and telling us about yourself, and for, of course, having the willingness to serve and help Ontarians.

Now we will go into our concurrence. We will now consider the first intended appointee. That's Ian McMillan. Can I have a motion, please, MPP Smith?

Ms. Laura Smith: I move concurrence in the intended appointment of Ian McMillan, nominated as member of the Destination Ontario board of directors.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Any discussion? Are the members ready to vote? All those in favour? Opposed? Obviously not. That carries unanimously. Wow. It happens when I'm not here, Wayne—or MPP Gates. Sorry.

MPP Wayne Gates: I'm going to have to vote this one down.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Ha ha. All right. Congratulations to Ian. That is great.

We will now consider the intended appointment of Harouna Sidibé. Can I have a motion please, MPP Smith?

Ms. Laura Smith: I move concurrence in the intended appointment of Harouna Saley Sidibé, nominated as member of the Social Benefits Tribunal.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Any discussion? Are the members ready to vote? All those in favour? That carries unanimously. We've never had a record of two. Congratulations to Harouna.

MPP Gates, we have one more thing. Do you want to speak first?

MPP Wayne Gates: I don't know if it's the right time. I didn't have a chance to speak to our member—our concern about not sitting and appointments.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Can we do our certificate?

MPP Wayne Gates: Okay. Do yours. I know I've only got a minute and a half, so I won't be talking long.

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

The last item of business is the extension of the certificate. The deadline to review the intended appointment selected from the May 1, 2026, certificate is set to expire on May 31, 2026. Is there unanimous consent to extend the certificate by 30 days?

Ms. Laura Smith: No.

The Chair (Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon): Whoa. We just lost that joy. Okay. I heard a no.

Back to MPP Gates.

MPP Wayne Gates: Yes, I want to use an example. I've said this a hundred times. Unfortunately, some of my colleagues might not agree with me. But I think this is an important committee, and I think we just saw it today, what we can actually do if we bring candidates that we can at least listen to and hear the qualifications.

Destination Ontario: I never had a chance to talk to him. But the last appointment as a board member for Destination Ontario was a candidate that ran against me in the provincial election for the Conservatives. He never came to this committee and is part of Destination Ontario. That's the type of stuff that I think we want to stop in this committee. I think we want to have quality people, someone that we can fairly, between all parties, ask questions to.

My suggestion is—although I'm sure my colleagues might not agree with this. A lot of committees sit during the summer. I think we should sit during this summer. I want to say I take great pride in being part of this committee, and I think having people come to this committee gives us a lot more credibility than having 20 or 30 people appointed while we're not sitting. So I'm making a suggestion that we sit during the summer.

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

All right. It is 10:15. Thank you for your words, MPP Gates. This concludes the business of today. This meeting is adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 1015.

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