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**Official Report
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Tuesday 17 November 2015

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Mardi 17 novembre 2015

**Standing Committee on
Government Agencies**

Intended appointments

**Comité permanent des
organismes gouvernementaux**

Nominations prévues

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
GOVERNMENT AGENCIESCOMITÉ PERMANENT DES
ORGANISMES GOUVERNEMENTAUX

Tuesday 17 November 2015

Mardi 17 novembre 2015

The committee met at 0902 in committee room 1.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): Good morning. It's Tuesday morning again, folks. Welcome to public appointments.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: If I might say, Chair, this is a brand new standard.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): Yes, I'm looking all around. People have got to be on time.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: There's no one here from the third party. The government doesn't seem—

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): And you've got an extra guy in the hall.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: —to take the seriousness of this committee very—

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: The important people are here.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): Okay, here's the most important thing: Can I have a motion for the subcommittee report?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I shall do that.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): Mr. Pettapiece.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I move the adoption of the subcommittee report on intended appointments dated Thursday, November 5, 2015.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): Thank you very much, Mr. Pettapiece. Any discussion? All those in favour? Opposed? Carried.

INTENDED APPOINTMENTS

MS. GITA ANAND

Review of intended appointment, selected by official opposition party: Gita Anand, intended appointee as vice-chair, Ontario Labour Relations Board.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): We have two intended appointments to review today. Our first intended appointment is Gita Anand, nominated as vice-chair, Ontario Labour Relations Board. Ms. Anand, can you please come forward?

Thank you very much for being here this morning. You are able to make a brief presentation. Any time that you use in your presentation will be taken from the government's time for questions. The questioning will begin with the official opposition. You will be asked questions by members of all three parties.

Thank you very much for being here today. You may proceed.

Ms. Gita Anand: Thank you, sir. Good morning, everyone. My name is Gita Anand and I am of South Asian origin. I grew up in Nova Scotia and moved to Ontario in 1986 upon graduation from law school.

I was called to the Ontario bar in 1988 and for the past 25 years, I have practised exclusively in the areas of labour relations and employment law, representing clients in unionized and non-unionized workplaces in both the public and private sectors. I have lived through the evolution of legislative change and jurisprudential development in labour and employment law.

My practice has focused on four main areas. I provide ongoing advice and representation to employers with respect to employment and labour statutes: the Labour Relations Act, the Employment Standards Act, the Ontario Human Rights Code and the Occupational Health and Safety Act, for example. In this advice, I have appeared regularly before the Labour Relations Board, the Human Rights Tribunal and other administrative tribunals of the province. I have advised on contentious matters as well as being part of dispute resolution processes and mediations.

The second area of practice involves acting as counsel at arbitration proceedings under collective agreements, and advising employers on the interpretation and application of collective agreements.

The third area in which I practise is as employer spokesman in collective bargaining, a role which has given me great insight into the dynamics of labour relations.

Finally, a portion of my practice involves acting as an external investigator for employment-related disputes, a role in which I often may be asked to mediate or facilitate resolutions of disputes.

As a result of those areas of practice, I believe I am respected in the labour relations community for my sense of fairness, my knowledge and my judgment. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): Thank you very much, Ms. Anand. Mr. Bailey?

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you for coming in, Ms. Anand; I've had a chance to look through your resumé.

According to our information, there's going to be a significant turnover in the coming years of members of the board. Understanding that, what changes or other

things could you put in place—I know you're not there yet—but what do you see that you could put in place to mitigate that? I think they're going to go from around 10 years of experience to less than three, with yourself being new as well. How would you see yourself mitigating—what would you do, along with training etc.?

Ms. Gita Anand: There's training, but there's also, in the appointment process, the appointment of people who have experience. That way, when there is turnover, the more experience the appointments have, to me, the better suited and better able the members of the board are to cope with that change. If people come in at a very inexperienced stage, then it's harder to become familiar with the board's processes.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Another issue that was pointed out to us is that apparently there is a big issue with the high volume of case management with cases before the board. Do you have any ideas of how maybe you could streamline that or what changes you could see with the rest of the board to manage that?

Ms. Gita Anand: Interestingly enough, the most recent board reports indicate that the volume seems to be dropping, which could be a function of a number of things. There are effective mediation services at the board.

I know that mediators are assigned to almost every application filed. The majority of files at the board appear to be settled or withdrawn; 20% are decided by way of hearing or consultation. I think that the backlog and the number of applications seem to be dealt with now through the use of mediation techniques such as telephone or electronic mediation. That could be one reason for the drop in the number of cases that are heard, but also a decreasing number of applications.

I think the board appears, at least from the outside, to be functioning well.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Do I have a little more time?

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): Oh, yes.

Mr. Robert Bailey: What would be your particular contribution to this position, as vice-chair of the board, if you could enlighten the panel here as to how you see yourself making a significant contribution on your own?

Ms. Gita Anand: I think that every party should have an opportunity to present their case fairly. Cases should be given full consideration. I believe that my reputation with trade unions that I've dealt with is one that is an effective but reasonable representative of employers. My investigation role that I described to you forces me to be neutral in the evaluation of disputes, and I am confident that I can offer fairness and impartiality. I also believe that the tribunals of Ontario should reflect the diversity of Ontario, and I believe that as a very qualified applicant, I would help in doing that.

0910

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you. That's all I have.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): Mr. Pettapiece.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Thanks, Chair. The Labour Relations Board has served quite a role regarding

teachers' unions. How are you prepared to wade into this ongoing public issue?

Ms. Gita Anand: I will apply the statute and the law as necessary. I think that the chair himself has weighed in on the issue with his decisions. It's not something that I could foresee in terms of weighing in, unless I know what the issues are to be decided in front of me. There's policy and then there's the actual dispute. I think the role of a vice-chair at the board is to apply the Labour Relations Act or whichever statute you're dealing with based on the evidence and the hearing in front of her or him.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): Thank you very much, Mr. Pettapiece.

Mr. Gates, good morning.

Mr. Wayne Gates: How are you today?

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): I'm fine. How was your pizza?

Mr. Wayne Gates: It was good, man.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): Okay. Thank you.

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

Ms. Gita Anand: Fine, thank you.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Good. Did you ever represent the unions?

Ms. Gita Anand: No, I never have.

Mr. Wayne Gates: You've always represented the employer?

Ms. Gita Anand: That's right.

Mr. Wayne Gates: In this role, do you think you could be impartial on going forward even though you've only really dealt with one side?

Ms. Gita Anand: I believe I can. I believe that I have established a good reputation as a management representative. I can tell you that on one occasion—I've received postcards from union business agents when they go to Dunkirk for the 50th anniversary of the landing. As a result of a hearing we were in, suddenly I get a postcard. So I believe that I will be viewed as impartial by trade unions, and I can be viewed as impartial.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Just a follow-up to getting cards from trade—did you keep any of those?

Ms. Gita Anand: No.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Okay. I thought they'd be good to have on your resumé.

It doesn't happen. I'll tell you, I never sent any to the employers as a trade union guy. I didn't send them any cards after it, so I think that's a compliment to you. It wasn't anything bad.

Maybe you can explain an employer-last-offer vote.

Ms. Gita Anand: There's an opportunity under the act for a final offer to be made. It's a strategic decision on the part of an employer to demand one, and it's rarely used.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Have you ever been involved with one?

Ms. Gita Anand: No.

Mr. Wayne Gates: You haven't?

Ms. Gita Anand: I have advised on whether one would be asked for or requested, but employers haven't actually done that.

Mr. Wayne Gates: So what's your opinion on an employer-last-offer vote?

Ms. Gita Anand: It's a lever. It's an opportunity to seek resolution by way of a final offer. Certainly, the act allows for a final offer to be made to a union in circumstances where there may well be a strike.

Mr. Wayne Gates: In your opinion, does it help or hurt the process?

Ms. Gita Anand: I don't think it helps or hurts the process. It's part of the process.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Okay. Maybe you could explain to my colleagues: What's a conciliation officer?

Ms. Gita Anand: A conciliation officer is an officer of the board appointed to assist the parties to reach a collective agreement. Unions and employers can apply for conciliation services right after notice to bargain is given. More and more one finds that, before the parties even sit down to bargain, a conciliation officer is appointed. But at any time during the bargaining process, the parties can access this neutral conciliation officer to assist in the finalization of a collective agreement.

Mr. Wayne Gates: It was raised by my colleagues around the teachers' unions. Obviously, they've gone through a tough round of collective bargaining on both parties, but at the end of the day, they came to a settlement that both parties, by the sounds of it, think was just. It sounds like their membership is in agreement with—do you have any comments on what you've read or what you've seen as a lawyer on the process at all?

Ms. Gita Anand: Not really. I wasn't part of that process. I only read the newspapers, as you say. It was a protracted process and certainly caused some public debate, but other than that, I don't have comments.

Mr. Wayne Gates: So in your long career—in my understanding, about 25 years so far—have you seen an agreement between two parties, in this case the government and the teachers' unions, but between a number of unions that would go on for 14, 16, 18 months? In your involvement with an employer, have you ever had a bargaining session that's taken that long?

Ms. Gita Anand: I have, actually, as a matter of fact.

Mr. Wayne Gates: And where was that?

Ms. Gita Anand: That was in the broader public sector involving the Canadian Union of Public Employees. The bargaining of a first contract took that long. Perhaps that's not as unusual for a first contract. The bargaining of a first contract can take a long time. Renewals, though, don't usually take that long.

Mr. Wayne Gates: So you might have seen one go that long. Actually, I'll take a—I've got a couple of seconds here?

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): Yes.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'm going to take a shot here, because we have one to your point—CarePartners in St. Catharines that is trying to get a first collective agreement. They've been on strike now for almost six months.

We're hoping that the health minister will get involved with that and get that resolved.

I understand that first agreements are a little tougher than ones that have some form of history that has been established, but certainly, some first agreements take longer than they should. Have you ever been involved in the first agreement, and what did you find was the most important thing for the two sides to understand, in a point of being fair?

Ms. Gita Anand: Well, in a first agreement, both sides are trying to—it's like building or negotiating a constitution, because both sides are trying to optimize the terms of what will govern the parties moving forward and govern their relationship. It does take longer and it always will take longer. Really, it's a question of how the bargaining relationship works and how well the parties can eventually reach agreements.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Being a lawyer for an employer, you probably may understand this. I'm going to throw this out as well. It's always easier to get a collective agreement—and you can respond to this—if you have two dance partners who want to dance. If you have one side that's not interested, it makes it extremely tough to get a collective agreement. Would you kind of agree with that?

Ms. Gita Anand: I would agree with that.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): Madame Lalonde?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you very much for being here—a real pleasure this morning. I'm quite impressed, actually, in terms of not only the knowledge, but your practice and everything you've done for the past 25 years. It's very impressive, and I'm sure people on the Ontario Labour Relations Board will be quite content, hopefully, to see you there.

Based on your experience or your previous encounters, have you had the pleasure—or displeasure—of interacting with the Ontario Labour Relations Board?

Ms. Gita Anand: I have, as I said, appeared in front of the board regularly. I appear both in contentious disputes as well as mediations and settlements. The board provides really good dispute resolution services to parties, so oftentimes—and always, you go to a mediation before you have a hearing. So I have had the opportunity to attend both those mediation sessions and hearings before the board and reconsiderations of decisions before the board, as the rules allow.

0920

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: I was reading your resumé, and I'm a little bit curious if you can just tell me a little bit about your role. I know it's national chair of the inclusion and diversity committee. Can you maybe touch a little bit—I know we have a little bit of time, Mr. Chair—on that?

Ms. Gita Anand: Absolutely. The private sector is a little bit behind in diversity-type activity than perhaps the public sector has been, so back in 2008 I drafted and our firm was pleased to adopt a diversity policy. We adopted a national steering committee, of which I was chair until

this year. That committee's role was to apply that policy: First of all, roll it out, have people trained in diversity concepts, and then try to apply this policy through our application, recruitment, performance management and team-building throughout our firm.

So it's really a role by which we are trying to bring diversity to a law firm, which, you know, is a challenge.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): Thank you very much, Ms. Lalonde—Madame Lalonde, I should say. And thank you very much, Ms. Anand, for being here this morning. You may step down. We'll consider the concurrences at the end of today's meeting, and you're welcome to stay.

Ms. Gita Anand: Thank you very much.

MR. MURRAY PORTEOUS

Review of intended appointment, selected by official opposition and third party: Murray Porteous, intended appointee as chair, Agricorp.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): Our next intended appointment today is Murray Porteous, nominated as chair of Agricorp. Mr. Porteous, can you please come forward? Thank you very much for being here today.

You'll have the opportunity to make a brief opening statement. Any time that you use for your statement will be taken from the government's time. You'll be asked questions by members of all three parties, and it will begin with the third party.

Mr. Porteous, you may begin.

Mr. Murray Porteous: Thank you Mr. Chairman, committee members and guests.

I've always said that a candidate should be measured by the strength of their convictions and the depth of their character, not by a resumé, so I really appreciate the opportunity for you to get to know me today.

I grew up on a dairy farm, and we had some apple orchard and cash crops. My family sold the dairy herd and focused on grain and fruit production in 1973. My father was then asked by Cuba to help their farmers learn dairy production, and that winter our family became the second non-Communists to enter Cuba since the revolution in 1956. The experience gave me an appreciation for good government and a respect for our freedoms.

My dad believed you should work for someone other than your father. He also believed that if you paid your own way through university, you'd value your education more. To pay my way, I raised livestock, rabbits and poultry, worked for several area farmers in vegetable crops and tobacco, and managed the processing at the Norfolk Cherry Company. I also taught leadership development for the Ministry of Agriculture and worked for an agricultural chemical company.

In turn, my family hired several students over the years. Toby Barrett worked for us. Dad said he turned out to be a better worker than he expected.

I've been fortunate to have worked in every major agricultural production area of Canada and in most of the

sectors, including grain, livestock, poultry, fresh and processed fruits and vegetables, crop protection and animal health, prior to returning to the family business. In my work, I toured agricultural production areas across North, Central and South America, the Caribbean and Europe.

I'm an apple, pear, sour cherry and asparagus grower, but agriculture is a complicated industry. My broader range of experience has given me an in-depth understanding of it. As a result, I've been asked to represent my industry at provincial, national and international levels.

I'm a politically aware person, but not a partisan one. I look for win-wins and have always tried to assist our elected representatives and public officials to avoid embarrassment and make good decisions. This has gained me friends at every level of government I've dealt with. When I go to the annual negotiation meetings for the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program next week, I speak for Canada. The representatives of the Caribbean Commonwealth countries say they see me as a friend who cares deeply about the people employed in the program, and the provincial representatives in my caucus see me as a fair chairman who builds consensus.

I've acted as the president or chair of several organizations and, without exceptions, all were in a more stable financial position at the end of my term than they were at the start.

I developed the company Fox Seeds and was its first president. Our farm was also the only one to be a founding member of Ontario Agri-Food Technologies. After convincing the province to transfer all agricultural research facilities from the Ontario Realty Corp. to the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario, I was asked by the Minister of Agriculture to chair the institute. As chair, I led the development of a new priority-setting process for agricultural research and a new funding matrix for public-private research partnerships.

We now have the ability to address research needs more practically and have a model that also encourages development of future opportunities as opposed to targeting all of the funding toward addressing "what ate my crop last year" type research. The Elora dairy research facility is one of the outcomes of this model.

To varying degrees, the processes I've used have always been the same: develop a good governance model, spin off ancillary operations, demonstrate a return on investment to the members and develop a vision for the future. It's been a great experience to be involved in so many undertakings over the years, but, in the process, unfortunately, I've had to deal with every situation imaginable.

When the Conference Board of Canada was told to audit the program delivery of the Agricultural Adaptation Council when I was chairman, we matched or outscored every other federal program we were benchmarked against on every criterion measured. In that year's Auditor General's report, we were identified as the model by which other federal government programs should be

run. Similarly, I was pleased last weekend when an auditor told the AGM of the Asparagus Farmers of Ontario that he deals with a lot of agricultural organizations and now considers the asparagus board to be a model of governance, oversight and operating efficiency. That's a big step up in credibility from not too many years ago when a past president addressed the annual meeting wearing only a red G-string and socks.

I'm excited about Agricorp because it presents a new challenge. We must deliver effective programs efficiently and reduce red tape. I think my experience in product development and marketing and my success in networking to reduce duplication combined with my understanding of the agricultural industry will be a real asset in helping meet this challenge. With your support, I look forward to beginning this new journey. Thank you for your time and attention, and I do thank you for your public service.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): Thank you very much, Mr. Porteous. Mr. Gates.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Mr. Murray, how are you this morning?

Mr. Murray Porteous: Very good.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Good. I'll just give you a hint on what I have down in my riding. I'm from the Niagara Falls riding, which includes Niagara-on-the-Lake, and we obviously have a lot of tree fruit and stuff in my riding.

I will address the daughters part. My daughter went to Brock this year. I'm going to drop your name to her and say that she should be paying for her university. I think that might become a win-win for dad and mom, but I'm not so sure how that works out.

If you happen to have the opportunity to speak in front of anybody once you're appointed, I think we'll all agree that a suit with or without a tie would be okay with us. We'll have no problem with that.

The farming industry is an incredibly important part of the economy for rural and northern Ontarians. What will you do to help grow the industry and assure Ontarians who rely on it that it can continue to prosper?

Mr. Murray Porteous: The business of Agricorp is predominantly mitigating risk for farmers. Right now; about 72 crops are covered by crop insurance programs, but in the province we probably have 150 or so commodities. To develop a new program for every crop would be very onerous and very bureaucratic. It would take a lot of manpower and a lot of money to do that. I believe in simple programs, the simpler the better. They're easier to administer. They can be applied more broadly to different commodities. It improves efficiency, reduces costs and reduces costs to the farmer. The less red tape and the less cost the farmers have to deal with, the more competitive they can be.

I think that that's the first step. Agricorp traditionally has used crop insurance models that are based on six-year rolling averages of production measured in bushels per acre. That's not the future for our industry. The future is going to be not so much bushels per acre, where we're competing with everybody in the world to try and drive

down our costs of production to be more efficient and compete in the market, but to be more specialized in producing things that the consumers can't get somewhere else. That might be in grams per hectare or parts per million, whichever way you want to talk about it. But the programs of the past won't mitigate risk for producers in those types of situations. We have to be able to adapt and develop new programs efficiently and be accountable to the public in delivering them.

0930

Mr. Wayne Gates: Okay; I appreciate that. The other thing—I'm not sure it's a question, but I'll throw it out to you. Something that seems to be working really well down in our area is promoting local. I think that that's one way that we can compete on taste and quality and that type of stuff. I don't know if you have any comment on that.

Mr. Murray Porteous: I agree.

Mr. Wayne Gates: That was a big comment. Yes, I appreciate that. That tied up a lot of my time.

Here's what I think is a very important question—I'm sure you'll have a lot to say on this because I think it's extremely important for all of us: What, if any, action would you encourage farmers to take to mitigate against the potential negative effects of extreme weather caused by climate change? I think it's one of our biggest threats, quite frankly.

Mr. Murray Porteous: Yes. My mind is not made up on climate change—whether this is real or whether it's cyclical. If you look back to the 15th century in France, they were wearing mink-lined underwear. France isn't that cold a climate. I'm not sure if there were other benefits that were driving that or if it was really cold.

Dealing with extreme weather, though, is a reality. We had peaches that we planted when the CanGro plant was established and they wanted peaches for processing in the province. We got one crop off of that and then the CanGro plant closed and pulled out of the province.

We removed that orchard and replaced it with fresh market peaches. We managed to get a crop of fresh market peaches. We did quite well with it. In 2012, we were wiped out. In 2013, we started to rebound a little bit. In 2014, we had some crop. In 2015, we lost the entire orchard. If it wasn't for programs like crop insurance, that would have dealt us a huge blow. On any new venture in our farm, I don't go into with more than 5% of our production, but, still, it was a big hit, especially with the reinvestment there.

I think that to help offset those risks, we need to look at technologies that can help mitigate weather challenges. In Niagara, a lot of wind machines have gone up, for example. In our area, they're starting to go up as well. There's good and bad with all technologies, but they certainly reduce the risk of crop loss.

I think that the government, through its agencies and its policies, needs to encourage farmers to take steps to mitigate those risks, rather than just relying on crop insurance programs to offset the losses to move forward.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Just on CanGro: It was in Niagara-on-the-Lake. It was before I became an MPP. I

can tell you that I did everything that I could, along with a lot of other people, to make sure that never closed. It should never have closed. It closed with what they said was a net benefit to Canada. All these years later, I still haven't figured out what the net benefit to Canada was.

What they did there—you're probably aware of this or maybe you're not aware of this. Once they closed, the federal government paid, I think, \$26 million or \$27 million to the farmers to rip up the fruit trees. Two weeks ago, I was at an announcement that we're planting those same fruit trees through the greenbelt at a cost of, I think, \$400 million, off the top of my head—the figure might be out by a bit—to plant those trees all over again. The CanGro one was, in my eyes, an extremely sad thing to have happen.

The other thing, very similar to my "local" question: What do you think the organization could do to support Ontario producers? Because I think that that's a key question here and, probably, a key role for you as the chair on a go-forward basis, so that our family farms can continue not only for a few years but forever. If we can't feed ourselves, we're in big trouble.

Mr. Murray Porteous: My farm is a fairly large fruit and asparagus farm by Canadian standards, but I don't think what we deal with is atypical of farming. In my case, it probably costs me about \$50,000 a year to collect data and redistribute it for people who are asking for numbers. None of that money benefits me as a producer; I'm just complying with all kinds of things that I've got to deal with.

If we're going to help farmers, I think we have to deliver programs that provide real benefit but don't get in the way and end up costing more than they give in benefit. As I said before, I believe in simple programs that are cost-effective and effective and reduce red tape. I think that's key in helping the Ontario economy.

The other thing that I think is important is, when people are trying new ventures, you have to have some kind of model to help them mitigate risk. If all of your production insurance is based on historical yield and you're trying a crop that has never been tried before, you're taking a double risk because you have no backstop from the government to help with that. The challenge will be to develop programs that look forward and help to diversify and be innovative in our agricultural economy.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'll just say that I agree that some of the things—I just spent an hour with the colleges, and they were saying the same thing as you are: that there's nothing wrong with putting programs in place, but make sure there's a net benefit and they're not just tying up time. Time costs money.

I appreciate talking to you, and I wish you the best.

Mr. Murray Porteous: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): Thank you very much, Mr. Gates. Mr. Rinaldi.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Thank you. Murray: good to see you. It's good of you to be here, and thank you for taking the initiative to apply for this position. It's an important position.

Mr. Murray Porteous: Thank you.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: As I was going through your resumé, I couldn't figure out whether you were going to be 100 or 150 years old to accomplish all of these things. You look pretty good for being around for a long time.

Mr. Murray Porteous: A hundred and fifty with the wind chill.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: First of all, thank you for all of your involvement up to now on all of the things you did to elevate agriculture to where it is. We always need to do more. We're never finished there.

I guess the question that I would have—I think it's a simple one: When I look at all of the different agencies you've been involved with, and your successes, what sets Agricorp apart from the others that you're keen to get involved in?

Mr. Murray Porteous: Thank you very much for that question. I've been involved in some major fixes on organizations from a governance standpoint and so on. For three of them, I spent at least 100 days away from my business in a year. When I say 100 days, that's not 100 10-hour days; those are 100 meeting days. My total hours would range between 2,000 and 2,500 hours in a year doing a major restructuring and renovation on some organizations. I'm really glad Agricorp is not in that position.

Agricorp has a staff of approximately 405 people, about \$3 billion in liabilities to offset crop insurance; it has a very professional board of directors with a lot of insight. I don't know all of them but I know most of them, and what I've seen on paper—so we'll see from there. And it has good programs that work pretty well. When you look at the assessments from the industry, Agricorp has scored generally quite well in terms of satisfaction with program delivery. Those things don't need to be addressed. That's a lot of heavy lifting and a lot of time-wasting when you're trying to move things forward. What I'm excited about is that they're in a position to move forward and develop, modernize and become more efficient in program delivery, reduce red tape and provide real benefit to the industry. To me, that's what's attractive to the job.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Thank you. Thanks, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): Thank you very much, Mr. Rinaldi. Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Thank you, Chair. I actually just came down to see if Murray had found the room okay or not, but I do have to jump in. He made mention of the fact that many, many years ago I worked for the family. It brings to mind that expression—it was a summer job, and I was going to the Ontario Agricultural College. I was just there in the summer, and like they say, "Summer help and some aren't."

I just want to thank you for coming forward. I'm the agriculture critic for the opposition. Agricorp is a very important organization and I think it is important to continue to improve that organization. With a new board member and a new chair, I think it would be incumbent on you to shine a spotlight on that organization to make

sure it is in a better position to serve our farmers and those of us who eat food, for that matter.

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Just in closing, you have the resumé, and I can attest that the Porteous family have been very heavily involved in farm organizations. They also run a first-rate series of farm operations. They were in dairy when I worked there, and went on into fruit and vegetables, and dominate the cherry industry.

One last thing I'll mention. We probably don't get political, but it just happened on Sunday that Ken Porteous, who is Murray's father—both of us, along with former Liberal ag minister Jack Riddell, attended a celebration, the 40th anniversary of the election of former Liberal MPP Gord Miller, who represented our area for a number of years—a friend of Sean Conway and Monte Kwinter and some of those.

I won't bud in with many questions, so I'll turn it over to—

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): Thanks very much, Mr. Barrett. Mr. Pettapiece?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: We have similar backgrounds. My dad had a dairy farm. I was raised in Essex county. Then we went into the fruit business. We had peaches and pears and enough cherry trees to keep the birds fed.

Mr. Murray Porteous: That's quite a lot of cherry trees.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Yes. Then we moved up north to Stratford and went back to the dairy business, so we kind of went back the other way. So I do know something about the fruit and vegetable business. It can be very rewarding; it can be very unrewarding too. We went through frosts and whatever that we had years ago, and certainly it's quite devastating when things like that happen.

I want to get your thoughts on the new Bee Mortality Production Insurance Plan.

Mr. Murray Porteous: I haven't looked at the details of that plan yet. I understand it's a new plan that's come out. Part of the challenge of this whole process—I was approached about a year ago to see if I would submit an application as chair of Agricorp. The hope was that when the previous chair's term expired in May, they would have succession and fit right into that role. For whatever reason, the delays have pushed us back to here. So I'm missing that continuity and experience and wasn't involved in the strategic planning process that occurred in June. I have some catching up to do.

On the whole question of bees, there's obviously been a lot of concern about the bee situation in Ontario, whether it's pesticide use or whatever. On our farm, last year I ordered 50% more hives than I would normally rent for this spring because I knew that we would have high mortality in bees over the winter. They were predicting a really cold winter. Bees have to generate enough heat to survive in the middle of the hive.

Since this whole mortality situation started, the bee-keeping industry has been moving a lot of hives to New

Brunswick and then bringing them back. They didn't put up a lot of honey last year for their own survival through the winter, so where producers didn't feed those bees strong, they had severe losses.

There's a whole lot of questions around that. I think it would be very interesting to see what that model entails and how they mitigate the risks for the producer, because there's a whole lot of factors involved there.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: It's something we're not going to get into here, but there are a lot of things—I know that up our way, bees have actually had a pretty good year, but the producers were feeding them through the wintertime because of the severe weather we had.

Agricorp had an issue a few years ago when about 4,500 farmers were overpaid. That certainly ended up in the courts. I'm interested in your thoughts about red tape and the excessive use, I think, of permits. Every time a farmer turns around, he's got to fill out a new form. It seems that way, anyways.

Do you have some insight as to how you'd want to improve the processes with Agricorp to kind of cut some of this stuff down?

Mr. Murray Porteous: One of the things I want to look at is that any time you develop a major program that requires the use of a lot of data, you have a dedicated computer system for it. Computers, from talking to people in the computer business—they tell me that computers aren't made to work in series; they're made to work alone. They don't work very efficiently together when you've got a whole lot of them working on something.

When you develop a set of computers to handle the task of doing the data work on a program and then you introduce the next program that may use some of that same background data, then you're getting into silos of technology because you've got something that was developed three years ago, you're adding something now and you're adding something a couple of years later, and those platform technologies aren't going to work very well together.

I'm interested in exploring ways to make that technology work better and cut down on duplication and having to redo inputting data and so on. Every time you input data you create an opportunity for an error, and the more we can do that links programs and systems, the more efficient we are and the fewer mistakes get made.

The other thing to look at is that Agricorp works a lot with the commodity council, which I used to chair, and the adaptation council as well. With the commodity council, it's to gather input from producers on programming and delivery; with the adaptation council, it's to share best practices on crunching data, programs that come and so on. I think that in working back and forth with other similar organizations that have similar needs, we can cut down on the amount of duplication.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I think that's part of the thing. One of the complaints I get, especially from people in the fertilizer and chemical business and farmers, is that it seems that we are duplicating things. I know that you

can—I think this is true—spray a certain herbicide on your hayfields but you can't use it on your lawn. You have to have a different permit to do that. When we were out on the farm, legally I couldn't move over a little bit and get the dandelions on my lawn. I didn't have a permit to do that, and that's silly. So there are things like that that certainly could be looked at.

Do you see any improvements, just off the top of your head right now since you've been looking at this position, that would help producers better manage their risk?

Mr. Murray Porteous: Improvements to—

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: To the system, to Agricorp.

Mr. Murray Porteous: As I talked about, developing new programming for emerging crops and looking beyond producing commodities but really producing components from crops, and how do we mitigate the risk of going into those types of ventures: I think Agricorp can definitely play a role there.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): About a minute left.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: A minute? Okay. I think you pretty much answered my next question. It was, "In what direction do you see Agricorp moving to?" You've just mentioned that that's something that hasn't been addressed, I guess, in the past. I think I'm done. Thanks, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): Thank you very much, Mr. Pettapiece. Mr. Porteous, thank you very much for being here this morning and presenting to us. You may step down now. We'll consider the concurrence just at the end of the meeting. You're welcome to stay. Thanks again.

We will now consider the concurrences. Our first concurrence is for Gita Anand, nominated as member and vice-chair, Ontario Labour Relations Board. Could someone please move the concurrence? Mr. Rinaldi.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Thank you, Chair. I move concurrence in the intended appointment of Gita Anand, nominated as vice-chair, Ontario Labour Relations Board. Sorry if I didn't pronounce your name right.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): Thank you very much, Mr. Rinaldi. Any discussion? All those in favour? Opposed? Motion is carried.

Our next concurrence is for Murray Porteous, nominated as chair, Agricorp. Can someone please move the concurrence? Mr. Rinaldi.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Chair, I move concurrence in the intended appointment of Murray Porteous, nominated as chair, Agricorp.

The Chair (Mr. John Fraser): Thank you very much, Mr. Rinaldi. Any discussion? All those in favour? Opposed? Motion carried.

Congratulations, Ms. Anand and Mr. Porteous. Thank you very much again for being here this morning.

We now have a couple of deadline extensions to consider. The first is for Marie Biron, nominated as vice-chair, Champlain Local Health Integration Network—her certificate expires on November 22; and Kevin Costante, nominated as member of the Ontario Pension Board, whose deadline expires on November 22 as well.

Do I have unanimous consent to move those dates to December 22? Thank you very much. So done. Meeting adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 0950.

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