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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

A-40

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

A-40

**Standing Committee on
Government Agencies**

Intended appointments

1st Session
42nd Parliament

Tuesday 2 March 2021

**Comité permanent des
organismes gouvernementaux**

Nominations prévues

1^{re} session
42^e législature

Mardi 2 mars 2021

Chair: Gilles Bisson
Clerk: Julia Douglas

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CONTENTS

Tuesday 2 March 2021

Intended appointments.....	A-359
Mr. Alfonso Teshuba	A-359
Subcommittee report	A-362
Intended appointments.....	A-363
Mr. Dennis Matthews.....	A-363
Mr. Michael DiBrina.....	A-367

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

COMITÉ PERMANENT DES ORGANISMES GOUVERNEMENTAUX

Tuesday 2 March 2021

Mardi 2 mars 2021

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

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Good morning, everyone. I call this meeting to order. We are meeting to conduct reviews of intended appointments.

We have the following members in the room: Mr. Bouma from the Conservative side, Mr. Gates from the NDP official opposition, and myself as Chair, Gilles Bisson.

Going around in what we call cyberland, if you don't change the screen, I'll be able to read them all: Robin Martin, MPP—I don't have all your ridings. I'm sorry.

Do we have it here?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Julia Douglas): No, just the members' names.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Oh, it was the same. Okay. I'm just going to give your names: MPP Lorne Coe; MPP Rick Nicholls; MPP Norm Miller; MPP Aris Babikian; MPP Marit Stiles; Mr. Matthews, who is here as our first intended appointment; and MPP Billy Pang.

Obviously, we have legislative research, Hansard, and broadcast services, who are either in the room or somewhere out in Zoom land following this committee and doing the great work they do in order to support this committee and the members.

I would just ask people to speak slowly and clearly to make sure that everyone can understand you. Please wait until I recognize you before you start. Please also take a brief pause before beginning since it could take a bit of time for the audio to get turned on by the Clerk. All comments by members and witnesses must go through the Chair.

INTENDED APPOINTMENTS

MR. ALFONSO TESHUBA

Review of intended appointment, selected by official opposition party: Alfonso Teshuba, intended appointee as member, St. Clair College of Applied Arts and Technology—board of governors.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): When we last met before, it was with MPP Stiles as we were dealing with a concurrence in regard to Mr. Alfonso Teshuba, who was looking to be appointed as a member to the St. Clair College of Applied Arts and Technology board of governors.

MPP Stiles, you have the floor.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I know we're going to be voting on concurrence in Mr. Teshuba's appointment today. I want to point out that in the questioning of Mr. Teshuba last week, it was quite clear that Mr. Teshuba has been very involved with the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario and the federal Conservatives for many, many years, and is quite clearly a very partisan appointment. We have seen this government—we've seen a track record here of appointments of people who are predominantly donors and often quite involved in the party. In the last few weeks, we've seen some really unfortunate attempts to appoint people, like Mr. Queija, who, as we will all recall, is a non-francophone being appointed to the board of TFO because of his partisan Conservative Party connections and donations.

So we remain deeply concerned, and we urge the government to reconsider this appointment of Mr. Teshuba. I think we know that the people of Ontario share these concerns that we in the official opposition have raised repeatedly, as to the partisan nature of these appointments.

It's unfortunate that the current government is continuing along the same sort of path that the previous Liberal government pursued of really shamefully partisan appointments. Surely the people of this province deserve to make sure that the best appointees are made to these positions—and it shouldn't require that somebody be a donor to the Conservative Party of Ontario to be given a position on a board. It's outrageous. This government has in many situations been called to account by the people of this province for their failure to properly review candidates—

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Ms. Martin, I have you on the list.

Go ahead, MPP Stiles.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you.

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Is it a point of order?

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Oh, I'm sorry. It's a point of order. Excuse me.

MPP Martin.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you. I wouldn't have interrupted otherwise—it is a point of order.

I believe MPP Stiles is impugning the motives of the government in making these appointments. She said specifically—

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): That is not a point of order.

MPP Stiles, please continue.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Yes, it is. Impugning motives is—

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): It is not a point of order.

MPP Stiles.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you. I think I've been pretty clear. I absolutely believe that this government is making appointments based on partisan connections, on political donation history. You can see it in every appointment that appears before this committee.

I will add, Mr. Chair, that we only see a tiny fraction of those folks who are being appointed through this committee because the government members refuse, repeatedly—

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): A point of order, Mr. Babikian—or are you trying to get on the list?

Mr. Aris Babikian: No, it's a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Go ahead.

Mr. Aris Babikian: We, the publicly elected officials, always encourage people to get involved—

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): That you can do in debate. That's not a point of order.

MPP Stiles.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you, Mr. Chair. You'll find, as I know you're new to this committee—and I fully appreciate your experience here—that what we see happening here every week is that the government members don't like to wait for opportunities to debate; they like to jump in and interrupt me constantly. But then I know I'm saying something that's true.

In this case, I'm really urging the government members to consider how this looks to the people of this province. We have a government that's bringing forward election finance changes. In the Globe and Mail today, even their own supporters are not approving of this.

We need to have as fair, transparent and accountable a process as possible, and it would be really refreshing to see some of the government members sometimes—just once, even—speak out against some of these super-partisan appointments that are being made. The people of Ontario deserve so much better.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Is there anybody else who would like to have anything to say?

MPP Babikian, go ahead.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Mr. Chair, in this committee, we're trying to put the best people possible. In general, the public—

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Is that a point of order?

Mr. Aris Babikian: —wants to participate in their communities, in their neighbourhoods; to volunteer to work and help their neighbours and their friends in the community. If we're going to continue in this attitude towards the candidates—we are going on a witch hunt against very well-qualified individuals who are serving the

public. This attitude cannot continue, because we will discourage people from getting involved in public life, to volunteer, to help others. We cannot accuse people of guilt by association. I'm very—

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Ms. Stiles, is that a point of order, or are you trying to get back on the list? Okay.

Mr. Aris Babikian: —Mr. Teshuba is a very qualified person.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Go ahead, Mr. Babikian. I just had to double-check if that was a point of order.

Mr. Aris Babikian: I understand my colleague opposite would like to argue on certain matters of the appointees. Mr. Teshuba has so many qualifications, but because he donated money to the PC Party, we have to disqualify him for that reason alone? This is not fair, and this is not the right attitude.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): I have two speakers: MPP Gates, followed by MPP Stiles.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I just want to say that I agree that we should be putting the best people forward—people who want to volunteer and want to get into their community. That doesn't mean that they're all Conservatives, and that doesn't mean that they all either ran for your party or they donated to your party. There are a lot of good people in the province of Ontario; I'm agreeing with you.

But I've been on this committee before—I'm not new to this. I did this for four years.

I was here last week, and both of the people who came forward, and both of the people coming forward today, are tied heavily to your party.

So I'm agreeing with you: We should be looking at the best people. You're going to discourage people.

If you're going to continue to bring people who are PC supporters and failed candidates, you're going to get this every single week from me, because it's wrong and it's partisan. You can't hide from it. It's not just me saying it; my colleague just said that the Globe and Mail is picking up on this. It's absolutely ridiculous that if all we're going to do here is rubber-stamp PC donors, PC riding associations, PC failed candidates—there are a lot of those out there. They're all coming here. It's not fair to the public. It's not fair to anybody.

I agree with you: There are a lot of good people out there. But that doesn't mean they have to be tied to your party.

You should be ashamed of yourself—every single one of you guys today. As we go forward, if that's what you're going to do, you should be ashamed of yourselves.

There are a lot of good people out there who want to volunteer. I see them all the time in my community. They're not all NDPers. They're not all Liberals. They're not all Conservatives. They're out there working every day, making our communities better.

If you're going to appoint people, it should be fair, it should be balanced, and it shouldn't just be PC candidates or donors, people who work in your riding associations or

people who work on your campaigns. It's absolutely ridiculous. It should be done in a non-partisan way.

0910

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Our last speaker, so far, is MPP Stiles.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Further to what MPP Gates said, I want to reiterate that I think we all—my goodness, why would we be on this committee if we didn't believe that these appointments are important, that it's important to put the best people forward?

But I have to say, many of the great people of my community, the people I would want to see appointed to some of the roles, for example, from across this province are not necessarily—it should not be based on who you know or how much money you have contributed to the governing party, whoever that governing party is. The point of this committee, from the public's perspective, is to be yet another means of vetting those candidates and shining a light on those appointees.

I don't have the figures here in front of me, but I've done this before in committee—gone through every single appointee that we've had. It is not a stretch to throw out there that the vast majority of candidates who are being appointed to these committees are donors to the Conservative Party of Ontario, are connected through riding associations, or are—as Mr. Gates mentioned—failed candidates, often, for the Conservative Party. This is something that used to be a thing of the past. Surely we're better than that now. Surely the government has learned something from the absolute fiasco of a couple of years ago, of all those appointments that were being made because they happened to be pals or on some team with the Premier's chief of staff—

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Point of order, Mr. Nicholls.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I move that the question now be put with regard to the appointment of Mr. Teshuba. I believe we've had enough conversation on this.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): No, there's still the ability to debate, according to the rules.

MPP Stiles.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I know the government members find this annoying. I see it on their faces. They interrupt me constantly in this committee. I'm used to it. But I do want to say that I think the reason they do that—unfortunately, what happens is that these things take up a lot of time.

For example, two weeks ago, when we heard from Mr. Queija, a Conservative Party donor who was being appointed, as a non-francophone, to the TFO board as the vice-chair, and he resigned a couple of days later—what a waste of time. What a waste of time in this committee for us to have had to go through that process. He should never have gotten as far as this, and he was actually asked to apply.

That's another thing that we're noting again and again and again here—people are being requested, increasingly,

to apply for these positions by someone in the government, in the Premier's office—

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): MPP Pang, is that a point of order or do you want to get on the list?

Mr. Billy Pang: I think MPP Stiles's point has been repeated and repeated and repeated. I think we have heard her points already. So I think we should—

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Okay, MPP Pang—just for members to be clear, each member of this committee has up to 20 minutes in order to make their point when we're in debate, and if another member decides to take the floor, they get 20 minutes. There is no limit on how long that goes. It is up to the Chair. At this point, I don't think it has been unreasonable. It has been about 15 minutes, and we've heard from multiple members.

So we'll conclude with MPP Stiles, unless somebody else wants to speak after.

MPP Stiles.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Mr. Chair, I was wrapping up, but I do want to make the point that this, again, is something we have seen repeatedly in this committee, and I'm going to keep saying it—they want to silence me, they want to silence MPP Gates, they wanted to silence MPP Natyshak before, because we're not asking convenient questions, because we're asking inconvenient questions. And that is not—

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): MPP Pang, is that a point of order or do you want on the list?

Mr. Billy Pang: I think Ms. Stiles is talking about our motives. As you mentioned, we have regulations here: We can say "point of order." We can ask to speak at any time—

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Excuse me, Mr. Pang. That is not a point of order. Other members from your side have used similar language.

She's allowed to say what she's saying; it's not out of order. She was about to wrap up, but I see you've—MPP Stiles, do you still want the floor? Or are you done?

Ms. Marit Stiles: I do, actually.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Go ahead. You have the floor.

Mr. Babikian, were you trying to make a point of order or get on the list? No? Okay.

MPP Stiles.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Mr. Chair, I'll tell you honestly, I am really at my limit with this behaviour from these government members. This happens to me every single time. I'm making a point—as you said, I have the floor.

I was speaking specifically to Mr. Teshuba's appointment, which I have every right to do. You may want to try to silence me, but I was elected, just like you, by my constituents, by the people of Ontario to sit here and ask these important questions, because they care about transparency, about accountability. This government has a responsibility.

Do you know what the people of Ontario don't want? Us to be just ticking the boxes. They want us to ask these

types of questions. You all do a disservice to your constituents and your government in the behaviour here and the way that you constantly interrupt—

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Careful, MPP Stiles. Be careful with the language.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Carry on. You're done? Any other debate?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Yes, I'm wrapping up. I really appreciate all their attempts to interrupt me and sidetrack me. But just so you know, as long as they continue to do that, Mr. Chair, I will continue to speak.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): You are well within your right. Any MPP has the ability to take the floor on these matters for up to 20 minutes, and another MPP can do the same.

Any other debate? Any other debate? If there's no other debate, are members ready to vote?

Interjection: Recorded vote, please.

Ayes

Babikian, Bouma, Coe, Martin, Norman Miller, Nicholls, Pang.

Nays

Gates, Stiles.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): I declare the motion carried.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Now we're going to move to our next order of business, which is the review of the intended appointment—

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Julia Douglas): Subcommittee report.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Oh, the subcommittee report. How come it's not on my list here?

We had a subcommittee report dated February 25, 2021. I take it everybody got a copy. Does anybody want to say anything in regard to that? Mr. Bouma.

Mr. Will Bouma: I move adoption of the subcommittee report on intended appointments dated Thursday, February 25, 2021, on the order-in-council certificate dated February 19, 2021.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Any debate?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I don't have a copy of the subcommittee report, but I just want to—and I may be out of order, and you can rule me out of order; I'm fine with that.

I was very, very shocked last week. I listened to their House leader yesterday talk about committees and how Vice-Chairs should be elected. I just want to say that at no time prior to that meeting was there any conversation, I believe, between the NDP or the Conservatives or Liberals or the Greens on how we are doing these committees. They

have been done a certain way for a long, long time. The comment was made that nobody said anything.

I'll be honest: I was in a little bit of shock on how it was handled. I thought it was normally done—

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): MPP Nicholls, is that a point of order?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Yes, sir, it is a point of order. Respectfully, to Mr. Gates—what he's referring to right now, in my opinion, has absolutely nothing to do with what our purpose for this committee is this morning and in getting on with business. So I would ask that we move on.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): MPP Gates, we're actually dealing with the subcommittee report, which is not a matter that you are raising.

Mr. Wayne Gates: It's fine.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): You can raise it later in committee, once we get to that point.

Anybody else on debate of the subcommittee report? MPP Stiles.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Looking at the report of the subcommittee, I have some concerns. We have here a large number of people—and some weeks, in the official opposition, we pick fewer; some weeks, we pick more. It depends on how many appointees there are that we are being asked to review.

0920

Just so anybody watching this will understand, what we're doing is—we name certain people; we call them from the list and say that we'd like to hear from these people, that we would like them to appear before this committee.

Unfortunately, what we have happening, though, is that the government members refuse to—we don't have enough time, and we often will not—looking at this list, I would say we probably may get to hear from a couple of those people on the list if we're lucky and then it will time out. The government members will, as they have done every single time, not provide unanimous consent to extend the period that we have to review those appointees. So we don't get to hear from them. It becomes just another opportunity for the government to push through candidates without any kind of public review or process, which as you know—government members have a majority here, and they have certainly passed every single appointee that comes through, no matter how many issues we raise or how bad the situation is.

I do want to add, Mr. Chair, that I feel like the government members often try to make it look like we're trying to make these appointees look bad. I have great respect for everybody who has appeared before our committee and everybody who seeks to do public service—100%, of course. It is not about them. In fact, the problem is that the government does those appointees a disservice by not allowing this process to take place, by not allowing us to review and vet these candidates and ask the important questions that the people of Ontario expect us to be asking, to shed some light in those corners. The government, at the end of the day, is pretty clearly going

to do whatever they want to do anyway, whether or not the people of Ontario have a problem with it. But this is an important part of the process. There's a reason why this committee exists.

As we look at this, I would really hope and encourage—I know the Clerks work really, really hard to try to accommodate as many of these appointees as they can.

I wonder if we could hear from the Clerk about just how they go through the list. Is it done alphabetically? Is there a way to prioritize which candidates we might hear from first? That would be really helpful to those of us on the committee who are trying to hear from as many candidates as possible.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Anybody else, on the subcommittee report? Seeing no other debate, all those in favour? Please signify by saying yes or raising your hand. All those opposed? It's not unanimous, but it is passed.

INTENDED APPOINTMENTS

MR. DENNIS MATTHEWS

Review of intended appointment, selected by official opposition party: Dennis Matthews, intended appointee as member, Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corp.—board of directors.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): We're now going to move on to the review of intended appointments. First, we have Dennis Matthews, nominated as member of the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corp. board of directors.

As you may be aware, you have the opportunity, should you choose to do so, to make an initial statement. Following this, there will be questions from members of the committee. Questions will start with the official opposition, for 15 minutes, and then it will move on to each recognized party. I want to remind you, Mr. Matthews, that any time you take is actually going to come off the government's 15 minutes.

The floor is now yours.

Mr. Dennis Matthews: Thank you, Chair and members of the committee. I really appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today. And of course, I'm looking forward to your questions afterwards.

The opportunity to serve Ontario in this volunteer capacity at this critical time is an exciting one—and I say “serve Ontario” because tourism and the economic and livelihood benefits that come from it touch almost everyone in this province, whether they realize it or not. Sadly, there's really not a sector harder hit during COVID-19 than tourism and related hospitality sectors. I really think the role of the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corp., Destination Ontario, and the need to market the province in unique and innovative ways has never been greater. This is an area where I believe my background, expertise and energy are uniquely suited to contributing towards.

First, a few things about me: I live in the Beaches neighbourhood here in the city of Toronto, with my wife,

Alison, and three daughters, Charlotte, Georgia and Dorothy. I have a bachelor of public affairs, public administration and policy management, with a specialization in strategic public opinion analysis, from the Arthur Kroeger College at Carleton University. And I bring 15 years of experience in marketing, with a genuine focus on moving public opinion in both the private and public sectors, to this role.

I'm currently a vice-president at the national strategic communications firm Enterprise Canada, where I lead our marketing services, including our in-house creative agency, Hub at Enterprise. My work at Enterprise is wide and varied, from advertising and digital strategies to public relations advice for the Strategic Counsel, which [*inaudible*] clients ranging from major retailers to agriculture and food-and-beverage giants through to health care advocates and industry associations. In 2019, I was recognized by Adweek magazine, the American-based trade publication [*inaudible*] as a Toronto Brand Star for much of this work and my media commentary on marketing and politics.

I serve in a volunteer capacity on the marketing committee for the Michael Garron Hospital Foundation here in east Toronto.

While I consider myself semi-retired from politics today, my very first job was in the office of Prime Minister Stephen Harper, where I held a number of roles, ultimately serving as advertising director—a position that saw me playing an integral part for the \$65 million a year in ad placements across a range of government departments, from national defence to human resources and skills development.

Before joining Enterprise Canada, I briefly served as an adviser to the interim Leader of the Opposition in Ottawa, Rona Ambrose, and I spent five years as director of marketing and brand development at Sun Media, where I was responsible for advertising and marketing strategies for the Sun newspaper and television news channel.

What all this work has in common is expertise at the intersection of public policy, traditional marketing and public relations, the business of persuasion—not simply selling a product, but getting people to take meaningful action along the way. That's at the core of why I believe my expertise would be most valuable to Destination Ontario as the government embarks upon a major focus on tourism through tax credits, funding and marketing efforts. From Ontario Live to reaching the staycation crowd through to marketing to global audiences when the time is right, this is a critical mandate.

Let me close by again thanking you for the time today.

Thank you to Minister MacLeod for putting my name forward.

I'm genuinely excited about the prospect of volunteering in this role with Destination Ontario, as an appointee of this government. I would lend my advice, expertise and dedication to the fullest extent of my abilities.

I really look forward to the questions that you have here today.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Thank you very much. That time will be taken from the government time.

We will now go to 15 minutes for the official opposition. Mr. Gates.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I guess it comes as no surprise after our debate, but from a very brief look at your background, sir, it seems you are very well connected to the PC government, both federally and provincially. Beyond your current role at Enterprise Canada, where you worked with other previous members of the Doug Ford campaign team—which I believe is correct—you also served as Doug Ford’s senior advertising adviser during the 2018 campaign, and previously worked for the federal, under the Prime Minister Harper government. There seems to be a theory in what we’ve been discussing since we got here at 9 o’clock.

Also, in the last several years—again, it shouldn’t come as any surprise to anybody on the committee, and certainly not the Conservative members, that you donated \$4,000 to the Progressive Conservative Party and Conservative Party.

Do you believe that this level of involvement with the current government had an influence on your appointment to the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corp.?

I may jump in if I think you’re talking too long. I have lots of questions, so I’m just giving you a heads-up.

Mr. Dennis Matthews: Thank you very much for the question.

There’s obviously no denying that I’ve had political involvement in the past, and I’m obviously very public about that, and have been, in my public and private life.

What I would say is that I applied for this position on my own. Nobody asked me to apply for it. I was looking for a way to serve the province of Ontario in some capacity. Obviously, I have a marketing and communications background. I applied for this position because of that background, and that’s why I’m here today.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I just have a throw-in question, quite frankly. Just by some of the comments that my colleagues asked or said—do you believe that there may be other people in the province of Ontario who are really good volunteers, who aren’t PC Party supporters? Do you think a Liberal or an NDP might be a good volunteer, as well, in the province of Ontario—or just PC Party supporters?

Mr. Dennis Matthews: It’s up to the members of this committee to make those determinations.

What I could add is that when I applied online, it was an easy process. I’ve actually encouraged friends and other people to apply as well, and they’re not PC members; it’s an easy process, and I think it’s pretty open to do so. So I’d really encourage anybody you’re referencing to apply and go through the process. I think there are a number of vacancies out there.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Yes, there are a lot of good people in the province of Ontario; I’m going to agree with you.

What’s your background in tourism?

Mr. Dennis Matthews: At Enterprise Canada—obviously, we can’t get into our client details, but we have

a range of marketing and advertising clients, and we’ve done work for a number of small tourism operators, particularly in the Niagara region, over the years.

0930

But I think that the big thing [*inaudible*] and the challenge brought on by the pandemic is that we’re outside of [*inaudible*] for tourism. Instead of just advocating coming to a certain attraction or province, we’re in a world where, once it’s safe to do so, we need to convince people to actually travel in the first place. This is going to be a significant challenge for jurisdictions all over the world. You’re not buying a product here or going to a specific thing; this is big, life-changing events that have taken place. And so we need to really be taking a big-picture view to, when it’s safe, finding ways to market Ontario differently than before.

In particular, digital, obviously—there has been a transition that has been accelerated by the pandemic in how you reach people. So I would say that’s an area of expertise that I bring to this file here. And my clients, on a range of issues, have been facing similar challenges in getting customers to come back in the door or getting customers to do things in general. It’s that approach that I would like to bring to this role here.

Mr. Wayne Gates: You were the vice-president of marketing and communications at Enterprise Canada. In that role, have you lobbied on behalf of any of your clients, or does your work strictly relate to marketing and communication material for your clients? And have you ever registered with the province as a lobbyist?

Mr. Dennis Matthews: Let me try to get all that. No, I’m not a lobbyist. No, I’ve never registered with the province, nor do I conduct those types of duties at Enterprise Canada. And sorry; what was your third question again?

Mr. Wayne Gates: Let me get it back here. Have you ever registered with the province as a lobbyist?

Mr. Dennis Matthews: No.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Never?

Mr. Dennis Matthews: No, nor federally either.

Mr. Wayne Gates: You were probably too busy working for the government; you didn’t have time. I’m not sure. Did you ever represent any clients related to the tourist industry?

Mr. Dennis Matthews: In a lobbying sense? No.

Mr. Wayne Gates: And what would that mean, “in a lobbying sense”?

Mr. Dennis Matthews: Well, if your question is, “Have I lobbied the government on behalf of anybody?”, the answer is no.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Okay. As you may or may not know—I know Rick didn’t like that question; he’s shaking his head. But unfortunately, I have to ask these questions. It’s my job.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): I’ll remind members to use last names or the ridings, please.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Yes, I apologize.

I represent the riding of Niagara Falls, so you can imagine how important the success of the province’s

tourism industry is to me. The pandemic has been a huge blow to the Niagara Falls hospitality and tourist industry. It's going to take a lot of work, once we get back to normal, to get the industry where it was prior to 2020, before COVID-19. You may or may not know; the committee might not know: We've lost 40,000 jobs to COVID-19. We've had a number of our small and medium-sized businesses close. Our hotel industry is begging the province for support that they're not getting, to the point that some may have to go into bankruptcy or sell their businesses.

The Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corp. is a non-partisan organization—hopefully, you're aware of that. However, your background is very partisan. Your inside experience, as noted on your company's website, includes your experience directing advertising and marketing efforts for several national and provincial Conservative election campaigns. So it would be fair to say you're skilled at delivering partisan marketing and advertising messages.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): That was a question?

Mr. Wayne Gates: Yes.

Mr. Dennis Matthews: Was that a question?

Mr. Wayne Gates: Well, it's a bit of a statement, because I want you to understand how important tourism is to the province of Ontario, which I'm sure you know. In my riding, whether it's in Niagara Falls or whether it's in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ridgeway, Crystal Beach or Fort Erie, we've been hit very, very hard. We all know in the that the tourist sector that it was the first to be hit, and it's probably going to be the last to recover, and so it's important to get that message out to you, who is probably going to sit on the board, to sit on the agency. I want you to understand that, as the representative for Niagara Falls, I know what we need in Niagara Falls. We need a lot of support. So that's why I got into Niagara Falls.

The last one: Would it be fair to say you're skilled at delivering partisan marketing and advertising messages in the role that you play?

Mr. Dennis Matthews: Yes, I think it would be fair to say that I'm still delivering those types of messages, and I've worked on a number of campaigns over the years. But I also have a private sector life where I work on marketing and communications strategies for all kinds of businesses, big and small.

Obviously, from hearing your statement there, I understand politically, we're probably not on the same page on a lot of issues. But I can assure you that we're on the same page on doing everything we can for the tourism sector of this province. I said in my opening statement that it's hard to think of a sector that has been harder hit. It's why I'm excited to put my name forward to volunteer for this position. I think it's critical for the province to get this right going forward. It's going to take incredible focus over, I think, a number of years to really bring the sector back to where it was.

When you look at your region in particular, being on the border, with the border closed and that situation there sort of compounding it, finding ways in the short term to

encourage the staycation crowd and getting people moving in the province when it's safe to do so is an obvious first step.

I would view this position as one where politics have to be left at the door. Getting the tourism sector back, as I say, is going to take years. I think it's going to take a lot of creative energy, and that's where the marketing side of this is going to be absolutely critical. We're not just convincing people to go to an attraction again; we have to convince them that it's safe to go out and do so in the first place when the time is right.

I'm really excited for it. I understand the political background and listened to the preamble before—I understand the concerns over politics. But I view this position as non-partisan, and that's how I would conduct myself through and through.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Dennis, I appreciate those words, because that's what we're trying to do, with my colleague—talking about how this committee should be non-partisan. Quite frankly, when somebody comes here, we should be asking different questions than what your affiliation is with your party—if it was more non-partisan. Unfortunately, you're being brought into the storm because of the people, who are probably on the screen—they're not in this room; there's only one in the room—who continue to do this every week. What we're trying to say is—I'm agreeing with you, Dennis. There are good people outside of PC supporters who want to do good work for the province of Ontario, who want to get involved with the tourism sector, whether you're talking about up north, where they have lots of challenges—because the border was closed this year and a lot of the Americans were not coming up north, a lot of those tourism sectors up there were hit very, very hard. I already said my area has been hit very, very hard. There are a lot of good people who want to get involved. This should be a non-partisan committee, so my questions should be about, "How can we work collectively together to get the tourist sector better?" But I can't do that because they continue to bring the same clientele, basically, to this committee every week. It's unfortunate that you have to listen to that.

I'm going to agree with you, Dennis—and I want you to write this down: I actually agreed with you, during this conversation, that we should leave the politics at the door. When I walk through the door at 9 o'clock on a Tuesday morning, I'm not coming here, saying, "Oh, I've got to talk about the PC Party again because all they're doing is putting their PC Party forward instead of putting the best people forward who want to volunteer." There's a lot of names that have come to committee that we're not seeing; I understand that—but they all shouldn't be PC Party. It's just driving me nuts. If they're going to continue to do it, these meetings are going to be the same way every week. Hopefully, they're going to get a strong message. Do they want to come every Tuesday morning at 9 o'clock and listen to this? It's up to them.

Do you anticipate using the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership to spread Conservative-aligned messages?

Mr. Dennis Matthews: No, not in any way.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Roughly three and a half minutes left.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'm going to give you a minute on this, but I have another question I want to ask you, so please keep it short. Thank you; I appreciate it.

Mr. Dennis Matthews: No, I will not use this position to advance Conservative Party messaging in any way—if that was your question.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Mr. Gates.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'm going to move on to the next one, because I think this is a very important question that hopefully we can have a little bit of a back and forth on, if you don't mind.

Going back to the issue that the tourism industry is currently facing because of the COVID-19 pandemic: We have long been advocating to this government for a number of initiatives to help tourism operators, including a private member's bill which I put forward that offers a tax credit for domestic vacations. It would be \$1,000 that you could get a credit for. Whether you want to go to Niagara Falls—which I would probably support, people coming to Niagara Falls, once it's safe to do so—or even go up north or come to Toronto, a \$1,000 credit would automatically go. The government has done a similar program, but they're talking about a \$5,000 limit where you get 20%. It would still be \$1,000, but the problem that I'm having with it, quite frankly, and I'll be very clear with it, is, there's a lot of people who want to go on what I would call a domestic vacation who might be able to afford \$2,000. With my plan, I think it's opened up to more people—people who might have two kids and don't have \$5,000 to spend, but who might have a couple thousand, knowing they're going to get the \$1,000 tax credit, to take that vacation. We've already said, very clearly, we have to do everything we can for the tourist sector. It was hardest hit first, and it's going to be the last to recover. I'll ask you, as part of my question—I'll read the rest of it—do you think that would be something that would help the tourist industry?

0940

The other thing I'm being asked by a lot of the hoteliers, particularly the big hoteliers, is to provide low-interest-rate loans to the operators.

What role do you think the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership can play in helping to rebuild the industry post-pandemic?

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): One minute left.

Mr. Dennis Matthews: It's a great question, and maybe I would say that there are two answers to it.

There are short-term issues in how, while the pandemic is still on, in part or full, you encourage the right amount of domestic tourism. That's going to obviously be a mix of things, whether it's tax credits or supports for struggling businesses directly.

I think the bigger challenge, but perhaps the more exciting one, is in the medium and longer term. There is going to be a renewed fight for tourism dollars all over the world. How do we find ways to position Ontario at the top tier of that list of destinations to go to? That's where there's obviously support, and I know the government has

provided a bunch—the suggestion of the different tax credits. I'm going to leave that to the policy experts—but these tax credits are a good way to encourage folks to be doing what they can in the short term. I think it's in the longer term of how we make sure that the province is well positioned to capture tourism dollars from the United States and places around the world—

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Okay, time is over. Thank you.

We have 12 minutes left for the government side. Mr. Bouma.

Mr. Will Bouma: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Through you, I'd like to thank Mr. Matthews for joining us today. I could understand if he left this meeting today thinking that some members of this committee don't necessarily hold to the charter—of freedom of association. However, I'll leave that.

I do review a lot of candidate résumés on a regular basis, and I must say that your résumé did catch my eye; more specifically, as it relates to the eventual opening of the province and the task ahead for Destination Ontario, which will be monumental.

As an inbound promoter of the province of Ontario, can you share with the committee a little bit more about how you might leverage your digital marketing expertise to promote the province as a destination?

Mr. Dennis Matthews: Thank you for the question.

Again, I'll pick up on what I was saying a moment ago. I think there are obviously the short-term struggles and finding ways to do what we can in the short term, but the bigger success to be unlocked is in the longer term.

When you look at the philosophy I often bring to my clients in this space, it's to get your strategy right, get the creative ideas and then the targeting. I think the strategy is so much dependent on COVID-19 and air travel and how that shakes out, and the border, but I think it's the ideas and targeting that are so critical in finding ways to get the right creative energy into positioning the province as an exciting place to visit. Everybody in this room, no doubt, has their favourite spots and attractions, and so do I and my family. We've got a great story to tell, and it's finding a way to tell that creatively.

When you look at the targeting side and digitally, the opportunity today—and we've done this for some clients before—is to pick a part of the world and digitally target it in quick ways, to learn and to see what's working. As the pandemic recedes, there are going to be parts of the world that will be faster to travel, faster to be making purchases. Using the most sophisticated digital targeting that we can to go after the types of people who will come here—whether they're in far-flung parts of the world or different states in the US, wherever that is—finding the right markets to be inviting people to come into the province, and really positioning it as the place to be, I think, is going to be so critical going forward here.

Mr. Will Bouma: I will pass it to MPP Nicholls.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): MPP Nicholls.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Good morning, Mr. Matthews. It's nice to see you here this morning and to learn more about

you and your background; specifically, as it relates to your involvement in this particular position that you are applying for.

As with most organizations, Destination Ontario operates with a fixed budget. As a result, scarce resources are deployed based on the greatest return on investment.

With your marketing and communication background, how would you develop, deploy and defend a campaign to promote Ontario as a must-visit destination?

Mr. Dennis Matthews: Let me assure you that everybody's budget is fixed; that's not a challenge unique to government. What I'd say is, whenever somebody comes to me with a fixed budget, this is where being creative is so important. Obviously, creative is king. You have to have a good story to tell, a good narrative, stuff that punches through. We're out of a world where you can get a big media buy and just put it on repeat over and over again. You have to have interesting content that engages people; in particular, on social. If you look at where people are picking travel destinations, whether it's being Instagram-friendly—all of that kind of stuff—you've got to find ways to really be creative and punch through.

Obviously, in digital, your dollars go further, but it's also about deploying the right analytics and the right metrics to make sure that what you're doing is working.

I think the big thing that I would be encouraging the folks at Destination Ontario to do is to be constantly looking at the analytics at every turn: What is working? Who's actually coming? What's the return on investment?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: On a side note, I've used Enterprise several times, and I always [*inaudible*] when they would come pick me up.

I will yield our time now. We have no further questions, Chair.

Thank you very much, Mr. Matthews, for your time today. I trust that you found it to be rather invigorating.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): There being no further questions from the government, that will conclude the time allocated. Thank you very much, Mr. Matthews.

MR. MICHAEL DiBRINA

Review of intended appointment, selected by official opposition party: Michael DiBrina, intended appointee as member, Cambrian College of Applied Arts and Technology—board of governors.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Next, we have Michael DiBrina, nominated as a member of the Cambrian College of Applied Arts and Technology board of governors, which we all know well as a college.

As you may be aware, you have the opportunity, should you chose to do so, to make an initial statement. Any time you use in that statement will come off of the government time. Following this, there will be questions from members of the committee. Questions will start with the government this time and then go to the official opposition. Fifteen minutes for the government—

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): —for your presentation, if you want to say a few words, and we'll start with the government, who has 15 minutes.

Mr. Michael DiBrina: Good morning, Mr. Chair and members of the standing committee.

I was born in Sudbury in an immigrant family. I am first-generation Canadian. I am the middle of three children of a working-class family, living in one of the toughest neighbourhoods in Sudbury. We were poor financially, but rich in culture, life lessons and love.

At the age of 18, my father, who was the sole income earner, suddenly died in a work-related accident. It was at that time I needed to work and help support the family and put myself through school in order to get my education.

Once I completed my education, I entered into the financial service industry, where I began my career about 31 years ago. The DiBrina Group head office was in Sudbury, with sales offices in both Toronto and New Liskeard. I built the company and sold it on October 1, 2017, to a Fortune 500 company called Gallagher. Today, I have the title and position of area president for Gallagher benefit services.

Some of my business accolades that I have achieved are MDRT life member and Top of the Table member for probably the last 20 years; Bell excellence entrepreneur of the year; top investment office in Canada with IPC; as well as many other accolades.

I have a philosophy that if you live in a community, you need to give back and invest, both with your time and financial resources, when possible. I have done so for 31 years.

I am and have been involved with the Rotary Club; Kivi Park; the chamber of commerce; many fundraising boards like the hospice, St. Joe's Villa and others over the years. I have given to many great causes, from beautifying our community, to the hospice, to the hospitals, to the Sudbury Theatre Centre, and our education, through bursaries. Our family has just agreed to donate \$100,000 to a long-term-care facility that will be announced in the upcoming months.

I am also very proud to say that during my term as campaign chair for the United Way, we had, at that time, the most successful financial campaign in history.

What I am also very proud of is the ability to raise two fine sons and my marriage with my high school sweetheart for almost 32 years.

0950

I am excited to bring my passion, my work and my personal experience to this position. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Thank you. Just for our records, could you confirm that your first name is spelled M-I-C-H-A-E-L? We have it spelled differently here.

Mr. Michael DiBrina: My legal name is Michele in Italian, M-I-C-H-E-L-E. I go by Michael.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Okay. That clarifies what we were asking.

The government is next.

Mr. Will Bouma: Through you, Mr. Chair: Thank you, Mr. DiBrina, for joining us today. Your story is an absolutely wonderful, Canadian story, even with the tragedies that you experienced as a youth.

In your opening remarks, you specifically mentioned the importance of an institution like Cambrian College—not only for your community, but for the dreams of so many new Canadians. Not only is it a place of higher education, but there's no doubt that it provides many jobs and works with the community for the betterment of the region.

Could you expand a little bit more on why schools like Cambrian are so important to their communities?

Mr. Michael DiBrina: Thank you for that question.

For me, the college is really a part of our community—you mentioned the education system, but for sports and arts, as well. Also, what it does is fuel and maintain the economy in Sudbury.

Here's a little bit of a story: One of my former [*inaudible*] was from St. Catharines, Ontario. He went to Cambrian College, where we have an [*inaudible*] we've had it here for almost 20 years—and brought him in. Not only was he a partner and a former Cambrian College student, but we were able to recruit him and keep him here in northern Ontario.

Without a facility like Cambrian College, it won't help facilitate the growth of our community, maintaining our youth in our local communities.

I'm very proud of what they've done and what they continue doing.

Mr. Will Bouma: I appreciate that answer very much.

In the interests of time and to keep committee business going, we will end our questions there.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): The government has chosen to end their questions.

That brings us to the official opposition. MPP Stiles, you have 15 minutes.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Welcome to the committee, Mr. DiBrina. We appreciate you joining us here today.

Obviously, Cambrian College is very important, as the member from the government side mentioned. It's crucial, I would think, to the local economy in Sudbury and also for the region.

Very recently, I've been meeting with faculty associated with Laurentian University. I know that you will be familiar, of course, with the situation at Laurentian University. I want to ask you a few questions about that, but before I do, I want to make sure I don't forget—because we often do.

In this committee, as you've heard, I think, we've seen a lot of folks with partisan connections appointed by this government—in fact, the vast majority. So I hope you'll understand that I'm going to ask you some questions about that, and I'm sure you expected that, because you are being appointed to an important position here, as part of the board of governors of Cambrian College.

Have you given money to the Conservative Party of Ontario?

Mr. Michael DiBrina: MPP Stiles, I have done so, yes.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I do my research, but I wanted to hear it from you.

Do you have a sense of how much you've given over the last few years?

Mr. Michael DiBrina: No, I would not know.

Ms. Marit Stiles: So you wouldn't be surprised to hear that you've given about \$2,700 to the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario over the last two years?

Mr. Michael DiBrina: I would think that would be correct.

Ms. Marit Stiles: You've given some donations to the federal Conservative Party, as well.

Mr. Michael DiBrina: I would think I would have, yes.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Are you a member of the Conservative Party, either federally or provincially?

Mr. Michael DiBrina: Provincially, I am, yes.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Are you involved with local riding events and such around the Conservative Party? Most members would be.

Mr. Michael DiBrina: Not really. I may attend the odd meeting, but I'm not very active.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Have you run for the Conservatives in the past?

Mr. Michael DiBrina: I have not, no.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Do you have any plans to run, in a political sense, for the Conservative Party?

Mr. Michael DiBrina: No, I do not.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Okay. I just wanted to check in on that because, as I've said, we've seen this repeatedly here. Of course, everybody has a right to donate to whatever party they want to, 100%. It's just simply that we are seeing a pattern.

Mr. DiBrina, were you contacted by anyone and asked to apply for this position—or suggesting that you apply for any appointments?

Mr. Michael DiBrina: Well, I talked to the president and showed my interest, and that's where we are today.

Ms. Marit Stiles: The president of the college or the—

Mr. Michael DiBrina: The college.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Anybody in the ministry or the government? Any elected officials?

Mr. Michael DiBrina: Absolutely not.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Have you ever met Mr. Ford—the Premier?

Mr. Michael DiBrina: I met him at one function a number of years ago.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Okay. I'm going to return to some of my questions about post-secondary issues.

You nodded when I talked about Laurentian University—terrible situation. I know with Cambrian and Laurentian, this is something that everybody in the Sudbury region is reeling over. I talked to our local MPPs here, with MPP France Gélinas and MPP Jamie West—being very deeply concerned and pushing the government to take more action to support Laurentian.

I want to get your opinion about a few things there, because I think it speaks to—well, I'll give you an example. Ernst and Young filed a report with the Ontario Superior Court of Justice as part of the creditor protection

proceedings that are under way—very, very unusual. I don't think anything like this has happened in the post-secondary sector. One of the things they noted is that when something like this happens with one institution, these things can really cascade. What I'm hearing increasingly is that obviously Laurentian is such an important institution in the north, in Sudbury, in that region, in the northeast, but also that Laurentian is really what people are calling, in the post-secondary sector, the canary in the coalmine. This is the concern.

It is a fact that post-secondary funding in Ontario—and it preceded this government; this government has made it worse, a 10% reduction. We have seen Ontario emerge as having the least funding per student provided by the province of any province in Canada, by quite a long shot, actually, and I want to get your opinion about that. I think what we're starting to see is, when times get bad, like in a pandemic, these institutions don't have a lot of wiggle room.

What is your thought about what the government's role should be in helping Laurentian out, but also in protecting and properly funding the college and university sector?

Mr. Michael DiBrina: I shared my story about where I grew up. My dad died in an accident, and I had to put myself through school. I was fortunate to get some form of grants through the program, but I put some of my own money and my own skin in the game, and I think because of it I'm a better person. I got the education and learned the value of hard work and money, so I'm okay with students putting some of their skin in the game like I did.

Ms. Marit Stiles: So are you saying you're okay with tuition being increased to cover losses of the—

Mr. Michael DiBrina: That's not my place. I think my focus right now would be that we need to make sure that our post-secondary education schools are there for our students, to allow them to get the tools they need to participate in society and bring value to our communities and our country. What I'm trying to get at is that if some students, like I did, have to work to put some additional dollars in to get the education—you tend to get more value out of it at the end of the day. At least that's my—

Ms. Marit Stiles: Mr. DiBrina, if I may, I appreciate that, and I certainly—I paid my way through university. I think, actually, to be honest, back when you and I were in university and college and stuff—or when our generation was—we were paying a whole lot less tuition than students pay now. I could work a summer job and have a part-time job in university and cover my tuition and my rent and everything. It was possible. But that's because government was subsidizing a much bigger piece of it.

1000

Nowadays, young people are carrying enormous debt. I don't know any post-secondary students who don't have a job to try to pay for university. I think that there's a very small number of young people whose parents can afford to cover them.

I agree with you: Most young people will. But I'm a little concerned about that, because I would suggest that what we've seen over the last 20 or 30 years, since I was

in university, is government reduce their portion of the funding and tuition rise dramatically.

Mr. Michael DiBrina: MPP Stiles, I don't want to comment on that. I shared, in my opening remarks, that as a business individual, I've provided bursaries to students who needed them. I think we all have a part, at the end of the day, to help students get the education they need—government, individuals, families and, hopefully, our community. I think a mixture of all of it will allow us to move forward.

Do I know the amount, volumes or, fiscally, the numbers that are being received? I don't, so unfortunately, I can't really comment on that.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Do you know what the tuition is at Cambrian College right now?

Mr. Michael DiBrina: Unfortunately, I do not.

Ms. Marit Stiles: What's happening at Laurentian—where I think this seems to be going is that it's the pensions that are going to get clawed back. How do you feel about universities being forced into a situation where it's the pensioners who end up paying the price?

Mr. Michael DiBrina: MPP Stiles, I'm still waiting for the CCAA report. I don't want to comment on any of the things until I see a final report. This is obviously sad—what has happened to our local university and our communities and surrounding areas and, more importantly, our students. But I think I would like to wait for the report to come out to get any comments or thoughts or suggestions at this point in time.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Could you maybe, though, just simply—

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): MPP Stiles, five minutes.

Ms. Marit Stiles: How many minutes left, Mr. Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): I'm letting you know you have five minutes.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In terms of understanding the kind of role you'll play at Cambrian as post-secondary institutions are going through these kinds of changes, and in this moment, I want to say, the government has, through this kind of “performance-based” funding plan—what do you think of that plan that the government has in place? It can result in a drop of about 10% in funding for post-secondary institutions. One of the things that we're seeing and that I find really worrisome is the increase in class sizes. Our students who, like you said—so many of them, especially at the colleges, work really hard to put themselves through, to get those qualifications. It's so important for our economy. Then they go in, and their program sizes, the class sizes are increasing, and they don't get that important contact with the instructors that they need. What do you think about those funding cuts to our college and university sector?

Mr. Michael DiBrina: MPP Stiles, I would tell you that until I am, hopefully, appointed to the board of governors and get a better idea of what's going on and have to get briefed and understand what the vision of the future looks like—I probably would hold back on any comments until I've been debriefed.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I do hope you do think through some of that stuff, because I think colleges and universities are right at the forefront—as you said in your earlier comments, they’re such an important part of the local economy. They’re employers.

We saw, I think at Laurentian, the non-faculty staff have already taken a pay cut before any of this, which is tough in this moment—to be considering a pay cut when the cost of living is increasing. In a sense, then, it’s the workers, those working people, who are paying for what the government really should be providing.

I’m the education critic for the NDP, and I am very concerned about this next generation, the impact that the learning disruption has had on young people—not just children, but youth and young adults. I wonder if you could speak to what you think the government’s role is in helping people weather this storm.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Two minutes left

Mr. Michael DiBrina: MPP Stiles, just to be clear, are you asking about the university or in general?

Ms. Marit Stiles: I think the university sector in particular, but if you want to go more to—

Mr. Michael DiBrina: Yes. If you look at the university—I can keep on going back to it. I’d like to see the CCAA report and get a better feel of what has happened. It’s devastating to see what has occurred to the university. I don’t know all the details at this point in time, but I think once that information comes out, I’ll have a better understanding of what happened. Hopefully, there will be a plan to restructure it and put it back on the map. We need it for northern Ontario, just like we need it for Cambrian College. It’s an important part of our communities. It helps us retain our youth. It allows businesses to grow and fuels our economy. I’d like to see a report before I give any of my thoughts at that point in time, as well.

But again, I think we all need to be fiscally responsible at the end of the day.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): You have about 50 seconds.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Well, if fiscal responsibility in this case means significant layoffs, that’s government that [*inaudible*] the cause of that too, in the end. So it may be better to invest in actually trying to support the university sector as an important employer so we don’t end up with people losing their homes, losing their jobs. That impact on the economy, locally, will be massive. It’s a disaster waiting to happen, I would say.

I hope that you, as a local, active community member, will be very much at the forefront of pushing this government to provide the support that Laurentian is going to need.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Okay, and with that 10 seconds to spare, I thank very much the official opposition.

That concludes the time we have allocated for both of these presentations.

I’d like to thank you, Mr. DiBrina, for appearing before the committee.

We will now consider the intended appointment of Dennis Matthews, nominated as member, Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corp. board of directors.

Mr. Bouma, you would like to move concurrence?

Mr. Will Bouma: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. Through you, I move concurrence in the intended appointment of Dennis Matthews, nominated as member of the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corp. board of directors.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Any discussion? MPP Stiles.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I think this is a very highly partisan appointment. The appointee was asked some really important questions by MPP Gates. It seems pretty clear that this is a person who has political connections at the very highest levels of both this government and the Conservative Party of Canada. Once again, I have to say, as somebody who has been watching this committee’s proceedings over the last—I’ve been involved here for the last two years—it’s part of what I think is a very troubling trend.

Frankly, this government does a great disservice, I would argue, and our committee will do a disservice, if we allow this to go through, to other appointees and to Mr. Matthews. This does not look good on anyone. It does not look good on anyone to be part of just yet another Conservative government politically connected donor appointee. It sends a pretty strong message to the people of this province that, as this government is at the same time changing the election laws to increase the amount that people can donate, loosening things up considerably—again, to the benefit largely of this government and this governing party—we’re going to end up in a situation again where it’s like pay to play. We have seen it happen when it comes to government policy, when it comes to the way that this government brings in MZOs.

This government’s policies in the middle of a pandemic seem to be aimed at just making life easier for developers, and we know who developers are giving money to. The developers have this government in their pocket.

When I see things like this, and as Mr. Gates pointed out—and Mr. Gates is from a region that depends very much on this agency and the appointment that Mr. Matthews is going to be put in. I think it remains deeply concerning that we continue to see this trend.

1010

I want to add that this is not just any potential candidate. I credit Mr. Matthews for being so upfront and honest about his political connections—I grant him that; at least he has been very upfront about it. This is somebody who made advertisements for Stephen Harper, who served the Premier of this province’s senior advertising adviser and who is now being appointed to the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corp.—an appointment that is significant. It’s the kind of thing that, when you think about it, people will put on their CVs, will talk about with great pride—

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Do you have a point of order, Mr. Nicholls?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Yes, I do, sir. With all due respect to the member from Davenport, she’s reiterating everything that we heard before. We have business—

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Mr. Nicholls, that's not a point of order. She has the right to debate the concurrence. It is every member's right to debate. If you wish to debate the concurrence, you'll get 20 minutes after her.

MPP Stiles.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In fact, just to correct MPP Nicholls: I actually wasn't one of the people who questioned the appointee; Mr. Gates did, so this is the first time I'm raising this—not that it matters, because I have the right to anyway, and will continue to. I won't be silenced by the government members.

This is part of a trend on the part of this government. Once again, we're seeing a very highly placed and well-connected Conservative Party insider being appointed. We saw two of those today, by the way; I'll speak to the other one when we get to that point, if we get to that point.

Earlier today, we saw this government go ahead and appoint Mr. Teshuba, another Conservative Party-connected individual in the Windsor region, despite the concerns that myself and Mr. Gates and others have raised here repeatedly, despite the concerns that I think Ontarians have made very clear in the past about this government's track record in appointing only Ford or Conservative insiders again and again to public appointments. And here we go again.

I'm just going to read it out, because I have done some research here: In 2017, Mr. Matthews gave \$112 to the PCs. In 2019, it was a little more—maybe he was in a better position—\$1,083; in 2020, \$1,081; in 2020, during

the by-elections, another \$1,081, as well as federal Conservative donations going way back. So this is a Conservative Party insider being appointed to a board by the Ontario government, somebody who clearly is super-connected to the Premier and to the former Prime Minister, Stephen Harper.

At a time when things like the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corp., as my colleague Mr. Gates made very clear, are absolutely critical to saving, to helping us recover, particularly to local economies in the Niagara region, for example—in my area, even, in Toronto, we rely a lot on tourism—I am deeply concerned that, once again, we are seeing this government continue to make these highly partisan appointments.

And frankly, we're only hearing from a fraction of them. We are only hearing from a couple of them every week, because this government refuses our attempts to have conversations, even, about extending the deadline, so that we can hear from people before they are just simply signed off, passed through with no consideration—no light being shone, again, on those dark corners that this Conservative government—

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): MPP Stiles, unfortunately the committee has run out of time.

I just want to remind members, because we ran out of time, just so that you're aware: The intended appointees we heard from today are on a certificate that is about to expire, so the Clerk is going to send out an email and ask for unanimous consent in order to extend those and others.

With that, this committee is adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 1015.

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