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of Ontario



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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

A-10

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

A-10

**Standing Committee on
Government Agencies**

Intended appointments

1st Session
43rd Parliament

Thursday 23 March 2023

**Comité permanent des
organismes gouvernementaux**

Nominations prévues

1^{re} session
43^e législature

Jeudi 23 mars 2023

Chair: Will Bouma
Clerk: Isaiah Thorning

Président : Will Bouma
Greffier : Isaiah Thorning

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

COMITÉ PERMANENT DES ORGANISMES GOUVERNEMENTAUX

Thursday 23 March 2023

Jeudi 23 mars 2023

The committee met at 0900 in room 151.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Good morning, everyone. The Standing Committee on Government Agencies will now come to order. We are meeting to conduct a review of intended appointees. We're joined by staff from legislative research, Hansard, and broadcast and recording.

To make sure everyone can understand what is going on, it is important that all participants speak slowly and clearly, which means I have to slow down by 150 words a minute, as my staff tells me. Please wait until I recognize you before starting to speak. As always, all comments by members and witnesses should go through the Chair.

The first item of business will be the adoption of subcommittee reports, which were distributed in advance. We have the subcommittee report dated March 9, 2023. Could I please have a motion? Member Coe.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you, Chair. Through you, I move adoption of the subcommittee report on intended appointments dated Thursday, March 9, 2023, on the order-in-council certificate dated March 3, 2023.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Is there any discussion of the motion? None? Are members ready to vote? All those in favour? That's unanimous. Thank you.

Next we have the subcommittee report dated March 16, 2023. Could I please have a motion? Member Coe.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you, Chair. Through you, I move adoption of the subcommittee report on intended appointments dated Thursday, March 16, 2023, on the order-in-council certificate dated March 10, 2023.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Very good. Any discussion on the motion? Seeing none, are members ready to vote? All those in favour? Unanimous. Thank you.

INTENDED APPOINTMENTS

MR. GORDON CLARK

Review of intended appointment, selected by government party: Gordon Clark, intended appointee as chair, Algonquin Forestry Authority.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): We will now move on to the review of our intended appointees. Our first appointee today is Gordon Clark, nominated as chair of the Algonquin Forestry Authority. I believe Mr. Clark is on? Very good.

Mr. Clark, thank you for joining us today. I can't see you, but hopefully you can hear me. You may make an initial statement at your discretion. Following this, there will be questions from members of the committee. With that questioning, we will start with the government, followed by the official opposition, with 15 minutes allocated to each recognized party. Any time you take in your statement will be deducted from the time allotted to the government.

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Oh, there you are. Good to see you, Mr. Clark. Thank you for joining us.

Mr. Gordon Clark: Oh, you're welcome. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): You can go ahead with your statement now.

Mr. Gordon Clark: Good morning. My name is Gordon Clark. I want to extend my appreciation for inviting me to appear before the Standing Committee on Government Agencies regarding my potential appointment as chair of the Algonquin Forestry Authority. I would like to take a few minutes of your time to outline the experience which I believe makes me a suitable candidate for the position of chair with the AFA.

Following a lengthy career in the Ontario public service, which I will highlight shortly, I began to seek opportunities to contribute to my community and my province. Giving back matters to me a great deal. Since retiring, I've been an active leader in my church, served on the board of directors of a local curling club and continued to convene a competitive curling league. However, my most meaningful community engagement has undoubtedly been my role as a member of the Algonquin Forestry Authority board of directors. I've been an active member of the board for almost seven years, and that's what brings me here today.

I began my early career as a forest technician with the then Department of Lands and Forests, fresh from the brand new Sir Sandford Fleming technical program, and forestry has remained close to my heart. In addition to my general membership on the AFA board since 2016, I was appointed vice-chair in 2020, assisting and advising the chair in the provision of independent, effective leadership for the AFA operating in Algonquin Park. On an interim basis and pursuant to the AFA Act, I assumed the responsibility of the chair of the board in October 2022, following the departure of the previous chair.

My role includes serving as a member of the human resources, finance and governance committees, the last of

which I previously chaired. Significant initiatives that I have worked on during my term include the development of strategic and implementation plans; fiscal management of accounts receivable; business case development pertaining to employee, executive and staffing governance and compensation; development of the MOU with MNR; board evaluations; and member competencies. I have prepared draft proposals for the board in collaboration with the general manager for setting expectations, recommendations and performance priorities for the agency, following direction received via agency reviews, audits, the minister and the agency direction letter.

I know this province well, having worked as a manager and as a front-line technician with both the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Ministry of Labour in the northern region, the eastern region and ending my career as the manager in a central government secretariat in Toronto.

Most importantly, I know the forests of this province well and even manage my own two-acre woodlot. Forestry is in my soul.

During my 22 years with the then Ministry of Natural Resources, I was involved with the planning, organizing and implementing of the forest management program. I administered the annual budget for the district forest management program of approximately \$1 million and enforced the Crown Timber Act related to unauthorized harvest and wasteful practice, completing and evaluating inspections and measurement of crown timber. I liaised and negotiated with other crown ministries and agencies, logging companies, contractors and consultants. Other responsibilities included project-managing aerial spraying programs and being the service boss on large fires.

In my 12 years as a manager with the Ministry of Labour, I served as both a district manager and a corporate services manager. These roles demanded excellence in the administration of workplace safety and employment standards legislation. They also incorporated a full suite of admin responsibilities related to large budgets in excess of \$37 million, human resources and regional program operation administration.

Of note was my leadership role in a major transformation initiative to reduce expenditures by more than \$14 million and to downsize 200 positions over two years.

I concluded my career as a manager of technology integration with the Inspections, Investigations and Enforcement Secretariat to lead inter-ministry teams in the development and implementation of a high-profile government change management project by developing options, strategies and business cases for improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the inspections, investigation and enforcement functions of the Ontario public service through the integration of computer technology into field applications.

I am extremely proud of my work with IIEP, which was recognized internationally with the Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management, CAPAM, gold award in 2002.

Following my retirement from the OPS, I briefly engaged in consultancy work with the Ministries of Labour and the Environment.

I thank you again for my time today. I look forward to continuing to serve.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Thank you very much for that.

We'll turn to the government first. There's just under nine and a half minutes. We're going to turn to member Coe.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Mr. Clark, welcome to the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Thank you, sir, for your service to the province of Ontario. You've had a distinguished career as a public servant, as you've noted. We're grateful for that service.

I'd like you to expand a little bit more, though, sir, on your statement about the importance of forestry management in the province of Ontario, drawing from your practical experience and since you've retired. Can you share that, please, with the committee?

Mr. Gordon Clark: I will. You cannot overstate the value of the forest sector in Ontario. The Ontario Forest Industries Association has provided information that says that Ontario forest sector exports have increased by almost \$1 billion in 2021, and revenues. There were 5,100 direct, indirect and induced jobs added in 2021, reflecting a strong market.

The industry is growing and generating new wealth and prosperity for northern, rural and Indigenous communities across Ontario. By sustainably harvesting less than half a per cent of Ontario's managed forests annually, Ontario's forest products sector supports over 148,000 direct, indirect and induced jobs in every region of the province and generates \$18 billion in revenues.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you, Mr. Clark.

Through you, Chair, I will turn to MPP Gallagher Murphy.

0910

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Member Gallagher Murphy, go ahead.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Welcome, and thank you for participating today, Mr. Clark. I'm very impressed with your roles, from forest technician to being a vice-chair to assuming the interim role as chair. I love your comment of forestry being your soul.

My question to you, sir, is, what is the role and importance of the AFA for both Algonquin Park and the surrounding areas?

Mr. Gordon Clark: Thank you for that question. Algonquin Park forestry, or AFA, supplies approximately 45% of the industrial wood supply from crown land in the southern region, which is south of North Bay, provincially, and the park supplies approximately 21% of the sugar maple and 33% of the white pine volumes.

The wood supply supports mills in communities such as Huntsville, Whitney, Madawaska, Killaloe, Pembroke, Eganville and Palmer Rapids. There are nine mills receiving part of most of their supply from Algonquin Provincial Park on a regular basis, and another 15 to 20 mills receive periodic supplies.

There are over 285 people employed in Algonquin woods activities and over 4,000 employed in the mills and tree nurseries. In addition, greater than 8,000 indirect jobs are created from sustainable forest management in Algonquin Park.

In 2021-22, sales values of forest products in the AFA were \$23.3 million. Contractors engaged from communities in the region were paid in excess of \$18 million.

The Algonquin Forestry Authority is financially self-sufficient, with no cost to the taxpayer.

Based on the 2021-22 harvest level, in excess of 330,000 cubic metres of wood, or about 350,000 metric tonnes, were harvested.

The Algonquin Forestry Authority contributed \$279 million to the Ontario economy in terms of value added.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Wow. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Member Harris, with five minutes left.

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you, Mr. Clark, for appearing before us today. Again, Monsieur Bourgouin may say different, but as someone who grew up in northern Ontario, I am very familiar with the forest industry and had a great opportunity to be the parliamentary assistant at the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry for a few years. This was during a time when we rolled out our forest sector strategy. There were different things, such as a biomass action plan, forestry access roads program and many more—and, of course, dealing with our softwood lumber tariffs that unfortunately still apply here in Canada.

I'm just wondering, in your kind of role—obviously, we've heard a little bit about it: as vice-chair, interim chair, being on this board for quite some time—in your estimation, since 2018, since we've taken government and a Progressive Conservative government, how have things changed? Has business improved in the forestry industry and more specifically, of course, around the AFA?

Mr. Gordon Clark: Thank you for your question.

The forest sector strategy has resulted in streamlining of forest management planning and reporting and a reduction of red tape. The AFA is involved in a significant amount of committee work with MNRF to achieve modernization of the forest management planning process and associated policy improvements. Positive changes have been made to the Independent Forest Audit Program to reduce duplication and burden.

Regarding biomass, we have not seen any benefit from this, to my knowledge. I believe some of the plans have explored the option. However, there are currently none in place in our catchment area.

The AFA fully supports the development of initiatives such as biomass energy production of low-grade wood that will directly feed the wood processing plants while various expensive options must be sought to utilize low-quality wood or the wood will not be harvested to meet forestry prescriptions and left in the bush to rot.

Regarding the forestry access roads program, this continues to be of significant benefit for the forestry program in the park and the AFA, through the development and maintenance of a safe and efficient road network

that also benefits park managers, researchers and Indigenous communities who use these roads for cultural activities and harvesting. Without this program, direct program costs would significantly increase and need to be passed down to the client.

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you very much. If there's any time left, we'll pass it over to MPP Sandhu.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Member Sandhu, go ahead. You have just under two minutes.

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: Thank you, Mr. Clark, for your presentation. You have been a member of the AFA since 2016, became vice-chair in 2020, and then interim chair for the AFA since 2022, following the departure of the previous chair. What do you feel has been your most significant contribution to the AFA so far?

Mr. Gordon Clark: Thank you very much for your question. I have a long list, but I will try and keep it down to [*inaudible*].

My responsibility in the chair has been to provide leadership to the agency by working with the board to set their goals, objectives and directions. I complete this through working with board members and the GM to identify needs, resources, issues and potential solutions. The GM is responsible for day-to-day supervision of the agency staff.

Throughout my career as a public servant, my primary strength has been providing operational program delivery, ranging from forest management plans etc. At the AFA, I have used this strength to lead the development, as chair of the governance committee, of a strategic and, importantly, an implementation plan to deliver the strategic plan.

I do not see contributions of the board as my contributions. We work as a team and provide direction and support to the AFA. These include the development of a 10-year strategic plan, a strategic plan implementation plan which monitors and adjusts efforts to achieve strategic goals. We have a board evaluation and competency requirements for directives—

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Thank you, Mr. Clark. Sorry to cut you off, but we're out of time.

We will now turn to the opposition for 15 minutes of questions. Mr. Bourgouin.

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: Thank you, Mr. Clark, for talking about your experience. I also come from the forest industry. I come from a small town, Dubreuilville, which was an old forestry town, and of course I'm living in Kapuskasing and representing the Hearst area, so I have a lot of sawmills and I've dealt with many different forest management plans and authorities.

My question, and based on your experience, with truth and reconciliation, we see more and more First Nations asking to have more consultation. They want to be consulted, but also, they say that they need to approve a lot of what's happening in the forest. In their view, there have not been consultations. I'd like to hear, from your experience, when you are appointed on the board, how are you going to address that? Because more and more First Nations are talking about aerial spraying, how it hurts their

traditional hunting. Anybody that hunts knows that once it's sprayed, it takes a while before the animals come back in. So I definitely want to hear from you on this perspective and how you're going to be dealing and approaching and addressing the First Nations issues.

Mr. Gordon Clark: Thank you, sir, for your question. The Algonquins of Ontario, along with the Williams Treaty and the Métis First Nations, participate actively in the forest management planning process and are consulted regularly during our annual work schedules. Indigenous communities surrounding the park benefit from sustainable forest management, planning and operations within the park. Approximately 14% of the wood harvested in the park has been by Indigenous business enterprise. They're also involved in silvicultural operations. A member of the Algonquins of Ontario is a director on our board. The AOO supports and endorses sustainable forest management.

During the development of our forest management plan for the next 10 years, which was just recently completed, there were extensive consultations with the public and specifically with the First Nations communities, primarily the Algonquins of Ontario, around the park. They are engaged on a regular basis, and with the addition of a member of the AOO on the board, it has greatly enhanced our opportunity to increase our understanding of issues that they have.

0920

Mr. Guy Bourgoin: But I would like to hear from your perspective how you are going to understand and address some of these concerns for First Nations. Spraying is huge for them because they're saying—and I've seen other regions that had First Nations that say, "No, aerial spraying needs to stop because it affects ours." So my question to you is, as a board member, what is your personal thought on that, and how are you going to be addressing it and working with First Nations? I'd like to have your perspective on it.

Mr. Gordon Clark: Within the Algonquin Park forest, there is no aerial spraying program conducted. There may have been some done historically, but there is none done at this time and none in our forest management plan.

Mr. Guy Bourgoin: And on your forest management plan—reforestation. Are we planting the same as we were 10 years ago or are we planting more, or do you believe we're planting less?

Mr. Gordon Clark: Well, my belief is we are planting at least the same. This spring, we will be planting between 800,000 and a million trees in Algonquin.

Mr. Guy Bourgoin: So we're the same, yet with the new equipment and technology we're harvesting more. Wouldn't it make sense to plant more if we're harvesting more than just the same as 10 years ago? Because technology has advanced, and if we are cutting more—it may not be the numbers, and you may correct me if the numbers—that's what my thoughts are, because I have seen the forestry, I come from the forest industry, so I know technology has, by leaps and bounds—and we know the machines can produce a lot more. So my question, I guess—if you're saying that we're planting the same thing

as the past 10 years but the machines are producing more, then we're technically planting less trees than we should because we're harvesting more trees than we're planting.

Mr. Gordon Clark: Under the forest management plan and the mandate that the AFA has, we have, as all sustainable forest licensees have, an obligation to regenerate areas that are harvested. Regeneration is not solely done by tree planting.

The nature of the forest in Ontario is greatly variable from the Great Lakes to the St. Lawrence up to the boreal forest in the north. The eastern part of Algonquin Park is primarily harvested for white and red pine and spruce. Forest management in that area is not just done through tree planting. A significant portion is done through the harvesting process which leaves seed trees, and then we subsequently prepare the soil underneath that for natural reforestation.

In other areas towards the west side of the park, which is primarily hardwood, the operations in those areas are primarily done through tree planting.

Mr. Guy Bourgoin: Thank you. I'll pass to my colleague.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Member Pasma.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you, Chair, and thank you so much—there we go. I hope you can hear me now, Mr. Clark.

Mr. Gordon Clark: Yes, I can.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Perfect. Thank you so much for joining us this morning.

The Ontario Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act says that maintenance and restoration of ecological integrity is the primary management objective in the province's parks and protected areas. Do you feel that logging within the park is maintaining the ecological integrity of the park?

Mr. Gordon Clark: Logging in Algonquin Park is a very historical matter. There has been logging in that Algonquin area since the 1800s. In the mid-1970s, when the Algonquin Forestry Authority was created, the intent was not to remove forestry from the park but to have one program or one agency lead to ensure that the park forest management was done while meeting park requirements.

I guess probably the short answer is that while there's been issues raised historically over why there is logging in Algonquin Park, the forest in Algonquin Park is over 750,000 hectares in size, and it is not appropriate forest management to just leave it non-managed. The ultimate decision for whether there remains to be logging in the park is not up to the AFA.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: That's a fair answer.

In 2020, the Ontario Auditor General recommended a comprehensive assessment of the impact of commercial logging in the park to see whether or not it's affecting the ecological integrity. Would you support that call?

Mr. Gordon Clark: The ecological significance of Algonquin Park is well recognized and addressed in both the park management plan, which was amended in 2013 to lighten the footprint, which reduced the harvest area within the park, and the forest management plans for the park.

The fact that Algonquin Park still contains some of the province's best examples of old-growth [*inaudible*] and forest, for example, is a testament to the quality of sustainable forest management that we practise. Old-growth forest continues to exist in the recreational utilization zone after 190 years of logging. Measures to identify and protect old growth exist, and operational plans are implemented to protect those.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: I don't think anybody's questioning the ecological significance of Algonquin Park, and certainly not me. But the recommendation of the Auditor General is that we don't actually know whether the logging is affecting the ecological integrity of the act, and she's recommending that a comprehensive assessment be done to determine what impact the commercial logging is having on the ecological integrity. Would you support an assessment like that?

Mr. Gordon Clark: To be honest, this is the first I've heard of this. The AFA is subject to reviews, and in fact we have undergone a recent mandate review and we understand there's support to continue our work. We comply with the requirements of our legislation.

Failure of sound system.

Mr. Gordon Clark: I can't hear anything.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Sorry about that—technological issues on our end.

I'd be surprised if that report was not shared with the members of the AFA.

I'm also wondering—conservationists, including the Canadians Parks and Wilderness Society, are recommending that an audit be done to determine whether there's sufficient timber in the areas around Algonquin Park that could be logged without affecting the ecological integrity of Algonquin Park. Would you support an audit of that nature being done?

Mr. Gordon Clark: I would have no personal objections to any types of audits being done. There's been questions asked over time about if logging ceased within Algonquin Park, what would be the impact. I spoke earlier about the financial benefits of logging in Algonquin Park. If it were shut down, it is a misperception that you can replace the harvesting done in Algonquin Park elsewhere. All the wood that is available in Ontario is allocated. There is no surplus wood under forest management plans that is available to replace the volume of wood from the park, in part because of the nature of the wood. You can't replace white pine and red pine logs with black spruce and Jack pine from the Far North.

0930

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Okay, thank you. I have a series of uncomfortable questions that need to be asked at the end—

Mr. Gordon Clark: Sure.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: —but we ask them of every appointee, so please bear with me. Have you ever been a member of the Progressive Conservative Party provincially?

Mr. Gordon Clark: No, I have not.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: What about the Conservative Party federally?

Mr. Gordon Clark: No, I have not.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Have you donated to the Progressive Conservative Party?

Mr. Gordon Clark: No, I have not.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: What about to the federal Conservative Party?

Mr. Gordon Clark: No, I have not.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Have you ever volunteered for a Conservative election campaign?

Mr. Gordon Clark: No, I have not.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Okay. And did anyone ask you to submit an application for this position?

Mr. Gordon Clark: No, they did not.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you so much, Mr. Clark. If I have any time remaining, I will share it with the independent member.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): A minute and a half.

Mr. John Fraser: I'll simply say, Mr. Clark, thank you very much for taking the time with us this morning and for your record of public service here in Ontario. I don't have any questions to ask. I think that my colleagues to the right—who are to my left, actually—or maybe not. Sorry, I woke you all up there. All of my colleagues asked some very thorough questions, and so we got to know you a bit better. I really appreciate you being here this morning.

Mr. Gordon Clark: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): We'll conclude. Mr. Clark, very much appreciate you coming to us today on Zoom. You can feel free to listen in on the next one, but at this point, you are off the hook. You can take the rest of the morning off too as far as the committee is concerned. Thank you for your time today.

MR. SIMON FOSTER

Review of intended appointment, selected by government party: Simon Foster, intended appointee as member, Province of Ontario Council for the Arts.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Our second appointee today is Simon Foster, who joined us a while ago, nominated as member of the Province of Ontario Council for the Arts.

Mr. Foster, thank you for joining us today. You may make an initial statement at your discretion. Following this, there will be questions from members of the committee. With that questioning, we will start with the government, followed by the official opposition, with 15 minutes allocated to each recognized party. Any time you take in your statement will be deducted from the time allotted to the government.

Go ahead. The floor is yours for your opening statement. Again, thank you for joining us today.

Mr. Simon Foster: Good morning, everyone. Thanks for speaking with me today. Simon Foster. I do have a brief opening statement, firstly, to thank you for the work you do to ensure important organizations like the Ontario Arts Council have strong and dedicated leadership.

I'd like to take a few minutes introduce myself. I'll start with my professional life. I'm the founder and CEO of a

company called Chatter Research, providing customer feedback software for retailers. I proudly built the company in Ontario. I'll share that my first venture funding came from Silicon Valley, and as I started the company, I spent much of 2017 commuting to California. But I wanted to build the team and company in Ontario, which is exactly what I did over the next six years. My area of expertise professionally is building technology companies, which I have done successfully over the past 20 years.

My connection to and support for the arts in Ontario is, I think, meaningful. I was a co-founder and chair of something called the Framework Foundation. We wanted to encourage Canadians aged 22 to 35 to pick up a cause and volunteer their time. To do that, we hosted what we called "timeraiser" events, where we would match young Canadians with a charity of their choice. Attendees at the event would then bid for art in an art auction, but instead of bidding with their money, they would bid with their volunteer time. So you would see a piece you fell in love with. You might bid 150 hours of your volunteer hours instead of money. We raised 130,000 volunteer hours across 63 events, most of those events in Ontario.

The important connection to the arts is our support for emerging artists. Asking an emerging artist to donate their work, which is of course very common for charitable events, doesn't really support an emerging artist. So we took the harder road of privately fundraising in order to pay fair market value for every work of art that we auctioned for time. In that part of our events, we invested a total of \$913,000 into the careers of emerging artists.

In addition to my work at the Framework Foundation, I served on the board of Canada's National Ballet School, located on Jarvis Street, from 2007 to 2012. I was chair of the nominating and governance committee and a member of the board's strategic planning committee. It was, for me, a highlight to play a role in supporting world-class talent at the school, with many of those students from that time now commanding the ballet stage all around the world.

I'll conclude by saying the Ontario Arts Council is vital. The funding it provides delivers a positive return to the province, both financially and in creating a highly desirable place to live. I'm very happy to be considered towards directing my energy to its ongoing success. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Thank you, Mr. Foster. I much appreciate that.

We have 11 and a half minutes left. Turning to the government, we'll go to member Leardi.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Mr. Foster, you're quite an entrepreneur. I admire the desire—that you built a team here in Ontario and a company here in Ontario. Chatter Research sounds like a very interesting company.

Can you explain to the committee why you decided to start a customer feedback software company? How do you think your expertise as an entrepreneur will benefit the arts council?

Mr. Simon Foster: Thank you for the question. For the first part of your question, in terms of basing the company

in Ontario, I saw and I knew and I understood that the skills and talent in Ontario are on par or even better than the skills and talent worldwide. A big part of my product is AI, and as many of us now know, Ontario is one of the great AI centres of the world. So it was both a practical and personal decision to say I have the greatest chance of success of building a world-beating company—our customers are international—but to do it from Ontario. Ontario has those skill sets.

Part two of what I've learned, and I'd maybe even go as far as to say what I'm good at, is understanding how seed funding, how an initial investment—how to grow it, how to maximize the benefit that can be delivered from an initial investment. It's not so much about requiring ongoing investment, but to use that initial investment to build for success in the long-term and independence in the long-term. I've hit a lot of walls over 20 years doing this, but I've learned a great deal.

I did apply that as well to the Framework Foundation. Our model there was, we will support those artists and charitable organizations in the first year, but we would actually ask that you not participate in the next year. We want to support another group and provide that seed capital to provide a launch pad for them.

Mr. Anthony Leardi: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Member Pang.

Mr. Billy Pang: Thank you, Mr. Chair, through you to Mr. Foster.

Mr. Foster, you mentioned in your opening remarks earlier that you served on the board of directors for Canada's National Ballet School. How do you think this board governance experience in the arts sector will benefit you on the Ontario Arts Council?

Mr. Simon Foster: Thank you for the good question. What I've learned from that experience is how to, from Ontario, create and nurture world-class talent, and the structure and model and funding that's required in order to do that. This was a school that, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, literally created some of the greatest performers around the world, and their talent was nurtured in Ontario. Learning how to do that—to not only create incredible arts and culture within Ontario for Ontarians, but to create a real centre of excellence for that in Ontario—was exactly what I learned, and all of the different requirements that feed into supporting world-leading talent.

0940

Mr. Billy Pang: Thank you very much. The next questions are member Harris's.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Thank you. Next question: member Harris.

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you, Mr. Foster, for taking the time to appear before us today. I wanted to follow a little bit in the vein of the questions that we've heard so far from the government. It's really around leveraging private sector experience in your potential role with the Ontario Arts Council. You have a wealth of it, and I commend you for that. Building up a company is not a small feat. As someone who has owned their own company before and

had to provide for employees and sign those paycheques, I know it takes a lot of work and dedication.

I wondered maybe, from your perspective, what it would mean to the Ontario Arts Council to be able to bring some of that private sector experience over. Often, we see people on agencies, boards and commissions here that have led more of a bureaucratic life, so it's nice to see some of that entrepreneurial spirit being applied for this board. I wondered if maybe you could comment a little bit on that.

Mr. Simon Foster: I appreciate the support for that entrepreneurial journey, which, as you said, is not always an easy one, but an important one. That bridge between private and public is one that I feel isn't as strong as maybe it could be in Ontario, and has an enormous benefit to, in this case, artists and arts organizations. There can often be—and this is from my experience at the Framework Foundation—different organizations and individuals who have the same goal in mind, but who may, knowingly or unknowingly, be working against each other a little bit across private and public.

The ability to create a common language certainly is a big part of my background and expertise. To reach across public and private and create those partnerships, with the express aim of delivering maximum benefit to, in this case, the arts and arts organizations, is something that I think we can do better, and I would certainly like to apply myself to doing better at it.

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Thank you. Member Sabawy, go ahead.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you, Mr. Foster. Arts and culture always play a huge part in the identity of the province. Can you please explain to the committee why you were interested in this appointment, and give us an idea about what is your opinion and perspective about the role the Ontario Arts Council can play in the success of this sector?

Mr. Simon Foster: There's no question that the benefit to the province that the Ontario Arts Council delivers is twofold. There is a financial return; there is absolutely no question that arts and culture is a huge part of the province's success and revenues. But it also is a place to live, a place to start a business, run a business and raise a family. It's a place to move to. Arts and culture is central to building that sense of community across the province.

I've experienced that personally. I've experienced that across my experiences within the arts, and what I'm particularly excited about as it relates to this potential appointment is the strategic plan that they have created. It's very focused around equity, diversity and inclusion, and that mission, I think, is meaningful. I think it is challenging to be successful. It's something that certainly speaks to the province I want to live in and want to support. So that focus, that they're just at the beginning of the strategic plan, is what's most interesting to me. It's less interesting to more broadly support the arts; this focus of this plan is what I'm passionate about.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): About two and a half minutes left. Further questions from the government? Member Gallagher Murphy.

M^{me} Dawn Gallagher Murphy: Thank you, Mr. Foster, for joining us today. My question to you is—first, a comment: Obviously, you've got an established track record of building technology companies over the past two decades. You've noted that AI has been a big part of your business model. I understand from your comments that investing to build for long-term success probably has a lot to do with what you've achieved. That being the case, at a high level, can you share with the committee your track record here on the business side and how this skill set will then help the Ontario Arts Council.

Mr. Simon Foster: Certainly. I mentioned seed funding, and I'll share—it's not really an anecdote; it's what happens every year at the Framework Foundation, these timeraiser events. I shared that the easier path was to ask an emerging artist to donate their artwork. At the time, an emerging artist's average income was \$12,000 a year. That doesn't help an emerging artist. We said, "We need to pay fair market value." We'd host these events, and they would be paid fair market value, but then, in addition, there would be great exposure.

The highlight for me was always 12 months later, visiting galleries around Ontario and seeing those artists who a year ago would not have been at the stage of their career when they would be in that gallery, where they would have their own shows in those galleries. I would see all the red dots. I would see the art be valued at two to three times what it was a year prior. That was, for me, the definition of success. It was this initial investment, fair market value, "Please don't donate your work. We want to pay fair market value," and where do you take it from there on your own?

That applies to the connection to my professional career: initial seed funding, and what can you build with that. I have a track record of resourcefulness and resilience to find ways when it seems quite—

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): I am sorry, but that does conclude our time.

We will now turn to the opposition, and I'm sure we'll hear more about that from the opposition questions. We'll turn to member Pasma first.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you so much for being here with us this morning, Mr. Foster. We appreciate it.

Arts and culture is a sector that really provides a mirror to our society. It shows us who and what we value, who we believe ourselves to be and also who we want ourselves to be.

In 2017, the province, in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, established a fund that was specifically for Indigenous arts and culture, in response to the recommendations of the TRC, but when this government came to power, they cut that fund. There were multiple years of stakeholders requesting that fund be reinstated, and the funding was finally reinstated in 2021, but at a lower level than it had been created at. So we're now spending less on Indigenous artists than we were before. I'm wondering if you can talk about your personal

understanding of how arts and culture reflects on Indigenous reconciliation and our relationship with Indigenous peoples in Canada.

Mr. Simon Foster: Thank you for the important question.

If I go back to the Ontario Arts Council strategic plan and look at what they have as a focus for the next, I believe, five years, the focus is Indigenous, Black and other racialized communities. I view it as, in a very positive way, a narrowing of the focus for the funding provided by the provincial government and where we want and expect to see the greatest impact over the next number of years. As I mentioned, that is a huge part of my interest in participating in the implementation of that strategic plan. I think the background to your question is which communities require the most support and will deliver the greatest positive impact, both financially and in terms of exposure and understanding of their culture in the province, and the Indigenous community is near the top, along with Black and other racialized communities. So while I haven't seen—obviously, I'm not a member of the arts council yet—the details of any budgets, I am very aware of the strategic plan and hugely supportive of that very specific focus.

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Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you. I really appreciate that answer. Can you tell me a bit about what your understanding is of the impact of the pandemic on the arts and culture sector, and what kind of support might be needed in order to help the sector recover from the pandemic?

Mr. Simon Foster: Yes, it's incredibly difficult for huge parts of arts and culture when everyone is not seeing shows and visiting galleries. There is a transition that needs to be supported towards more digital means of consuming and distributing arts and culture, but that's part of what's required, not the entire piece of it.

I'll share another part of what I like about the mandate and mission of the Ontario Arts Council, which is to support artists as well as arts organizations. I think that the Ontario Arts Council is and will be a real catalyst to support a lot of the arts organizations who are doing a good job of facilitating the transition I mentioned, and also helping artists succeed after a couple of very difficult years.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Thank you. I will pass it to MPP Bourgouin.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Member Bourgouin, go ahead.

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: Thank you, Mr. Foster, and thank you for your answers. It was pleasant to hear you speak on the questions on both sides.

I have to ask you some questions that might be uncomfortable but necessary, that we ask any appointee. Have you ever been a member of the Progressive Conservative Party provincially?

Mr. Simon Foster: I have not.

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: Okay. Have you ever been a member of the Conservative Party federally?

Mr. Simon Foster: I have not.

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: Have you donated to the Progressive Conservative Party provincially?

Mr. Simon Foster: I have not.

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: Federally?

Mr. Simon Foster: I have not.

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: Have you ever worked on a Conservative election campaign?

Mr. Simon Foster: I heard that question previously and my answer is no. However, when I was, I think, nine years old, my mother was working to support Barbara McDougall, and I stapled signs for her.

Laughter.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Thank you for admitting that.

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: Did anyone ask you to submit an application for this position?

Mr. Simon Foster: No.

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: Okay. Thank you, sir.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Any further questions?

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: No more questions.

Mr. Will Bouma: Mr. Foster, thank you so much for taking the time to join us today. If I can just say, on behalf of the committee and on behalf of the province of Ontario, thank you for being willing to volunteer to do this good work for the people of Ontario. Thank you. You can stay on if you would like, but we will be moving on now. Otherwise, you are free from the committee, but again, you can continue to watch.

Mr. Simon Foster: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Members, we will now consider the intended appointment of Gordon Clark, nominated as chair of the Algonquin Forestry Authority. We have a motion from member Coe.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Chair, through you: I move concurrence in the intended appointment of Gordon Clark, nominated as chair of the Algonquin Forestry Authority.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Is there any discussion on that motion? Seeing none, are members ready to vote? All those in favour? That is unanimous.

We will now consider the intended appointment of Simon Foster, nominated as member of the Province of Ontario Council for the Arts. A motion by member Coe.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Chair, through you: I move concurrence in the intended appointment of Simon Foster, nominated as member of the Province of Ontario Council for the Arts.

The Chair (Mr. Will Bouma): Concurrence in the appointment has been moved by member Coe. Is there any discussion on that motion? Seeing none, are members ready to vote? All those in favour? Again, unanimous. Thank you, members.

That concludes our business for today. This committee now stands adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 0955.

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