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**Official Report
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(Hansard)**

A-9

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

A-9

**Standing Committee on
Government Agencies**

Intended appointments

2nd Session
42nd Parliament

Tuesday 1 March 2022

**Comité permanent des
organismes gouvernementaux**

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2^e session
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Mardi 1^{er} mars 2022

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Clerk: Tanzima Khan

Président : Gilles Bisson
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
GOVERNMENT AGENCIESCOMITÉ PERMANENT DES
ORGANISMES GOUVERNEMENTAUX

Tuesday 1 March 2022

Mardi 1^{er} mars 2022

The committee met at 0900 in committee room 2.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): The committee will come to order. I'd like to welcome everybody back. This is our first in-person meeting in quite a long time, so everybody welcome. We all know how this is supposed to go.

I just want to remind members that the Speaker yesterday announced a mask policy, that you have to wear a mask while in the House, which obviously extends into committee. So unless you're talking, everybody's got to keep their masks on.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): With that being said, we have a subcommittee report that I think Mr. Yakubuski is going to move.

Mr. John Yakubuski: Thank you very much for that. Chair, I move adoption of the subcommittee report on intended appointments dated Thursday, February 24, 2022, on the order-in-council certificate dated February 18, 2022.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Any discussion on the subcommittee report? Seeing no discussion, all those in favour, signify by raising your hand. All those opposed? Okay, that's carried.

Just a couple of things before we go to our first presenter: The Clerk would have distributed to all of you, via SharePoint, all of the information that you need in regard to what we're doing today and various documents. If you don't know where the SharePoint is, I'm sure the Clerk and legislative research will let you know how to find it.

The second thing is, our second presenter, Dominique Giguère, is going to be presenting in French. Just if members don't know, because I didn't know this, once you plug your little gizmo into the machine, you toggle the top button up or down to get it to French or English. That, I didn't know. I'm just letting you guys know.

INTENDED APPOINTMENTS

MS. MARY HENEIN THORN

Review of intended appointment, selected by official opposition party: Mary Henein Thorn, intended appointee as member, Licence Appeal Tribunal.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): With that, I guess we're going to go to our first presenter. There's our first

presenter on the screen. We'll deal with that a little bit later. If we could call in Mary Henein Thorn, who's applying to be a member of the Licence Appeal Tribunal. You will have as much time as you need within the 15 minutes that the government caucus has, and whatever time you take, we'll take it off the government caucus. So, please, go ahead.

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: Thank you very much. I've prepared a statement that I'd like to read to you this morning.

Good morning, and thank you very much for your valuable time today. I appreciate the opportunity to appear in front of you this morning to highlight my qualifications and demonstrate how I can be an effective part-time adjudicator on the Licence Appeal Tribunal and serve the citizens of Ontario.

Proudly, I'm a daughter of Egyptian immigrants who immigrated to Toronto in 1963. They left their country due to persecution and came to Canada to live every immigrant's Canadian dream: a dream to start a better life for their future children and for themselves. I am well aware of how different my life could have been for me if my parents hadn't come to Canada, and I'm grateful every day for each opportunity that presents itself, such as this one.

I have gained so many valuable transferable skills through my professional lived experiences working as an entrepreneur in the private, non-profit and government sectors. A highlight of some of my skills are the ability to actively listen, ask pertinent questions to draw out necessary information, critical reasoning, objectivity, working under pressure, transparency, fact-based decision-making and fluency in Arabic. These skills would make a great contribution to the role of adjudicator at the LAT.

A brief synopsis of positions I've held in my professional career is as follows:

Early on in my career, I worked for an insurance company as a group accounts coordinator, managing over 350 group accounts and over 1,300 employee health benefits. The bulk of my duties in that role was to compare the company's agreed-to contracts and policies against the client's health benefit request and make a decision. My decision would need to be noted in a letter to the client and documented in the company files. This role required the ability to research and fact-find, speak to clients and determine exactly what their needs are and come to a decision based on the company's contractual obligations and render a decision—skills which would be similar to that of an adjudicator.

Further in my career I worked at a constituency office serving the public. My days were busy, the problems were big, each case was vastly different, but the process was the same: Listen to what the issue was, figure out what legislation and policy it falls under, work with the constituent and governmental departments within the parameters of those policies and legislation to bring about the best outcome.

Constituents were coming to our office because their issues were at a critical point, affecting their lives in a very serious way, and they turned to me and our office for assistance. I had to make sure I dealt with these issues swiftly with a clear and concise answer so that they could continue on with their lives.

As a special assistant to the federal government, I met regularly with stakeholders and community members, spent an exorbitant amount of time researching each issue, reporting my findings to the minister in both oral and written forms, followed by detailed recommendations for the minister to review. Deadlines were tight, the office moved at a fast pace, and my recommendations and decisions had to be accurate. At the end of the day, I was accountable to the taxpayers of Canada.

Lastly, as a small business owner, you can imagine the role comes with a tremendous amount of self-discipline, effective time management, responsibility, critical thinking, ongoing preparation and the ability to prioritize.

I have also held a number of volunteer positions throughout my lifetime, as chair of the Grand River MS Society, assistant to the executive director of BLESS Canada, Kitchener Housing, VP of the Ontario Trillium Foundation and a number of other boards and associations, all giving back to my community and Ontarians. My desire is to keep serving the public in every capacity I can.

Again, I very much appreciate your time today, and I'm ready for your questions.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): With that, we go to the government side and we start with Mr. Yakabuski.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you, Ms. Thorn, for joining us today, and thank you for your initiative in applying for this position. Your work in a constituency office—I think everybody on this committee can attest to the importance of constituency staff and the vital role they play in how they make our jobs possible by having that connection with our constituents 24/7—also, your past work in the insurance industry as well.

You've dealt with high caseloads. I want to ask you about that, because as we know, there's a tremendous backlog on this tribunal, and the caseload volumes are going to be extremely high. Can you maybe explain a little bit more about your experience in managing heavy caseloads and how you can ensure that you will be able to stay on top of that workload and deliver your decisions within the targeted processing times?

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: Absolutely. Thank you very much for that question. It is really important to move these cases forward, as they do affect people's lives. In my case, when I worked for the insurance company, or any of the other places that I worked, we prioritized to make sure

those deadlines were met. If that meant longer hours and longer days, then we were committed to do so to make sure that that level of customer service was achieved.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Well, thank you very much, Ms. Thorn. I appreciate that. It's clearly important that one be able to withstand the pressures of those workloads. So I thank you for that answer.

I'm now going to pass it over to my colleague MPP Pang.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): MPP Pang, you have the floor.

Mr. Billy Pang: Thank you, Ms. Henein, for sharing your experience and putting your name forward. What do you believe it takes to be an effective member on the Licence Appeal Tribunal?

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: I think fairness, transparency, critical thinking—again, that level of customer service, making sure that the clients feel comfortable—accessing the appropriate information and following the guidelines, legislation and policy are all important.

Mr. Billy Pang: Okay, thank you. That's very straightforward.

I want to pass the next questions to my colleague MPP Babikian.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Mr. Babikian, you now have the floor.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Thank you, Ms. Thorn, for coming and sharing your experience with us. It's not easy to work in a constituency office. You have to be patient. There are long hours—it's not a 9-to-5 job—and you need to have the stamina and the passion to be working in a constituency office, and dedication to serve the residents of the particular constituency. What sort of engagement do you have in your community—volunteer work etc.—what have you learned from it, and how will it inform your work on the Licence Appeal Tribunal?

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: Thank you for that question, sir. I do a lot of community work. I sit on the city of Kitchener housing board. We assist our community in providing affordable housing. That's a very big issue not only in my region but across Ontario, and it's important that I stay on top of the information as I'm making decisions in voting on certain policies. It's important that I stay on top of the needs of our community, and that doesn't change for this position either—just staying informed, staying current, understanding what the issues are and making decisions based on that information.

0910

Mr. Aris Babikian: Thank you. I will now pass the questioning to my colleague Deepak Anand.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): You have the floor, Mr. Anand.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Perfect. Thank you, Chair. First of all, I want to say this: Mary, thank you for coming. I wish you were in person here; you would have seen the hustle-bustle happening back in Queen's Park.

I was listening to the questions from my colleague. I was hoping that something was going to be about COVID. There was nothing from COVID, but I just wanted to talk

about [*inaudible*] which we just had over the last couple years. As you know, COVID presented many significant challenges for operating the Licence Appeal Tribunal—in fact, the whole world—in particular with in-person hearings.

How do you think that the Licence Appeal Tribunal can adapt to this and do you have any concerns about not being able to conduct in-person hearings?

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: Well, thankfully, we do have Zoom and Teams meetings, and I think that has certainly helped the world move forward through this terrible pandemic that we're all suffering through. Technology has come a long way. I understand that technology is not easy for everybody, but I have a 90-year-old father who has managed through it, so I think people have caught up to the use of technology.

Of course, we also have to make sure that we are as accommodating as we possibly can be, and helpful and informative, to make sure that everybody is as much at ease as possible as we can make them. Patience goes a long way—and, again, going back to understanding what might be an issue if somebody is having some difficulty and challenges accessing the hearings.

When the time is right to be in person and the community feels that's the right time then I'm sure we will move on to that.

Mr. Deepak Anand: I appreciate it. Thank you so much.

Chair, how much time do we have?

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): You have about five minutes. I see Mr. Miller would like on as well. Do you have a second question?

Mr. Deepak Anand: No, no. Please, go ahead, and then I will come back.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Okay, Mr. Miller, you have the floor.

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you, Ms. Thorn, for putting your name forward for the Licence Appeal Tribunal. You were recommended for the process following the tribunal's Ontario competitive merit-based recruitment process. What was your impression of the process and why do you think you are the best candidate for the role?

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: I thought the process was a good process to follow. It was fairly easy for anybody who would like to apply. The portal was fairly self-explanatory; it was easy to fill out the forms. I went through the merit system. I feel that my life experience and my professional background have really given me the skill set necessary to fill this position. Thank you for mentioning that it was a merit-based system. I did go through the interview, the case study and did all that to get here. It was a process, but a fair one.

Mr. Norman Miller: Good. Well, thank you for putting your name forward. I'll pass it on to MPP Coe.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Mr. Coe, you have the floor. You have about four minutes.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you, Chair, and through you to Ms. Thorn: Thank you very much for being here this morning. As you pointed out, you have a long-standing

record of serving the public, of public service in general. I'd like you to talk a little bit more broadly about what motivated you to apply for this position, and then, as an adjunct, if you could also speak to if this was the only position that you applied to. Thank you very much.

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: Absolutely. I applied to a few different positions after carefully reviewing what the boards and tribunals did and comparing that to my experience. When I worked as a constituency assistant, there were cases that came through our office that would have needed to go through the LAT, so it was something of interest to me. Serving the public has always been a passion. It's something I've done for as long as I can remember. I wanted to continue my public service, which is why I applied, and that's how I got here.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): I see Mrs. Martin. You've got about two-and-a-half minutes.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you, again, Ms. Henein Thorn, for being with us. Is that how we say your name? I've heard Henein or Thorn. Is it Henein Thorn?

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: Yes, it's Henein Thorn. Thank you for clarifying that.

Mrs. Robin Martin: It's a little confusing when you have the double-barrelled name, but I wanted to get it correct.

Thank you for joining us. I wanted to ask you: You seem to have quite a few experiences in your community, and I wondered if you could talk about some of the things that you've done within your community and how you think your community involvement will factor into your being on this tribunal, how it will help.

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: Absolutely. Like I said, I'm VP of the Ontario Trillium Foundation; I sit currently on the Kitchener Housing board; I have been chair for the Grand River MS Society; I've done things for our local multicultural centre; I do things through our church to volunteer. That level of service is very important to me. I think when you serve the community, you have a very good sense of people management and how to help them. I think my long service of serving people will help that. I deal with a diverse group of people of different demographics, different income levels, different languages. I think all that will make a good contribution to this role.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): You still have about a minute left.

Mrs. Robin Martin: Thank you very much. MPP Yakabuski, go ahead.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Mr. Yakabuski, you have the floor.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, again, Ms. Henein Thorn, for coming forward. I do detect a significant humility on your part when answering the questions, quite frankly, because you know what a challenge it is in a constituency office. Perhaps you can elaborate a little bit more for those that are listening to this who are not MPPs on just how vital it is, how it changes you and the impact you have on people, being able to work in a constituency office as you have in the past.

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: Absolutely. Working in a constituency office is a vital role, as we've said here today. People really come to you when they feel like they've exhausted all options and they're feeling very frustrated. These problems are large problems that need to be solved concisely and with a clear path. It takes a lot of research to find out how to solve these problems and make sure we stay within the guidelines of legislation and policy—

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Sorry, that's all the time you have. We'd love to hear more, but the rules are pretty well set.

Now we go to 15 minutes to the official position. Who would like to start?

Mr. Wayne Gates: Good morning.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Mr. Gates, you have the floor.

Mr. Wayne Gates: It's nice to have a full house here. I guess COVID's finished now? We're all done with COVID. The Raptors have got a full house tonight, so we're back to normal, with everybody sitting side by side here in the room. It's kind of interesting.

Thanks for coming today, Mary. I appreciate it. I'm going to—and don't think you're special in this question because I ask it all the time, particularly to people who are brought before us. I'd like to begin by discussing your previous affiliation with the government party. Can you confirm that you previously ran for the PC Party?

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: Yes, I have.

Mr. Wayne Gates: And what year was that?

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: In 2018.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Who did you run under? Who was the Premier at that time?

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: Premier Ford.

Mr. Wayne Gates: You did talk a lot about working in a constituency office. I can tell you that I have probably the best staff in Ontario—

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Hang on a second, now. Order, order.

Mr. Wayne Gates: So I understand. I can tell you how important constituency staff is. You said that you dealt with it quickly. If you're dealing with the government, I've found that there's not a lot that's quick coming out of the constituency office when you're trying to get answers, but that's just kind of how I've seen it over the last eight years.

What office did you work in? Who did you work for at the time?

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: MPP Michael Harris.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Was that under the Harris government?

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: No, that was not.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Who was it under?

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: Forgive me, I'm drawing a complete blank.

Mr. Wayne Gates: That's fair. Would you remember whether you worked at a constit office in a union? My staff is all unionized here at Queen's Park. It's OPSEU, and in my office it's COPE. Were you unionized when you worked in a constit office?

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: I was not.

Mr. Wayne Gates: You were not. Were you ever approached to join a union while you were in your office?

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: Never.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Never. And you worked for the Conservative Party at that time, as a constit?

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: I worked for MPP Michael Harris.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Okay. Actually, Michael's a pretty good guy. I know he's moved on, but I had a lot of fun with him. He was a pretty good MPP, quite frankly.

You talked about your life experiences that would put you in the right frame of mind to do this job. What were your life experiences that you think will be helpful to do this job?

0920

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: I think my ability to speak another language, Arabic, is helpful. Living in Canada, I think having parents who were immigrants gives me some insight into some of the struggles they face. My work history; working for the MPP; again, doing casework with some people coming to the constit office with the issues I've dealt with a lot at other tribunals; working with intergovernmental departments; working for the minister; my oral and written communication skills—I think those are all important things that will contribute to this role.

Mr. Wayne Gates: You might not remember, but with your experience, I'm sure you will: When you were in the constit office, what were your three biggest concerns that were coming on a daily basis from residents in the riding?

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: We had a lot of Family Responsibility Office cases; some OHIP cases; some warranty cases; licensing issues, such as driver's licences and things like that. We also had some rural issues because of the riding.

Mr. Wayne Gates: What was the last one?

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: Some rural issues because of the riding.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Did you ever have any housing issues, any rental issues, anything like that, in the constit office?

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: Absolutely, for sure.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Affordability is a big issue right now in the province of Ontario, particularly around housing, particularly around rent. I have a daughter who is trying to buy a house, and a starter home in Niagara is going for just over \$700,000. It's very tough on young people. When you were there in 2018, or whatever date it was—it's gotten a lot worse in the province.

I'm going to continue on my questions here. We ask that those that appear before this committee—because the government has a habit of appointing their friends and donors to these types of positions—have you ever donated to the PC Party?

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: I believe I have.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Can you think real hard and maybe see if you can remember how much it was?

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: It's been quite a while. Forgive me, I really don't remember the amount.

Mr. Wayne Gates: But you're pretty sure you did donate to the PC Party.

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: I'm sure I have.

Mr. Wayne Gates: When you ran for the PC Party, what were some of the things that you found when you were knocking on the doors?

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: Affordability, for sure—something that you brought up; housing, the cost of living: Those were probably the top issues. Health care. That was another top issue. People were very much struggling, and they wanted help. Ontarians need help.

Mr. Wayne Gates: When you were in the constit office—you mentioned cost of living—did you get paid cost of living? Do you remember?

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: I couldn't tell you. I'm sure I did.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Cost of living is a big issue when you're working for somebody. If you can get a cost-of-living raise, you can sort of keep up to inflation. Were you capped at a 1% pay increase when you were there?

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: You know what, I don't remember. But MPP Harris was very good to us.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Sorry, I'm having trouble hearing you. What was the last part?

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: MPP Harris was very good to us. He was a good employer.

Mr. Wayne Gates: That wasn't my question. I've already said that MPP Harris was a good guy, and I've enjoyed lots of conversations with him. My question was, were you capped at 1%? Either you don't remember or—

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: I don't remember.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Because in the province of Ontario today, we have a bill called Bill 124 where wages are capped at 1%, and inflation is at 6%. I don't think that's fair. I wouldn't think it's fair in a constit office, and I would think if you were still in the constit office—because we're getting lots of calls from corrections officers and nurses and those that work in the health care sector on how unfair Bill 124 is.

As we've previously stated, this government regularly appoints their partisan friends to positions on provincial boards and agencies. How would you balance your role on the tribunal, in which you must remain objective, with that of a partisan candidate?

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: Like at the constituency office, I park that at the door. I'm not really involved right now. I am there to serve the public, just like I do in other non-governmental roles, like Kitchener Housing and as chair for the MS Grand River chapter. I'm there, really, to help people.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Maybe you can list the number of charities that you work for or that you've volunteered for.

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: Sorry, currently or—

Mr. Wayne Gates: Yes.

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: Currently there are two, Kitchener Housing and VP of the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

Mr. Wayne Gates: So you're from Kitchener?

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: I am.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Do you ever go to the Rangers games?

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: I do.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Do you know that the IceDogs from Niagara usually beat the Rangers all the time, or no?

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: We try. We try.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Well, you're not a strong team this year, by the way. Kitchener has always had good teams, but this year you're a little weaker than normal. And we're a lot weaker than normal, unfortunately. Anyway, it's a little off the subject, but it's good that you're supporting young local kids who are playing some hockey and getting some exercise.

The LAT and the AABS saw an increase in appeals received, at 15,619 in 2020-21, up from 14,000 in 2019-20 and 13,000 in 2018-19. The number of case conferences held continued to steadily rise, to 11,519—I know these are a lot of stats—in 2020-21, up from 9,900 in 2019-20 and 8,800 in 2018-19.

Last week, we spoke about this issue. The Licence Appeal Tribunal is facing a massive backlog in cases. This government has appointed numerous representatives to the tribunal with little evidence of subject matter expertise or adjudicative experience. Could you discuss your subject matter expertise for this tribunal?

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: I think my life experience, like I said, and my professional experience that I bring to the table are of value, and I'm always willing to learn further.

Mr. Wayne Gates: You said you were a small business owner. What was it?

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: Advertising and marketing—a small business.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Did you ever advertise for the PC Party?

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: No.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Have you ever advertised for me?

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: Business is business.

Mr. Wayne Gates: You would, though, right? If you had the opportunity, I'm sure.

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: Absolutely.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'm just checking. You never know when I'm going to need somebody. I appreciate it.

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: For sure. You never know.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Could you discuss some possible strategies for dealing with the ongoing backlog? Is it possible to look at other jurisdictions for examples, whether that's outside Ontario or wherever?

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: I think it's always good to look for ways to grow and improve, absolutely. It's hard for me to comment with not actually being on the LAT, but I firmly believe that growth and improvement is always a good thing, especially when we're serving the constituents of Ontario.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Okay. I'll help you out here—we're about halfway through.

How much time have I got left?

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): You have four minutes.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Well, I guess we're a little more than halfway through.

I'm going to go out on the limb and make a prediction that you'll get on the committee. I've been on this, I'd say, for about 18 months now, or whatever it is. My experience is that you'll definitely be part of it. So hopefully, you'll take a serious look once the vote is done and find out how we can do a better job on getting through the caseload that we have. The case numbers are extremely high, and they're going up. And like we said, people are being appointed, but we're not seeing any real coming down in the cases. I think it's one that you should put a lot of your time into as we move forward, or as you get on the committee. I think it's important. Working in a consti office, you know how important it is to get back to people, how important their case is to each individual. If you don't get back to them right away or it goes on and on, that person gets discouraged. Sometimes, they start giving the office a hard time. So I think it's important that you put some effort into that, because the numbers are just way too high.

Tribunals Ontario does not provide specific financial data for the LAT. Do you think this should be changed?

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: I can't answer that. I don't have enough information.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Well, I think you can answer this one: Would it be helpful for board members to know the current financial realities of the organization?

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: Absolutely. Transparency is very important.

Mr. Wayne Gates: And why do you think that?

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: Because we serve the citizens of Ontario, and they deserve to know.

0930

Mr. Wayne Gates: Last week—and again, I'm saying last week because we had people here last week—we discussed some of the ongoing concerns with the new online process: some concerns that the process creates barriers for access to justice for parties without adequate or effective access to technology, particularly in the north, as you're probably aware. How do you feel this should be addressed?

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: I think we need to find every means available to us to make sure it's accessible to everybody. I can't give you particulars because I don't know what they have done and what they've looked into, but it is important.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Do you believe that the north is certainly at a disadvantage because of the lack of technology in the north?

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: I think everybody should be able to access the services fairly.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I understand that the LAT aims to convene a case conference within three months of the receipt of an appeal or an application in 80% of the cases. It only did 1%—I'm going to repeat that—it only did 1% of the cases in 2020 and 2021 and 2019. What should be done to address this?

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: My personal goal is to make sure that I serve the people of Ontario in an expedient manner. I'm not on the LAT yet, so I can't give you particulars as far as how I would change that, but I'm willing to put in whatever time I can and be efficient as I have in my past roles to make sure that everybody gets proper service as much as I can give them.

Mr. Wayne Gates: So you obviously feel that it's unacceptable to do 1% of the cases in a year?

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: I can't comment because I'm not on a tribunal, I'm not sure what the cause of that is, but I believe that people deserve the best quality of service we can possibly give them.

Mr. Wayne Gates: That's that 1% coming up again that seems to be a favourite number. When I read that, I was actually shocked. I'll be honest with you. With the number of people we've appointed and only doing 1% of the cases, I think it's disgraceful—

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Thank you very much, Mr. Gates. We are at the end of your time. With that, I want to thank—

Mr. Wayne Gates: Thanks very much, by the way.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Yes. You're allowed to say "thank you very much." That's very, very good.

You will be contacted by the committee after this process and the public appointments secretary, and we thank you for appearing.

Ms. Mary Henein Thorn: Thank you very much for your time.

Le Président (M. Gilles Bisson): Vous êtes bienvenue, madame.

MS. DOMINIQUE GIGUÈRE

Review of intended appointment, selected by official opposition party: Dominique Giguère, intended appointee as member, Ontario French-Language Educational Communications Authority.

Le Président (M. Gilles Bisson): Là, on s'en va à notre prochain présentateur, quelqu'un qui veut faire partie de—ils l'ont écrit en anglais—the Ontario French-Language Educational Communications Authority. Too bad they didn't do it in French. That would have been even better. Anyways, on a M. Giguère—oh, c'est M^{me} Giguère, Dominique Giguère. Excuse-moi. Je n'ai pas regardé l'écran.

So donc, vous avez 15 minutes pour être capable de présenter. Le temps que vous prenez va venir des 15 minutes du parti du gouvernement. Avec aucune autre petite affaire, on vous donne la parole, madame.

M^{me} Dominique Giguère: Merci beaucoup. Merci, monsieur le Président, mesdames, messieurs, les membres du comité. Merci pour l'occasion qui m'est donnée de me présenter devant vous.

Au-delà de mon expertise bien détaillée dans mon CV, l'opportunité de contribuer au succès de TFO représente pour moi une chance unique d'exprimer ma reconnaissance et ma passion pour une agence qui a contribué à mon propre succès professionnel.

Cette année marque, en effet, le 25^e anniversaire de mon premier contrat avec l'Office de la télécommunication éducative de l'Ontario, ou TVOntario. À ce moment, TFO et TVO étaient sous le même toit. J'ai été embauchée par TVO en tant qu'agente d'éducation afin de pourvoir un poste dédié au soutien pédagogique des enseignants francophones dans les écoles d'immersion. Je n'avais pas encore terminé mon bac en enseignement lorsqu'on m'a offert ce chantier ambitieux et novateur, c'est-à-dire :

- offrir le perfectionnement professionnel en présentiel et à distance—il y a 25 ans—à travers la province, de Thunder Bay à Ottawa, en passant par Timmins et Sudbury, évidemment;

- soutenir les enseignants dans la transition d'une nouvelle pédagogie d'enseignement des sciences;

- mettre en place un nouveau curriculum; et

- faciliter l'implantation d'un nouveau programme interactif produit par TVO.

Donc, TVO a pris un risque avec moi, et moi avec TVO. Ce fut un succès, et ce fut l'occasion de développer des liens avec la communauté franco-ontarienne dans toute la province, avec les dirigeants des commissions scolaires, avec le ministère, les associations d'enseignants et, bien sûr, avec TFO grâce à une étroite collaboration avec Peter Hominuk, avec qui je garde contact depuis ce temps.

Pendant six ans, dans mon rôle à TVOntario, les occasions d'exercer un leadership, d'innover et de créer des partenariats avec le monde de l'éducation et des médias se sont multipliées, tout comme les succès. Pendant cette période, j'ai pu contribuer directement à plusieurs transformations stratégiques, incluant la création d'une nouvelle division, « New Media »; l'initiative du ministère, « Lifelong Learning Challenge Fund »; et l'acquisition du « Independent Learning Centre ».

Aujourd'hui, je vois plusieurs parallèles entre les opportunités et les défis du Groupe Média TFO et ce que j'ai vécu avec TVOntario. Je comprends très bien tous les aspects du mandat de TFO. Je vois aussi les opportunités et les défis qu'un monde post-COVID nous offre, autant dans la prestation des services que dans le recrutement et la rétention d'une main-d'oeuvre qualifiée et engagée.

Tout le travail stratégique que je viens de décrire devra se faire dans un contexte où la gouvernance et le leadership devront être absolument sans reproche. En 2022, il n'y a plus de marge de manoeuvre. Les contribuables, les employés et tous ceux qui accèdent aux produits et services de TFO se doivent de se sentir en confiance grâce à une offre de services et une gestion visiblement modernes, inclusives, durables et axées sur les besoins de la communauté franco-ontarienne. En tant que conseillère experte en gouvernance, je comprends très bien le rôle du conseil d'administration et je sais comment appuyer une équipe de gestion.

Avec le temps, mes horizons se sont élargis. J'ai l'occasion maintenant d'offrir mon expertise en gestion et en apprentissage multimédia à l'échelle internationale en soutien à des causes humanitaires. Mon travail avec Médecins Sans Frontières, par exemple, en Afrique de l'Ouest, en Europe et en Haïti m'a permis de créer des

liens avec la francophonie mondiale et d'apprécier sa pluralité, diversité et richesse extraordinaire. Je réalise mieux maintenant qu'en fait, cette richesse existe aussi dans la francophonie ici, chez moi, chez nous, en Ontario.

Après 25 ans de carrière, mon choix et mon désir de rejoindre le conseil d'administration de TFO constituent l'opportunité de mettre toute mon expérience et mon expertise au service de ma communauté franco-ontarienne. Merci.

Le Président (M. Gilles Bisson): Merci beaucoup, madame. Puis là, on va aller au parti de l'opposition. Vous avez 15 minutes. Qui veut aller en premier? Ça va être M^{me} Stiles.

M^{me} Marit Stiles: Alors, bienvenue, madame Giguère, et félicitations pour votre nomination. Contrairement à certaines des autres nominations par ce gouvernement, nous sommes tellement heureux de voir que vous êtes non seulement une francophone, mais aussi une personne qui a de l'expérience dans ce domaine.

Premièrement, quelle est votre vision du rôle de TFO dans l'apprentissage en ligne, de la maternelle à la 12^e année?

M^{me} Dominique Giguère: Ma vision correspond tout à fait au mandat qui a été conçu par le ministère. C'est une offre de service de qualité, et je mets l'emphase sur « de qualité », de soutien de programmes qui sont tout à fait orientés aux besoins de la communauté franco-ontarienne. Donc, la base est déjà là. Il y a toujours des opportunités d'améliorer et de contribuer aussi à la qualité de la programmation dans la Francophonie mondiale aussi. Donc, oui, ma vision c'est d'aller de l'avant et vraiment de maximiser toutes les opportunités que les nouvelles technologies nous offrent.

M^{me} Marit Stiles: Et est-ce que c'est différent post-pandémie? Est-ce que tu penses que c'est un peu différent maintenant? Est-ce que nous avons à apprendre quelque chose de nouveau, peut-être?

M^{me} Dominique Giguère: C'est différent dans le sens où l'apprentissage en ligne, par exemple, est plus accepté et un peu plus acceptable. Dans mes 25 ans, il fallait toujours un peu expliquer et prouver que c'était possible.

Ce que j'apprécie aussi après la—j'espère qu'on est après la pandémie, presque. Je pense qu'on apprécie beaucoup plus comme quoi c'est difficile de produire de la qualité en ligne. C'est une chose que j'ai dû prouver, encore une fois, et expliquer pendant plusieurs années, et je pense que maintenant, puisque tous ont eu une expérience bonne et parfois mauvaise, malheureusement, je pense qu'on apprécie maintenant comment TFO peut offrir quelque chose de qualité, et ça prend du travail. Ce n'est pas n'importe qui qui peut le faire n'importe quand, n'importe comment.

0940

M^{me} Marit Stiles: OK, j'ai une autre question. Le gouvernement—sorry, I have to get this out of my ear—a confié la gestion des conseils scolaires francophones aux francophones pour assurer une gestion par et pour les francophones. Comment est-ce que vous voyez le rôle de TFO pour appuyer les conseils et leurs écoles sans toutefois aller à l'encontre de ces principes importants

pour les communautés de langue officielle en contexte minoritaire?

M^{me} Dominique Giguère: Vous pouvez répéter la question? Je ne suis pas certaine d'avoir compris vers la fin.

M^{me} Marit Stiles: Le gouvernement a confié la gestion des conseils scolaires francophones aux francophones pour assurer une gestion par et pour les francophones. Comment est-ce que vous voyez le rôle de TFO pour appuyer les conseils et leurs écoles sans toutefois aller à l'encontre de ces principes importants pour les communautés de langue officielle en contexte minoritaire?

M^{me} Dominique Giguère: Je pense que vous avez utilisé le mot-clé, et c'est « appuyer ». Donc, mon expérience avec TVO et avec TFO, c'était carrément une offre en soutien. On utilisait le même principe aussi, du « par et pour et avec », parce que c'est la seule façon—la meilleure façon, selon moi—d'être bien orienté sur les besoins de la communauté, les besoins spécifiques de la communauté. Donc, moi, je vois, et je l'ai vécu, la possibilité de partenariat tout à fait sain et équilibré. Chacun remplit son rôle et chacun contribue au succès de l'autre.

M^{me} Marit Stiles: Et quelle est votre connaissance de CAVLFO?

M^{me} Dominique Giguère: À développer.

M^{me} Marit Stiles: OK. Ce n'était pas là quand vous avez travaillé avec TFO les années passées? Non?

M^{me} Dominique Giguère: Non.

M^{me} Marit Stiles: Alors, nous savons que pour quelques conseils scolaires, vraiment pour les conseils scolaires francophones, en particulier, l'apprentissage en ligne, c'est très important. Nous savons ça. Mais croyez-vous qu'un rôle de premier plan dans l'apprentissage en ligne pour TFO fournirait un modèle qui respecterait les droits constitutionnels des francophones encore? Est-ce que tu sais?

M^{me} Dominique Giguère: Oui, tout à fait, parce que le droit constitutionnel, il est là. Donc il vient avec une responsabilité du gouvernement, selon moi, d'offrir un produit, une possibilité d'apprendre dans sa langue maternelle avec des ressources d'apprentissage qui sont toutes à fait—encore une fois, je le dis—de qualité, mais en lien avec le curriculum, donc avec les mêmes standards que tous les autres outils d'apprentissage. C'est essentiel, pour moi, justement de répondre à ce droit avec la responsabilité. C'est un rôle tout à fait pertinent pour TFO d'y contribuer.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Okay. I want to ask a couple more questions. In addition to making this online learning mandatory and permanent, the government has issued new directives to TVO and TFO to commercialize the online content it produces. So not only would this scheme take money directly from school boards, which is a major concern for the school boards that I'm reaching out to, when students access this new and centralized online learning system, it's also going to be charged with monetizing the program. With this in mind, do you think that the government is using TFO, a valuable public agency, as cover for the stealth privatization of education? I'll give you a preview: I think it is.

M^{me} Dominique Giguère: I appreciate your opinion. I think that the main focus of the discussion today is my nomination and how I can contribute to TFO's success.

I will offer the comment that, in my experience, the development of quality online learning resources—the cost is very high and it's not easy to develop good quality. So for me there is a responsibility to consolidate the resources and avoid duplication. That's something that even with Médecins Sans Frontières—it was not welcomed at first, but I think when everybody realized it's so expensive to do good online learning I created a forum where there was more co-operation and sharing of resources and consolidation of resources to avoid duplication and to contribute to a sustainable approach.

Ms. Marit Stiles: How many more minutes do I have?

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): You still have six minutes.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I appreciate that, I do. I think one of the concerns to flag, though, from the perspective of boards—in this case, francophone boards predominantly—is also that that money is coming out of school boards.

I wanted to go back to CAVLFO, because the francophone community has raised some very serious concerns with the government's changes that, as I have mentioned previously, would take online learning out of the control of francophone school boards and then centralize it with TFO. Of course, as I know you're going to familiarize yourself with this, French-language school boards already have a consortium for the provision of online learning which they've worked very hard to develop over many years. CAVLFO is well respected. It supports students across the province. It really does appear that the government hasn't taken this into account.

Nor did it, by the way, consult with francophone stakeholders about this plan in advance at all. And as I've mentioned previously in my questions, there are questions about constitutionality. I know we asked about CAVLFO, but specifically some of these issues I'm referring to now—I'm curious if you're familiar with them, if you have any thoughts on the issues and the matters, and how in this new role you might encourage, perhaps, the government to actually consult with the francophone stakeholders who they are purporting to serve here.

Ms. Dominique Giguère: Again, my experience in the development and production of online resources, especially at a large scale, is that it works best when a partnership's roles, and everybody's lane, so to speak, are clear and negotiated. That needs a constant adjustment. There are things that perhaps are perceived by these workers as control where I would say maybe it's actually a partnership. It's a sharing of resources as opposed to taking away resources. Ultimately, the goal I think is that everybody wants the best tools for the most efficient and highest return on that investment to the benefit of the Franco-Ontarian community. I think everybody is on the same page on that, myself included, and TFO included.

Perhaps there is room on an ongoing basis to clarify how you get there and what the best use is of everybody's resources. In my role on the board of TFO I would not comment or try to influence government policy or

direction, but I would definitely ensure that TFO, with the resources it has, works to the maximum of its potential and serves the community the way it is expected to.

0950

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you. I just want to reiterate: It is, I would say, an unusual pleasure to see a francophone appointed to the board of TFO, for a change. The last person we saw who was being appointed to the TFO board was an anglophone whose one interest in French seemed to be related to having dated a francophone at one point, as I recall—true story—and who I think did the right thing in the end and withdrew. But it was very unfortunate. It set a really unfortunate tone for these things. So I am reassured somewhat by, of course, talking to you here and knowing that you have some experience with TFO in the past.

I think it's fair to say that on our side, we remain deeply concerned about what seems to be the encroaching privatization of education, but specifically this piece of education around online learning. I want to reiterate: The francophone community, school boards in particular, are deeply concerned that the government hasn't been consulting with them and gave them no heads-up. So there's a lot of important work to be done to mend fences.

I hope the government members are listening, too, to some of the questions here, because for a lot of people in this province, especially coming out of the pandemic, as you said in your response to one of my questions—

Interjections.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Order.

Ms. Marit Stiles: —the concern is, yes, there has always been and there will always, probably, remain a role for online learning, particularly for rural northern francophone communities; but if we don't learn something from this pandemic experience about how difficult that is for so many students—and we've heard the Minister of Education, we've heard his parliamentary assistant also, explicitly say that nothing replaces in-person learning. To then use this opportunity somehow as sort of a stealth way of privatizing education through the back door just seems like a very unfortunate attempt to make a profit, frankly—for government to profit from the pain that so many students have gone through in this pandemic.

So I want to leave you with that. I'm sure you're aware of those issues. How many more minutes do I have?

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): You have 15 seconds.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Fifteen seconds. Well, I want to thank you again for appearing today. Thank you.

Ms. Dominique Giguère: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): I would ask government members to please not chat while we're actually doing questioning of a witness, and I would ask the opposition to do the same; they haven't this morning. We need to respect that people have the right to ask questions. We may not agree with their philosophy or their questioning, but those are rights that members enjoy, and I think we need to respect that.

With that, we'll move over to the government side, and I think we're starting with Mr. Yakabuski.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much—

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): I got it right.

Mr. John Yakabuski: You did. You did. Shocking. Thank you very much, and I acknowledge your concern. Sometimes, we do have to have a discussion as to what our next questions may be, but we will endeavour to make sure that we are as quiet as possible. Thank you very much for that admonishment, Chair.

I want to thank you, Ms. Giguère, for joining us today. I will say *bonjour*, good morning. I will not attempt to ask questions in French, but I do appreciate you putting your name forward for this position. It's a tremendously important position and of value to the people of the province of Ontario, so I want to thank you, amongst your vast experience, for still being willing to serve in this capacity. It is greatly appreciated.

I have a few questions. I'm going to do them together and, if need be, I can repeat them if you can't remember the two and three sort of thing.

The TFO board is comprised of individuals with various skill sets, as you have indicated, and backgrounds, and yours is extensive and impressive. How do you think your work and life experience will help improve the TFO board?

You mentioned that during your time with TFO, you worked with French communities across Ontario. Could you expand on how your time with TVO has equipped you for TFO? I think I might have put a "TFO" in there earlier that I should not have; it should have been "TVO."

Aside from TVO, what has your interaction with the Franco-Ontarian community been like? Could you highlight how your other positions have equipped you for TFO?

Finally, you are the co-CEO and founder of Currents Group, which provides consulting services. Could you expand on how this would equip you to work with TFO?

I'll repeat the first part, just so we have it correct: You mentioned that during your time with TVO, you worked with French communities across Ontario. Could you expand on how your time with TVO has equipped you for TFO?

Ms. Dominique Giguère: Thank you for those questions. Your first question was about how my skill sets could improve the board. I haven't been on the board yet, and I don't know if it needs improvement, but I know that I can definitely—

Mr. John Yakabuski: How about "contribute to the board," then?

Ms. Dominique Giguère: Yes, that's exactly what I was going to say. I think what makes a board very successful is that recognition of the need for different perspectives, the need for different skill sets and the need for diversity and respect for each other's contribution. I think I am adding a perspective, perhaps, that is not there now, and so I'm really, really looking forward—I know I can make positive impact.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I believe you're correct.

Ms. Dominique Giguère: Thank you for that.

My work at TVO has definitely prepared me for this. As I mentioned, there are a lot of parallels in mandate. The

mandate is evolving with the times, whether it's TVO or TFO, but, at the core, there are a lot of similarities, and my alignment with and passion for that core of why TVO and TFO exist are still there.

It was interesting; we were under the same roof, TFO and TVO, and it was easy to go to the sixth floor to collaborate. I had the privilege to actually work in—even though somebody had to sign my paycheque within TVO, I was looking after the Franco-Ontarian community and also the French-as-a-second-language community and providing resources to that community. That required a foot in both worlds.

That started in the K to 12 sector—I mentioned, a lot of great partnerships with the school boards and teacher associations for that support. But eventually, that expanded—TVO's mandate and TFO's expanded into colleges and universities. I was really proud to be able to reach out to Boréal and La Cité and really ensuring that—in fact, the LLCF project that I was looking after spanned all colleges, so I was able to go back and forth and really work as a full and integrated community. So I very much lived that experience of, “It's crossed over; it doesn't matter who does what, as long as resources are well used,” so I feel very well prepared. I feel like I have been working in parallel with TFO for a long time.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I think you've certainly just displayed that.

You're good with the other two questions? You've got them?

Ms. Dominique Giguère: Yes, the third one was about my past experience. I think I touched on that. The Franco-Ontarian communities are there, they're vibrant throughout the province, but they are in pockets. So it was such a privilege to have as a responsibility, as my job, to actually go from one community to another to do professional development days with teachers and offer resources and then to continue that relationship. What we would do is—before Zoom, we thought we were so innovative in using a full television studio to offer distance learning. I had the chance to really support teachers across the province, and those are bonds that remain to this day. I feel the roots are there. But, as I mentioned, it's not easy if you want to grow professionally to work in French in Ontario, and I had opportunities to use my skills internationally, but it's great to also now be able to do both and contribute more locally.

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Right now my firm, Currents Group, offers organizational development services, and I think it's a perfect combination for TFO, because I still develop online learning courses for Médecins Sans Frontières. I'm just wrapping up a project with Geneva. At the moment, I'm also sought-after for governance expertise, best management practices and strategic planning—and I can see that sort of, combined, wraps up question number one. I'm brought in sometimes in organizations where there's conflict on the board or between the board and the management team. Often, it's just because roles have not been clearly defined. So this is something that I can contribute to the board, in case there are conflicts, and

support the board in its strategic planning process, particularly implementation, which is much harder sometimes than developing the plan in and of itself. I bring that governance expertise as well as expertise in the core mandate of TFO.

Mr. John Yakabuski: And your work as co-CEO of Currents Group is similar in its scope, I would think, your ability to work with some of the different—

Ms. Dominique Giguère: Yes. My last answer was a direct description of the services that I offer as the co-CEO and main consultant for Currents Group, which are strictly focused in the not-for-profit sector and education, humanitarian and the arts. I made it a choice that our corporation would provide top-notch organizational development services to organizations that, frankly, sometimes can't access big-box organizational development consulting services. I made that our mission, so that's why it ties in perfectly with TFO's mission.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you so much for that, Ms. Giguère. The people of Ontario are fortunate to have people like you step forward, I certainly assure you that.

I do now want to pass it on, with the consent of the Chair, to my colleague MPP Babikian.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Mr. Babikian, you have about a minute and 14.

Mr. Aris Babikian: Thank you, Madame Giguère, for your extensive experience and sharing your experience with us, not only with the people of Ontario, the Franco-Ontarians, but also internationally. I see the passion, the commitment and also the experience to be an ideal candidate for this position.

My question is: What interested you in applying for the board of TFO?

Ms. Dominique Giguère: It's that opportunity to apply and serve in my own backyard. My career so far and the clients that I have developed have brought me and given me opportunities to serve a lot outside of Ontario. When I practise in Ontario, it tends to be more with the English-speaking community and anglophone businesses. So this is unique. This is that kind of perfect combination of—

Le Président (M. Gilles Bisson): Merci, madame Giguère. Vous avez épuisé le temps qu'on a pour les questions. Je vous remercie beaucoup. Vous allez être contactée par la greffière et par le bureau d'appointements avec la décision de ce comité. Avec ça, on aimerait vous remercier d'être venue devant notre comité aujourd'hui.

M^{me} Dominique Giguère: C'est moi qui vous remercie. Bonne journée.

Le Président (M. Gilles Bisson): À la prochaine.

Now we're going to deal with a couple of things. We have concurrences that we have to deal with. Mr. Yakabuski, I take it?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Yes, thank you, Chair. I move concurrence in the intended appointment of Mary Henein Thorn, nominated as member of the Licence Appeal Tribunal.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): With that, any discussion? There being no discussion, I then move to a vote.

All those in favour, please signify. All those opposed? Okay, carried.

All right, Mr. Yakabuski, you have a second concurrence.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I do, Chair. Thank you for that.

I move concurrence in the intended appointment of Dominique Giguère, nominated as member of the Ontario French-Language Educational Communications Authority.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): With that, any discussion? There being no discussion, all those in favour, please signify by saying “aye.” Opposed? Very good. That’s carried.

I have one other order of business that I would like to deal with—and if members have something after that, they can raise it—and that is, we’ve been, up to now, because of the pandemic, utilizing Zoom to allow our presenters to come before committee. This committee is going to have to decide, do we want to continue doing this?

I just mention to members, and I think long-standing members know, that in the past, we would arrange to have a telephone connection or, back in the days before Zoom, for somebody to get into Contact North or something to be able to connect. So it’s not a foreign idea, but we formally have to decide if we’re going to allow Zoom for the presenters.

So with that, does anybody want to weigh in? Mr. Yakabuski.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you, Chair. You are correct. I’ve been on these committees—not as long as you, but longer than most, and there always has been a provision for remote communications or interaction or appearance. I think that could be continued, but as a rule, it was always that the applicant would appear before the committee. There were exceptions made because of circumstances on different occasions. So I think if we were to revert to that, that would be the direction that we’d want to go in. We know there are always going to be exceptional circumstances. Otherwise, we’d be on Zoom. We’re not prepared to allow people to routinely appear remotely.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): I’ve got Mrs. Stiles.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I think what the member opposite is proposing is that we—I’m not really sure, exactly; I might need some more clarity. But I think he’s proposing that we not return to Zoom, but we just continue with the past practice: if somebody can’t make it in person, we accommodate them by phone.

I would like to see the opportunity—obviously, we all would prefer people to be here in person, but it’s difficult. And particularly in this moment, some people may not be comfortable travelling right now. I really do feel like we benefited. I personally find it much more engaging to be able to see the person on the screen, and I would really like to see that continue. Maybe I’m misunderstanding the member opposite.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Okay, maybe, Mr. Yakabuski, you could clarify what technologies you think we should be able to use.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Yes, and I appreciate the comments from the member opposite. I apologize if I sounded confused. Unfortunately, that’s—

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Some of us do it naturally.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Yes, we come by it naturally.

I was not implying that it would have to revert back to telephone, because we might as well start doing things by mail as well.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): That still exists, yes.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Technologies do exist. In extenuating circumstances, if there is an issue that arises that the person—because we have some people for whom, if they live up in the farthest reaches, and you would understand that very well, it might not be practical. We understand there are always exceptional and extenuating circumstances, but we’re not suggesting that that revert back to being by telephone, because I accept and share the view of the member opposite that even having a visual remotely is better than no visual at all.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): I want to be clear: The committee—I don’t know if we want to do this as a motion or just as an agreement.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tanzima Khan): It’s just an agreement.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): It’s just an agreement.

If I understand correctly, what we’re asking is that people appear before committee as normal, but if there are circumstances that the person can’t be here or doesn’t feel comfortable coming into the city because of COVID or whatever, we will allow them to participate by Zoom.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I don’t think I want it that broad. I think we have to have a better understanding of what the circumstances are than, “I’m not comfortable coming into the city.”

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): I think the Clerk can maybe help us a bit on this, because they do the screening, they do the invites. Maybe you can explain.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Tanzima Khan): What I can do to accommodate—I think what you’re trying to say here is, when we are scheduling, if we get a request for someone to appear virtually, I can send that request out to either the subcommittee, if you guys decide just the subcommittee, or the full committee. And I can get advice from either the subcommittee or the full committee about how you guys would like to proceed with that specific request. Otherwise, as we are scheduling, we will ask people to appear in person.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I think that is absolutely what we would do.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Okay. Any other questions on that?

So, we’ve got a procedure by which we’re going to revert back to what we used to do, but include Zoom and the technology that was afforded to people.

Is Mr. Babikian in as well?

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): No, I saw that. I thought you were pointing to Mr. Babikian. Mr. Anand?

Mr. Deepak Anand: I just wanted to say that we want to encourage in-person. It's as simple as this: We want to encourage in-person, so it should be in-person, but just in case, if there is a reason they are not able to come in person—I think we should keep it only to the subcommittee, not the full committee; then it becomes a back-and-forth issue. Let's keep it to the subcommittee.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): Yes, I understood it meaning it would go to the subcommittee, not the general committee.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Yes.

The Chair (Mr. Gilles Bisson): With that, does anybody have any other business they would like to raise? Seeing no other business, this committee is adjourned until next week.

The committee adjourned at 1011.

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