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Journal des débats (Hansard)

Mercredi 16 mai 2007

**Standing committee on
government agencies**

Intended appointments

**Comité permanent des
organismes gouvernementaux**

Nominations prévues

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ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
GOVERNMENT AGENCIESCOMITÉ PERMANENT DES
ORGANISMES GOUVERNEMENTAUX

Wednesday 16 May 2007

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The committee met at 1003 in room 151.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT

The Chair (Mrs. Julia Munro): I'd like to begin our proceedings this morning. Our first order of business is the report of the subcommittee on committee business dated Thursday, May 10. I need someone to move its adoption.

Mr. Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford): I'll move it. MPP Joe Tascona will move whatever we need moved.

The Chair: Is there any discussion? If not, all in favour? The motion is carried.

INTENDED APPOINTMENTS

JOHN BALD

Review of intended appointment, selected by official opposition party: John Bald, intended appointee as member, council of the College of Nurses of Ontario.

The Chair: We will now move to the appointment review. Our interview today is with Mr. John Bald, intended appointee as member of the council of the College of Nurses of Ontario. Mr. Bald, please come forward. Welcome to the committee. As you may know, you have an opportunity, should you choose to do so, to make an initial statement, and subsequent to that, there will be questions from members of the committee. Today we will be commencing the questioning with the official opposition. Please go forward.

Mr. John Bald: Thank you very much for inviting me to appear before your committee in relation to this appointment. Most of my career has been devoted to the secondary school education system in the province. I worked for the Hamilton Board of Education and my career encompassed three schools, with the last 17 years as business director at Barton Secondary School in Hamilton. My undergraduate degree from Western is in English, but I completed post-grad studies at the University of Toronto, McMaster and Western. In addition to being director of business education, I was also director of adult education at Barton for three years. At its peak, we had 165 adult students in our program and it was extremely fulfilling working with adults. As well as curricular work, I was a coach and adviser to the students for over 25 years—student council, things like that.

When I retired from education, I was encouraged to consider municipal politics. I ran successfully in the town of Lincoln and was an alderman for six years, with the last three being deputy mayor. I was a member of many committees during my six years, but probably the most exciting was the West Lincoln Memorial Hospital board. I had the pleasure of serving six years on the board, as well as being on the governance committee and the leadership and partnership committee of the hospital. I worked very closely with administration and the medical and nursing staffs. West Lincoln has been on a building drive as well, and I was proud to be part of the board that helped to steer toward the completion of a new hospital.

Throughout my career I have held many leadership positions and I've developed skills that would lend themselves well to this position as a board member of the council of the College of Nurses. I'm excited about the opportunity to serve, and I hope you will consider my application. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much for your comments. Each party will have 10 minutes allotted for questions. As I mentioned, we'll go in rotation. We will deduct the few minutes that you took from the opportunity for the government party. We'll begin then with Mr. Tascona.

Mr. Tascona: Thank you for coming here today, Mr. Bald.

Mr. Bald: Thank you.

Mr. Tascona: This position, I understand, is a part-time position on the council of the College of Nurses of Ontario. Do you know what the term will be for this position?

Mr. Bald: I think it's three years.

Mr. Tascona: Three years?

Mr. Bald: Yes.

Mr. Tascona: And the remuneration, is it—

Mr. Bald: It's a per diem of, I think, \$150, according to the material I downloaded.

Mr. Tascona: Were you contacted by any person in particular to fill this position?

Mr. Bald: Mr. Smitherman's office called me and suggested that I consider applying for it; a girl named Donna, and that's all I know there.

Mr. Tascona: Okay. Do you have a current membership in any political party?

Mr. Bald: No. During the last federal election, the Liberal candidate in our riding asked me to support her in her nomination procedure, and I did. I took out a

membership in the federal Liberal Party. When she got the nomination, she then asked if I would join her team to write policy for that election, and I did. But when the election occurred—as soon as the election ended, I resigned my membership. I know some people might not agree with me, but being a municipal politician, I really, honestly feel municipal politicians should be non-partisan. I didn't want to belong to any one party, so I did resign at that time. But I was a member of the Liberal Party for about six months.

Mr. Tascona: Okay. I have an article from the St. Catharines Standard here that indicates your spouse has worked on the campaign team of a number of Liberal candidates in most of the major elections over the last number of years. A quote from this article states, "Her Liberal ties go way back," and "The Liberal Party espouses all the values I hold dear. I gravitate toward Liberals. They're my kind of people." So your wife, I take it, is quite involved in the Liberal Party.

Mr. Bald: Yes. This is my second wife. My late wife passed away six years ago, but my wife at this time is from Thunder Bay, where she worked for the federal Liberal MP there, Stan Dromisky, in his office as part of his staff—administrative assistant—for six years. So she was obviously very familiar with what was going on, at least in the Thunder Bay area and in the federal sense. She was a federal Liberal at that time. She no longer has a membership in the Liberal Party either.

Mr. Tascona: This is Noreen Bald?

Mr. Bald: Yes, right.

Mr. Tascona: Now, the position you're going to hold is a public member of the council of the College of Nurses, which is intended to provide a non-professional citizen's perspective, and the decisions are to be made in the public interest. You seem qualified for the position, sir. Are you going to make sure that your Liberal ties are not going to impact your decision-making on this, seeing that you were contacted by Minister Smitherman?

1010

Mr. Bald: Absolutely. I've always been a team player—and I hate using that phrase; I apologize. It's such a cliché. But I've always been a team player. I'm a hard worker and I—I hate to use the word "guarantee"; of course, I can't say that word. But yes, I would be able to perform my functions without allowing that at all to colour the way I think.

Mr. Tascona: Do you know why Minister Smitherman contacted you in particular?

Mr. Bald: I applied for the LHIN position which came available in the Niagara area. Jennifer Mossop asked me to apply for that a number of months ago. After I got out of politics last fall, she came to me and said, "Listen, we don't want to lose you from public service. Have you considered this?" So I applied for the LHIN position. I didn't get it, and I thought, "Okay, that should be about it then. I'll move on to more tennis. But then Mr. Smitherman's office called me and said, "Would you be interested in considering this?" So I downloaded all the information I could, and after having the experience I had

on the West Lincoln hospital board and working just on the fringes—but after I read what the college does and what their mandate is, I became quite excited about it and thought, yes, I would really like to take a shot at this; this sounds really challenging.

Mr. Tascona: Is Jennifer Mossop your MPP?

Mr. Bald: No.

Mr. Tascona: Who is your MPP?

Mr. Bald: Tim Hudak.

Mr. Tascona: Tim Hudak, okay.

Mr. Bald: I worked with Jennifer because I was on the hospital board and we were involved with the funding for the new hospital. The hospital is in her riding, so she would come to many meetings, and I got to know her because I was on the governance committee and there were only six of us, and we had many, many meetings. She talked about the various strategies that she would have to go through in approaching Minister Caplan and things like that, so I just got to know her.

Mr. Tascona: Okay. I've got an article that your wife, Noreen, wrote to the editor of Niagara This Week—it's dated December 1, 2006—where she wrote about Mr. Hudak, saying that by endorsing a municipal candidate, "Mr. Hudak has forever changed the landscape of municipal politics in Lincoln. We will no longer be voting for friends, neighbours or the best person for the job. We will now be forced to vote along party lines." As you know, MPP Jennifer Mossop endorsed a Stoney Creek municipal candidate for ward 9 in the last election, Phil Bruckler. In this context, did Ms. Mossop forever change the landscape of municipal politics?

Mr. Bald: Well, my wife's letter was in response to a previous letter from the chair of Mr. Hudak's campaign. He had made some comments that she was offended by. I don't endorse what Ms. Mossop did either. I really, sincerely think that municipal politics should be non-partisan. Sorry, but I really don't think any party should be involved in it. It's one area where it's just so open to claims of favouritism and so forth. As Cicero said, not only must justice be done, it must appear to be done. In the local political situation, you're opening so many cans of worms when you get into that: "His street was plowed before mine." "That's because he's a Liberal." "Their trees got trimmed before mine." "That's because he's a Conservative"—that kind of thing. I really think we should try to avoid that, so I don't endorse what Ms. Mossop did, nor do I endorse what Mr. Hudak did, or anybody. I really think it would be a good idea to stay out of that, in my opinion.

Mr. Tascona: Okay. Currently, are you retired from the teaching profession?

Mr. Bald: Yes.

Mr. Tascona: Are you doing anything else besides that, in terms of—

Mr. Bald: I was in municipal politics until last November. Now I carve song birds and play some tennis.

Mr. Tascona: Good for you. What do you want to get out of this position, in terms of what you want to contribute to this College of Nurses position?

Mr. Bald: Having downloaded and read so much of what they do, I really would like to be part of helping to steer in the right direction, if I may be so bold. We've obviously got a situation in the province, and we all know this, where environment and health are the two things that concern people more than anything. With health, most people in this room were baby-boomers, or pretty close to it, and our hospitals are in a period of—they're going to have to be ready for the baby-boomers, shall we say. I think the nursing profession, being on the front line—we've got to help them; we've got to be there for them. The Liberal government, I know, has appointed 8,000 nurses, according to what I read in the paper, since their mandate began, and we need more. We really do need more.

Mr. Tascona: There was a comment yesterday about people who are on the front line, that if someone dies—I'm talking about nurses in particular, the front-line health care workers—their family should receive death benefits because of the fact that they work in the health care profession. I don't know if you're aware of that, but it was raised yesterday.

Mr. Bald: I heard it on the radio. It was over the flu epidemic, wasn't it?

Mr. Tascona: Yes. What do you think about that?

Mr. Bald: Boy, that's a tough one. I'd want to know a little bit more about that one. That could be a real problem. But I'd like to know more about it.

Mr. Tascona: Okay. Those are all of my questions.

The Chair: We'll move on to Ms. DiNovo.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale-High Park): Welcome, Mr. Bald. Last week was Nursing Week and I went to St. Joseph's Hospital, which is in my riding. I did a tour there and I heard from many of the nurses in many of the departments about their concerns. Front and centre among those concerns were being overworked and understaffed. I heard this really across the board. I'm sure it's reiterated in hospitals across this province, and I just wondered if you could comment a little bit about that reality.

Mr. Bald: On Sunday, I spent some time with a friend of mine who's a nurse, and his wife is also a nurse, both in the Hamilton system and both for over 15 years. We chatted about his day and he said that every day last week—Nursing Week—there were at least two people who phoned in sick on his shift; one day there were three. And he said, "That means we pick it up, and that means we have more patients. It's a grind." He said, "One of the things that goes"—and he was upset about it—"unfortunately, is the education part of it, because you just don't have time on your break or whatever it might be to attend seminars." He said that there have been more nurses that have come along in the last few years and that's great, but we need more. I concur with him. From what I hear, talking not just to him but to other nurses and people, and reading the papers, we really need to bulk it up.

That's such a big question, though, because coming out of the high school system—you've got to attract kids

coming out of school to look at the nursing profession and think, "That's the way I want to go." I taught grade 13 for years and counselled and dealt with kids, and nursing was not one of the things that was at the top of the list. The general consensus among most kids was, "Man, do they ever work so hard—12-hour shifts and working hard." It's something that we have to work on. It needs some public relations, and if I could ever help with something like that, I'd love to do it.

Ms. DiNovo: Also, in long-term care, we just had a bill pass, Bill 140, and there was a great deal of discussion about the number of hours per patient. Of course, this all comes back to funding. So I'm wondering if you could comment on, if we need more nurses in long-term care, if we need more nurses in our hospital system and presumably also in community health clinics, where's the money going to come from? How do we fund this?

Mr. Bald: You're talking to an ex-municipal politician. I don't know. It's one of those things that I just don't know enough about at this time. That's in your bailiwick. You've got to find the money for that. Part of me envies you and another part of me just says, "Good luck." The money has to be there—we know that—so it's just a matter of finding it.

Ms. DiNovo: Out of that discussion have come some real critiques of the health care system in Ontario—the nurses' association has taken part in these discussions—the fact that we're moving to a two-tier system, that we're moving away from universal access to our medicare system. One of their bones of contention is the P3 hospitals, the public-private hospitals. They're already incurring huge cost overruns. I wanted you to maybe discuss this government's move to a two-tier system.

Mr. Bald: I can't. I really don't know enough about it at this time. I hope it doesn't happen. I'm for universal health care and I'm hoping that we're not going in that direction. But that's about all I can say because I really don't know enough about the P3s, other than what I read in the Star, like we all do.

Ms. DiNovo: Certainly, the nurses will get you up to speed very quickly about that, I'm sure.

Mr. Bald: I'm sure they will.

Ms. DiNovo: Speaking about the Ontario Nurses' Association, they've also been rallying here earlier this month for Bill 30, which is our own health critic Shelley Martel's bill, the Safe Needles Save Lives Act. I'm wondering if you could comment about that. The Ontario Nurses' Association is in favour of this act. This is to replace the needles that we have at really a few cents per needle. This prevents injury by needle pricking.

Mr. Bald: Oh, the needle—

Ms. DiNovo: Exactly, yes.

Mr. Bald: Good idea. Excellent idea.

Ms. DiNovo: Okay. So you would support the passing of that bill?

1020

Mr. Bald: I remember how when I was on the hospital board you'd hear about somebody in the laundry facility at the hospital who was just rolling up some

sheets and got stuck with a needle, and you'd think, "Oh, man, that's awful." As careful as the nurses and the RPNs had been, it happens, and we want to avoid that. If we can avoid it through this bill or some other means, let's investigate, because that was a terrible thing.

Ms. DiNovo: Maybe you could phone Donna in Mr. Smitherman's office and suggest to her that this bill be passed.

Bill 171 is another piece of legislation that has also come before this House recently. One of the concerns when it was first written, a real oversight, was the lack of social workers in it, but the nursing association had some concerns and amendments. Could you say something about Bill 171?

Mr. Bald: Is that the one about nursing practitioners?

Ms. DiNovo: Yes.

Mr. Bald: I don't know enough about it, other than what I downloaded. I'm certainly in favour of nursing practitioners; I think that's a great idea. I couldn't comment on the suggestion about expanding to various areas because I just don't know enough.

Ms. DiNovo: Again, back to the shortage of nurses that we have: We're losing nurses, of course, and we're not attracting them from other countries or getting them up to speed as quickly as we'd like to see. I actually had a forum for internationally trained health care professionals in my riding recently. We had the college come out to speak to this, and they admitted that there was a problem in getting internationally trained nurses on the floors of our hospitals as quickly as we could and as well as we would like to. Do you have any comments about internationally trained nursing staff?

Mr. Bald: Again, I hate to cop out, but I don't know enough about it. It certainly is intriguing if that is going to help to alleviate the problem.

My late wife was in the hospital system for over 20 years. She had seven types of cancer and so forth over 21 years. I've been in almost every hospital in southern Ontario, from Niagara Falls to Mount Sinai, and every hospital in Hamilton. I have nothing but the greatest praise for our hospital system. I think they're just marvellous. I think they're working hard. I think there are some wrinkles that we have to help them straighten out, and if that is one of the ways of doing it, then so be it. Let's go for it. I've watched it, and it is quite a system. I hear people put it down, and I think they're wrong.

Ms. DiNovo: What it needs is a lot more funding.

Mr. Bald: It needs some help. We've all sat in emergency rooms for long afternoons, but that's just the way it is right now, and hopefully that can be fixed. I'd love to be part of that.

Ms. DiNovo: That's it for me.

Ms. Monique M. Smith (Nipissing): I can't help but feel compelled to straighten out some of the misleading

information that Ms. DiNovo was sharing with the committee this morning. We don't endorse a two-tier health care system, and I know you know that, and in no way are our hospital projects that we're moving forward with private hospitals.

The North Bay hospital—I represent North Bay—is going forward. I spent two hours in the old North Bay hospital on Friday morning with our nurses celebrating Nursing Week, and I can only say that the RNAO representatives I met and the nurses in the North Bay hospital are pretty darned excited that 37 and a half months from now we will be in a new hospital.

I know that you're working toward a new hospital in your community, as well. It's an exciting time as we rebuild the health system.

I really want to just thank you for coming. I think that you are doing a great community service.

I just wanted to clarify: You were encouraged to apply by a number of people for the LHIN position and that didn't come together.

Mr. Bald: Right.

Ms. Smith: So you thought everything had kind of gone away, and then you were just approached. Do you think it was because your application was still at the ministry?

Mr. Bald: I really don't know. I know I had seen Jennifer and she said, "Don't go away," so I said all right. I went on the site—it's a beautiful site—and downloaded a lot of things and looked at them. After I had the phone call from Minister Smitherman's office, I immediately looked at the College of Nurses and went from there.

Ms. Smith: We're thrilled that you're excited about serving. I think you're going to make a great contribution. We really appreciate your service to our community. Thanks.

The Chair: That concludes our time. You may step down. Thank you for appearing here today.

We will now deal with concurrences. We will now consider the intended appointment of John Bald, intended appointee as member, council of the College of Nurses of Ontario.

Ms. Smith: I move concurrence of John Bald as appointee to the council of the College of Nurses of Ontario.

The Chair: Concurrence in the appointment has been moved by Ms. Smith. Any discussion? If not, all in favour? Opposed? The motion is carried.

That concludes our business on intended appointments. Thank you very much for your participation.

We will now revert to agenda item number 3 in camera.

The committee continued in closed session at 1025.

CONTENTS

Wednesday 16 May 2007

Subcommittee report	A-581
Intended appointments	
Mr. John Bald	A-581

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

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