

Crowd shouts down dissident trustees

# Board chairs refuse to resign

**DAVID LEA**  
Special to The IFP

"I respectfully decline the request."

These five words— spoken by Halton Catholic District School Board Chair Al Bailey and Vice-Chair Alice Anne LeMay— were all it took to put to rest one of the most intense and controversial meetings in the history of the board.

Earlier in the week, five trustees called a special meeting for Thursday night to vote on a motion calling for the resignation of the chair and vice-chair.

The motion, presented by Oakville Trustee Anthony Danko, stated the majority of trustees— including Halton Hills Trustee Rosanna Palmieri— no longer believed that Bailey and LeMay spoke for them.

Burlington Trustee Bob Van de Vrande said the leadership's inability to forge a board that could work together towards a common vision justified their dismissal from the position. Disagreement between the leadership and some board members also existed over the role of the trustee, some believing that trustees should take a more active role in establishing policy and providing direction for the board.

Danko said the motion was merely being put forward to make a statement and convey the trustees' dissatisfaction over remarks Bailey had made about their conduct.

Although the motion passed, with a 5-4 majority, it was non-binding.

In other words, it was just a formal request which Bailey and LeMay quickly rejected.

All three student trustees made their support for the chair and vice-chair known but their votes did not count.

The fact it was a non-binding motion did not stop the boardroom from filling with more than 70 concerned spectators.

From the beginning the crowd made it known whose side it was on.

As Danko read the motion and

attempted to speak on his reasons for bringing it forward a cry of 'Shame! Shame!' erupted from the crowd.

Bailey silenced the spectators with a few strikes of his gavel, but much more was still to come.

All the trustees were given the opportunity to speak to the motion. Some spoke in support of the chair and vice-chair.

"I am of the firm opinion that this board has operated quite capably and competently over the period of leadership exercised by these individuals who have proven records of service in their roles as chair and vice-chair," said Milton trustee Rev. David Wilhelm.

Wilhelm also spoke of the dangers that could await the board if inexperienced trustees replace Bailey and LeMay, who have extensive experience.

Wilhelm's statement was followed by thunderous applause, as was every other trustee who spoke in support of the chair and vice-chair.

The audience's reaction was somewhat different when a trustee seeking the resignation of Bailey and LeMay attempted to speak.

"The fact that there are so many trustees that are asking for a changing of the guard at this time should be a signal to some that perhaps all isn't right around the board table," said Burlington trustee Joanne Matters before being interrupted by the angry grumbling of the audience.

Again, Bailey quieted the crowd with the pounding of his gavel, but the crowds' anger only got worse as Matters continued to speak.

"We're not your pawns," one man yelled.

In the end, the vote was held, those favouring the motion had the majority



**ROSANNA PALMIERI**

and the chair and vice-chair declined to resign.

"This whole procedure has been the most un-Christian experience I've had in my 27 years with the school board," said LeMay.

After the vote Van de Vrande lashed out at Bailey and LeMay for refusing the majority of the board's request.

"The majority of the board of trustees have indicated that we want a change. Why would these individuals choose to cling to a position where they do not have the support of the majority?" he said. "That strikes me as the height of arrogance."

Van de Vrande experienced the same problem as Matters, struggling to finish his statement as the shouts of an angry crowd threatened to drown out his comments.

Palmieri was not expecting the turnout of spectators strongly opposed to the motion.

"I was surprised by the numbers because it was a non-binding motion. We were really (just) making a statement," said Palmieri.

Palmieri said the trustees behind the motion didn't intend to make "such a public spectacle" of the matter and had provided both the chair and vice-chair the opportunity to resign during a private meeting held earlier.

"The public should trust the people they have elected (the majority) for a little while because we are more close to the situation and we need to work as a team," she said.

She doesn't believe the motion has caused "any more damage" in terms of the working relationship of the board. But she added she doesn't know how the chair and vice-chair feel.

"They've made a decision. I don't necessarily agree, but we all have to work together. We need to move on."

Palmieri said the matter would not be dealt with again until this December when trustees elect the board's chair and vice-chair.

—With files from Lisa Tallyn, staff writer



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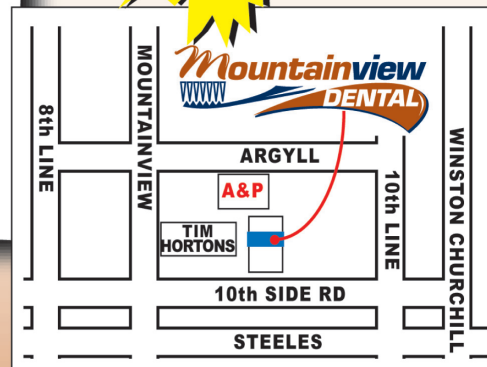
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