

OUR READERS WRITE

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

All male and all white is certainly not alright

Dear Editor:

There has been considerable debate recently about the fact that the Halton Regional Police Services Board is now, for the first time in 10 years, all male.

Having sat on that board for more than four years and having been chair of the board for one of those years, I'd like to respond, firstly by clarifying who is responsible for the composition of the board and then by commenting on the remarks of some of our regional representatives.

It is the province and our regional council that are jointly responsible for the composition of the Board, not the members of the police service, not the Chief, and not the board itself.

The province appoints three members from the community. Regional council elects three from its own ranks, and as of January 1, 1998, council appoints the fourth community member -- for a total of seven members.

The board is a public body governed and mandated by the Police Services Act. It has responsibility for setting policy and the annual police budget and for determining policing priorities for the entire Region of Halton.

For those who wish (and have tried) to applaud anyone for why the Police Services Board in Halton is all male and all white, the province and regional council deserve the credit -- a dubious distinction in my opinion.

As a member of regional council, Oakville's Councillor Keith Bird chaired the committee that selected the region's citizen appointee to the board. In response to the concerns raised about the absence of women and minorities on the board, Mr. Bird maintains, "These are non-issues. I think we have gone beyond this. The whole issue blindsided me." Mr. Bird was not blindsided. He was asleep at the switch. Even if the public can accept the

remote possibility that Mr. Bird hasn't read any newspapers, which have debated the merits of inclusionary practices and representative workplaces and decision-making bodies for the past 20 years.

Mr. Bird was present when this very same issue (i.e. the importance of having a representative board) was raised by both Ms Carmichael and myself at a board meeting in late 1997.

Mr. Bird and I were both members of the board when it approved correspondence sent to the region to assist council with their citizen appointee selection and appointment process.

This correspondence emphasized the importance of having a representative board. This issue was there in black and white. Mr. Bird and his cronies simply chose to ignore it!

But Mr. Bird does not a regional council make. He doesn't work alone. Sadly, in the midst of all of this debate, most of our remaining councillors have been silent. The public has seen or heard nothing from any of them individually or as a council saying "we realize we have made a mistake and we'll remedy it". All we have heard is "it is a non-issue" or Mayor Krantz's equally absurd defence of "I'd resign first before I'd engage in reverse discrimination".

But silence can be as dangerous as the excuses we have heard. By their silence, the remaining regional councillors have joined Mr. Bird and Mr. Krantz in giving people like Mr. Edgar of Glen Williams and his ilk a green light to publicly "bash" the most disadvantaged groups in our country. This is not only tragic, it is shameful. It is embarrassing. It is an issue and the excuses and defences put forward to date and the silence of others on Council are making it a bigger issue! Why can't Regional Council accept responsibility for the fact it has made a mistake and take steps to fix it?

Wendy Roberts
Former chair, Halton Regional
Police Services Board

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