

AFN executive to discuss National Chief's hiring of "girlfriend"

By Lynda Powless
Editor

OTTAWA - Assembly of First Nations leader Perry Bellegarde will be facing questions from the AFN executive later this month over the hiring of his partner as a political adviser.

AFN National Chief Perry Bellegarde admitted in a letter to an Ontario chief that he was in a conflict of interest over hiring his girlfriend to act as his political adviser at the AFN.

Bellegarde and AFN CEO Peter Dinsdale said they had mitigated the conflict by having Valerie Galley answer to Dinsdale rather than Bellegarde for human resource issues.

But that still doesn't sit well with some members of the AFN executive.

The letter from Six Nations Elected Chief Ava Hill was discussed by the executive committee in April.

Several members of the executive, including **Bill Erasmus AFN regional chief for the Northwest Territories**, were surprised to learn Galley was still employed at the AFN.

"Yes we brought it up in an executive meeting and we had some discussion and my understanding is it's not fully resolved. We are still talking about it," said Regional Chief Erasmus in an interview with Turtle Island News.

He said the National Chief agrees he is in a conflict.

"He does agree there is a conflict and he is trying to divert it by having her an-

swer to the CEO," said Chief Erasmus.

"But to us there is still a



**Regional Chief
NWT Bill Erasmus**

conflict because she is advising the National Chief not the CEO. It is an unwritten policy we don't hire our relatives especially our spouses. That's in all politics especially ours. It's a bad signal to give out to our people," he said.

He said it will come up again.

"For sure. We will meet just prior to the assembly in July in Montreal and we will address it again with the National Chief," he said.

Chief Erasmus said he learned of her role when Turtle Island News broke the story.

"Yes, absolutely, I was surprised by it. First of all we were not aware she was on staff. When we found out most of us were quite shocked. We expected the national chief to do the right thing and if it means designing a policy that explicitly mentions it then that's what we are going to have to do. You don't hire your wife," he says.

AFN NS/NFLD Regional

Chief Morely Googoo said the issue did come to the executive but he thought



**Regional Chief NS/NFLD
Morley Googoo**

the matter was resolved.

The decision was, it was satisfactory to the executive at the time, the arrangements that he had made."

He said he continues to

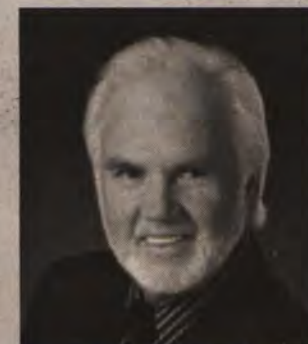


AFN National Chief Perry Bellegarde's controversial hiring of his partner Valerie Galley as his political adviser will be discussed at the next AFN executive meeting. Neither Bellegarde or Galley have commented publicly on the issue-CP Photo-

support the decision, "until I see otherwise differently. I think the AFN dealt with whatever conflict he felt he

had with reporting and attendance."

He said other regional



**Regional Chief
New Brunswick/PEI
Roger Augustine**

chiefs can revisit the issue. "If they decide to bring it up, that's their prerogative. I will be open to listening to them. That is part of our job is to listen to each other

but to my knowledge it has been dealt with."

Roger Augustine, the AFN Regional Chief for

New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, said Bellegarde was within his



**Regional Chief
Quebec Labrador
Ghislain Picard**

right as national chief.

"If he sees that this is causing harm and is putting the regional chiefs in jeopardy and compromising the image and the respect and integrity of the office, he will assess that and he will make a decision based on those things," Augustine said.

He said "If having someone close to him work in the office, if that is jeopardizing anything, he will make a decision and that might be to either remove her from the office, or find some other way of dealing with that issue in terms of her employment."

AFN Quebec/Labrador Regional Chief Ghislain Picard said he did not attend the meeting in B.C. where the issue was originally discussed.

"I understood that that it never really concluded in a way that would provide a definite answer to the issue but I am sure it will come up again."

He said he expects it will come up at the next executive meeting before the July AFN general assembly in Montreal.

"Some of my colleagues are keen on discussing this issue in person," he said.

He said when he was contacted by Six Nations Elected Chief Hill he stayed silent because he had ran for the National Chief position against Bellegarde.

But he told Turtle Island News when asked if he would hire his wife or partner:

"No, I wouldn't do it and I have never done it in any capacity in the past."

He said "I wouldn't consider doing that but I also agree with Ontario Regional Chief Isadore Day that this is something we can provide ourselves with a proper forum to discuss and come to terms with the situation."

AFN executive members Bill Traverse, Manitoba Regional Chief, Kimberly Jonathan Regional Chief Saskatchewan (Federation of Saskatchewan Indians where Bellegarde served at Regional Chief prior to election as AFN leader), Mike Smith Regional Chief Yukon; newly elected B.C. Regional Chief Shane Gottfriedson and newly elected Ontario Regional Chief Isadore Day did not return Turtle Island News calls.

Elections for Regional Chief positions just concluded in Ontario, B.C. and Alberta.