


Mayor should embrace open competition for jobs

Councillor Michael Walker, National Post

Published: Monday, September 22, 2008

Presented by



 On July 28, 2008, Shirley Hoy appeared at a media conference with Toronto Mayor David Miller to announce her resignation as Toronto's City Manager. Having served in the public service with distinction for more than 25 years, including seven years in the City's top post, she is fully entitled to the many commendations that continue to come her way.

Near to the end of the event, Mayor Miller announced that he was personally recommending her replacement, the current Deputy City Manager and Chief Financial Officer. He was introduced on the spot as the new City Manager, as if the sanctification was business as usual.

But it wasn't. Many city councillors were unaware of the appointment. Only a few partisan fellow travelers had been consulted beforehand. Most councillors had no say in the process of nominating the chief bureaucrat who would report and be responsible to them all.

For some of us, the high handed nature of the Mayor's move was nothing new. The Mayor has long salivated at the notion that he and he alone should choose the top public servant in the City of Toronto.

His own hand-picked members of the Mayor's Fiscal Review Panel duly reported in February that, "the Mayor should have the power to direct, appoint, and dismiss the City Manager."

In my opinion, this is a formula for selling ourselves short. The residents of the city and all those who do business with it should be able to rely on its leaders to pursue an open and competitive hiring process that will result in the widest canvassing of talent for this vitally important job.

After all, this is the most senior municipal public service job in the country. It requires management of a budget that is larger than that of six Canadian provinces.

An open competition will expose us to new people with new ideas and visions to make a great city even greater. Its salary range of more than \$300,000 would no doubt be attractive to many with the requisite skill and experience.

Why then would we not seek out recruitment professionals to help find us the best talent from across North America? Why would we not take advantage of the expertise among councillors to actively contribute to a recruitment and selection process for a position that serves them all?

The answer seems to lie in a continuing effort on the part of the Mayor to commandeer power for his own interests, and to place a higher value on direct personal control than on shared input and influence.

Ultimately, the Mayor's desire to have things his own way in appointing a City Manager represents a very risky venture. When you are selected by the Mayor, you do the Mayor's bidding. That opens the dangerous door to partisanship in the public service, and to a revolving door of ostensibly neutral public servants when leaders and political stripes change. That harms the kind of continuity in public service management that has served Toronto so well for generations. And it's not much of a leap from that to the introduction of political parties at city hall.

Competition can be a painful thing, but it produces great results, as well as a sense of ownership in the results. We owe it to ourselves to seek out and retain the best and the brightest. And an open recruitment and selection process involving more than just the Mayor is the way to make that happen.