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Term of Toronto ombudsman Fiona Crean renewed for 2 years

Submitted by Councilor Pasternak

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Toronto ombudsman Fiona Crean, who accused Mayor Rob Ford's office of meddling with a civic appointment, has been granted a two-year extension.

Council's 41-3 vote came after a day of backroom negotiating between councillors who wanted Crean's job extended five years and those who believed her time is up.

Crean is serving a five-year term that ends Nov. 16, 2013. She is the city's first ombudsman, helping citizens who feel they've been ignored or mistreated by the civic bureaucracy.

Rather than grant a second five years, council extended the term to Nov. 16, 2015.

Councillors Gord Perks on the left and Ford supporters Giorgio Mammoliti and David Shiner voted against the two-year extension, which had been moved by the mayor as a compromise both sides could live with.

Mammoliti, who was upset Crean found he had berated staff during the civic appointments process, said her term should be over.

Reached after the vote, Crean said she personally supports a single but lengthy term for an ombudsman. She noted that in other Canadian jurisdictions, an ombudsman serves one term lasting seven to 10 years.

The rules for Toronto's ombudsman set a term of five years, renewable for a second five years.

"The legislation very clearly says five years, renewable once for five years," Crean said. "So it's just unfortunate there has to be a negotiation about that. Here's a good illustration of why you don't want to have two terms."

Perks said limiting the extension to two years amounted to "political interference."

"I think we made a mistake as a council today," he said. "We've once again told a public servant that to some extent their job is contingent on whether or not the mayor likes what they say. And that's wrong."

"Absolutely this is political interference. Effectively, one of our accountability officers was told you're kind of on probation now and we'll see what you do for the next couple of years."

In a media scrum after the vote, the mayor called the result a huge victory.

"We compromised at seven (years)," Ford said. "There was a lot of negotiating back and forth but that's what you have to do, and I'm happy."

Ford denied he was trying to punish Crean.

"Giving her another two years is not payback," he said.

Crean supporters on council also claimed victory.

"The mayor wanted her gone," said Councillor Adam Vaughan. "She's still here. That's a win.

"The mayor was pushed back today and that's good news for accountability in this city."

"The mayor did the right thing, said his brother, Councillor Doug Ford.

"He compromised," Doug Ford said. "It shows he's maturing as mayor and he understands the art of compromise."

Crean survived because she's been doing good work and that's recognized by both sides on council, said Councillor Paula Fletcher.

"So I don't think the majority of council felt that they simply wanted to give her the bum's rush. He (Mayor Ford) got a little pushback, saying why are we being so hard line when she's giving us great service?"

Mammoliti, however, said Ford had "negotiated with the devil and I think it's going to come and bite him on his rear end."

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REAPPOINTMENT

Council votes to extend ombudsman's contract

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CITY HALL BUREAU CHIEF — The Globe and Mail

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Toronto council has decided to extend the ombudsman's contract for two years instead of five, a "compromise" that had some of the mayor's foes praising him for demonstrating a rare willingness to bend.

Ombudsman Fiona Crean's job hung in the balance for much of the day Tuesday as councillors scurried around the chamber trying to cut a deal that would keep Mayor Rob Ford and his allies from blocking her reappointment.

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"I just want to make sure that we're all in this together," Mr. Ford told his colleagues before the vote. "If we're not, it'll be unfortunate because I am compromising, I am reaching out."

Council supported the mayor's motion by a wide margin, 41-3.

Ms. Crean has been in the mayor's sights for weeks, ever since she released a report that concluded his office meddled in the recruitment and appointment of citizens to city boards.

The mayor also suggested abolishing her office – along with those of two other watchdogs – and replacing them with a single lawyer on retainer.

By a fluke of timing, council had to decide Tuesday whether to extend Ms. Crean's contract, which was set to expire in November 2013.

Complicating matters further, a two-thirds super-majority was required to hand Ms. Crean another five-year term.

That meant the mayor, whose grip on the 45-member council is usually weak at best, needed only 15 votes to block her reappointment.

When it became clear that Mr. Ford likely had the votes, a few members of his camp and some of his staunchest left-leaning opponents began hammering out a compromise, one that could extend Ms. Crean's term and keep Mr. Ford from looking like a mayor out for political revenge.

The mayor even thanked some by name in his speech. "I think this is a fair compromise. It should carry," he said. "I want to thank, obviously, on our side, Councillor [Peter] Milczyn and Councillor [Karen] Stintz, on the other side, Councillor [Pam] McConnell, Councillor [Paula] Fletcher."

Ms. Fletcher, usually a foe of the mayor, later told reporters she wrote the compromise motion the mayor moved. Mr. Milczyn said he got involved toward the end, suggesting the two-year figure council ultimately endorsed.

TTC Chair Karen Stintz, a key broker, paced the chamber flashing two fingers – for a two-year deal – as the compromise came together.

Councillor Doug Ford said the outcome showed his brother is "maturing as mayor."

But Councillor Adam Vaughan, the mayor's most outspoken critic, dismissed the compromise storyline.

"The mayor wanted [Ms. Crean] gone. She's still here. That's a win [for us,]" he said.

Ms. Crean, meanwhile, spent much of the day in the public gallery talking to councillors and watching the diplomacy unfold.

"I'm delighted they've extended the term. I'm disappointed it's not five years as the legislation calls for," Ms. Crean said in an interview.

However, she said the debate was not good for an office that exists to help ordinary Torontonians fight city hall.

"The uncertainty that kind of debate provokes is unhealthy," she said.

Councillor Gord Perks, one of the three who voted against the deal, slammed the arrangement.

"This city council has sent a message to public servants that their job is contingent on whether or not the mayor likes what they have to say. That's terrible for Toronto and Torontonians."

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