

Mammoliti kicks off task force behind closed doors^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

TORONTO - After one meeting, Mayor Rob Ford's child-care task force is embroiled in controversy.

Councillor Giorgio Mammoliti, chairman of the task force, held a closed-door meeting of the group Thursday night at city hall and barred two other councillors and the media from entering the room.

Mammoliti's meeting comes a day after he blasted city staff for having a "secret meeting" with massage parlour owners earlier this week.

Councillors Janet Davis and Kristyn Wong-Tam, both members of the community development and recreation committee that oversees the city's child-care operations, were booted out of the 7 p.m. meeting when they tried to sit in on it.

Reporters from the Sun, Globe and Mail, Toronto Star and CBC were also not permitted to enter the room.

Mammoliti said the inaugural meeting was not a "secret meeting," describing it instead as a private briefing session of the task force.

"We feel that they need to get properly briefed by staff at their first meeting," he told reporters. "We don't want to turn this into a very intense kind of deal, these are all volunteers in here who want to help the city, these are all experts in child care and I don't want to turn them off by the politics that I've already seen happening here."

Mammoliti said no one was advised about the meeting because it is the mayor's advisory committee.

"They are there to advise the mayor and I want complete honesty from individuals and I don't want it to be influenced by the politics of city hall," he said.

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Wong-Tam blasted Mammoliti's claim.

"Keep the politics out of city hall at city hall? I think that was one big circular statement if I've ever heard one," she said.

"We have a closed-door meeting, a private in-session meeting where sitting councillors like Janet Davis and myself are asked to leave in front of child-care providers."

She stressed the meeting was not being conducted in an open and transparent way despite the fact Ford ran on a platform of openness and transparency at city hall.

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In an open letter to the mayor posted on her Twitter account Thursday night, Wong-Tam questioned why the meeting was closed to the public and why she as an elected official could not attend.

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Davis said the majority of people she saw in the meeting were private, for-profit daycare operators.

Mammoliti said the task force membership would be made public in the near future.

Back in July, Ford tapped Mammoliti to lead three new mayor's task forces: Child care, homelessness and ice rinks.

"Taxpayers need good child care so they can support their families," Ford said at the time. "The city does provide some child-care spaces but other levels of government has either reduced their support or taken it away entirely. This task force will review our existing services and how we can continue to support child care in our current economic times."

-reprinted from the Toronto Sun

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