
Full-time House, Part-time Member?

This is an edited version of a panel discussion which took place at the annual Canadian Regional Seminar in Toronto in November 1987. The panelists were Don Cousens MPP, Terry Huberts MLA and Donald C. MacDonald.

W. Donald Cousens: When my staff saw I was speaking on this subject they broke out in laughter to think I would admit to being a part-time member in a full-time House. I like to think of myself as a dedicated, fully involved member of the provincial Legislature who has also maintained linkages to the business world.

We belong to different parties but I think we all share a desire to serve our communities, to serve people and to serve our country. Because most politicians start from that premise I do not think those of us who have other interests do not give any less importance to the responsibility we have to our electorate. I hope I do not, and yet one never really knows for sure, because there are so many things that tug at one's time and pull one in different directions.

Personally I could not have entered politics if I had to give up my other interests. I had a young family and my wife was very concerned about putting all eggs in one basket. She is a great, devoted, supportive wife, but genuinely concerned that the same thing could happen to me as she has seen happen to other politicians. At some point, the electorate decides they no longer want them. Then what do I do?

If I did not maintain my business contacts, I could very easily be shunted aside and, not being independently wealthy, find myself with a long haul to get started again. So it was important to my wife that the security of my family be maintained over the long term. It is one thing to love the job and I do not think there is one of us who does not love politics. If you are in it, you do it because of genuine compassion and concern. The rewards you get are not financial. They are of a different type. But it is very important for my family's security that I should keep some kind of outside interest so that, if something happened, I would be able to fall back on it.

It became very important on September 10, 1987. Just three days before that election the polls showed that the

Conservatives might end up winning only four seats. At that point, I knew I would not be a reelected member. It was like being on an airplane, strapped to a seat, looking out the window and being unable to do a thing about it. But I knew that on September 11 I would have a job waiting for me with my long-time employer. That, by the way, would increase my earnings, but I would not have been as happy a person.

The way I see it you can be the best MPP in the world. You can personally do the best job in the world, but when things happen, as they happened in Ontario on September 10, an individual may not necessarily make the difference. Therefore, I have always maintained business contacts.

How does one do two jobs? First of all, by having an understanding wife at home. I think that is the difference with many of us who still have our marriages intact after being in politics for a while. It is a shared arrangement. You cannot do it by yourself. The family is intricately involved in what you are and how you do it. Therefore, when you are late for supper five nights in a row and you are not able to join the family on certain events because of your involvement, they understand why and it is no surprise to them.

The important thing for me is to be open, not only with my family but with my constituents and my business contacts, so that each knows that I am in a position where I am trying to balance certain things.

I think it starts with that honesty – honesty to yourself that says: "I want to be in politics. I want to do the job, but I also want to protect those other things that are important to me, my family and my home." It is important to them that they have that sense of security.

During my past six and a half years as an MPP I have never hidden the fact that I have had business associations. I do not look forward to the new legislation. I am going to have to reveal how much money I am making on the side, because under the new conflict-of-interest guidelines it may all

become public knowledge and people will then know how poor I really am. That is part of this new openness, which is another whole subject altogether.

Being a part-time MPP has made me far more aware of the needs of business. I know the value judgments that are being made by business people. Being involved in the business milieu has enriched my capability as an MPP. I have had to walk a line in many cases where I do not want to get caught in a conflict-of-interest situation. My own integrity is something that says, "I do not want in any way to jeopardize the trust that I have been given."

There have been times when I have been asked to do things, as any politician has, and have said, "No, I cannot do that," because it would put me in jeopardy, but it would never take me away from that primary responsibility of serving the constituents. □

Terry Huberts: I have been a member of the British Columbia Legislative Assembly for only a year and a half. My constituency is Saanich and The Islands, just outside of Victoria, B.C. Before I became an MLA I knew there was a lot of work involved, but I did not realize how demanding it would be. Not until I became an MLA did I realize that the numerous duties, both inside and outside the House, would demand my full attention.

As an MLA, I think it is important, first and foremost, to serve my constituency effectively and responsibly. I take that very seriously. Whether the Legislature is in session or not, I keep the lines of communication open with the people of Saanich and the Islands through my constituency office, through correspondence, conversations, personal appearances and weekly news columns. I attempt to be accessible. I want people to know that I am available any time if they need me, and that I will be there for them.

During the spring 1987 session I was able to bring two private members' bills to fruition, the *University Foundation Act* and the *City of Victoria Foundation Act*. This was an exciting experience for me, and as a new legislator, it required a lot of research and a lot of hours of hard work.

When the Legislature is not in session, I am back in my constituency, listening to the town councils, meeting with community groups, parents, business people, workers and students. Saanich and The Islands is a large constituency, consisting of three municipalities, four major centres and five islands. Each centre and island has a different feel about it. To visit every part of the riding frequently is a major task in itself. Fortunately, my constituency office has purchased a motorhome to function as a "Mobile office". This allows me to go from one place to the other with a little greater ease, but getting to all these places consistently is quite difficult.

As a matter of fact, the last time I was on Salt Spring Island – and I have been there six times since the election – someone said to me, "I am really disappointed that you are not coming here often enough. I thought you promised during the

election that you would be here more often." Even though I had already been there six times, which is a fair bit in a motorhome, as well as the other little things I had done, it was not quite adequate yet.

Another responsibility I consider important is to be well informed on the issues of the day. This involves analyzing and synthesizing vast amounts of information and a great deal of research. I believe that an MLA needs to be well versed on all issues in order to address the concerns of his or her constituents, and to be able to speak effectively in the House, to the media and to the public at large.

The concerns of my constituents, which I deal with on a day to day basis, relate to such matters as business, taxation, assessment, insurance, workers' compensation, welfare, social problems, health problems, education concerns, plus many others. However, my job is not just problem-solving, it includes many positive aspects, such as delivering lottery grants to assist local organizations. I really enjoy the work, it is rewarding, positive, and uplifting.

In addition to representing the constituents, an MLA has numerous outside duties. When we are not in the House debating the issue of the day, we are called upon to attend public forums and accept speaking engagements. In my case, because I am a member of the Social Credit government, and we do not have a member sitting in Victoria proper, I am often asked to speak on behalf of cabinet ministers who are not able to be in town, including the Premier, which I have done three or four times already. These are added responsibilities to my already extensive duties.

I am also a director of the B.C. Steamship Corporation, a crown corporation which transports tourists from Seattle to Victoria six months of the year. I am a member of the Select Standing Committee of Economic Development, Municipal Affairs and Transportation; chairman of the Select Standing Committee on Agriculture; and a member of the Island Trust Review Committee.

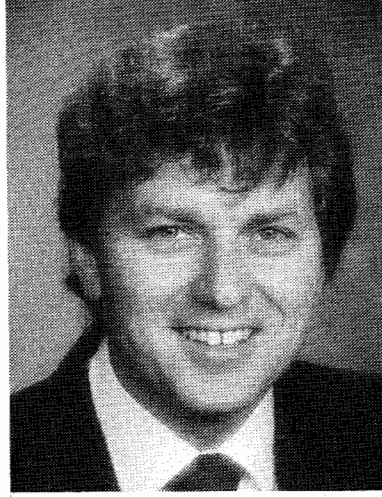
The long hours and the endless meetings are gratifying to me because I take pride in serving my constituency well, and in being part of the Social Credit government's long-range plan to build a strong future for British Columbia.

Before I decided to run in 1985, there were several factors I had to consider, one of which was my family. I am very committed to my family. I have a loving, supportive wife and two sons, ages nine and seven. The fact that my children were that young was a major issue to me. Another factor was my busy, one-man veterinary practice. I was used to a certain standard of living. "Would I be able to maintain this as a member of the Legislature?"

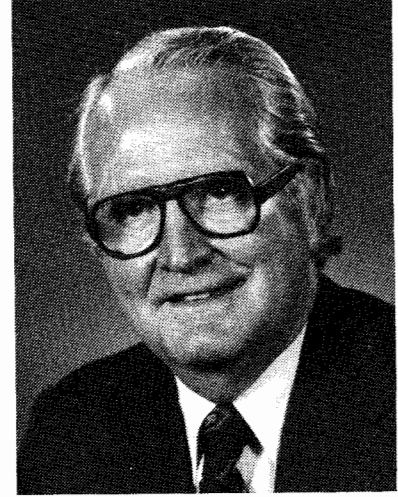
I knew, however, that I wanted to be the MLA for Saanich and The Islands. The constituency had been good to me over the past 15 years and I wanted to give something back in return. I also wanted a new challenge. I have always loved people and been at ease with them. So for me running for elected office was the natural thing to do. There is a point



Donald Cousens



Terry Huberts



Donald C. MacDonald

where you wonder whether you should run or whether you should not run and finally say, "Yes, I am going to run. I am committed." You forget all the fears that would discourage you. You do not listen to anybody who tells you that you cannot make it. You get on with it and do the job; and lo and behold, you get elected.

After I got elected, there were major adjustments to be made. I had never been an alderman or a mayor prior to my election to the House. I had jumped from small-animal veterinary medicine to member of the Legislative Assembly. Someone asked my little son Jason, "How do you like your dad as MLA?" His answer was, "I think I like him better as a veterinarian." I am sure you can imagine the many changes involved in making such a switch in occupations. The meetings, and the time I was spending away in the evening were an adjustment for my family.

The veterinary practice also begged adjustment because veterinary medicine is a practice which demands immediate and constant presence. Most people wait until their pet or farm animal is ill and needs immediate attention before going to the veterinarian. It is not like dentistry, where you can book in advance and say, "I will see you on Thursday evening and I will deal with it then." They want you right now, and if you are not going to be there, somebody else will be and you have just lost a patient or client. So the time constraints were affecting my practice. I was not really totally satisfied that I could carry out all my responsibilities in the way I would want.

I also wanted to do a professional job as an MLA. I wanted to be committed to the position, yet to do so demanded most of my waking hours. I soon began asking myself whether I could serve two careers and do both well? For five months, I did do well. I kept it all in balance. When the session started

in March 1987, I hired someone to run my veterinary practice as I soon found that I truly had no time whatsoever. After the session I had to decide whether I would go back to the practice?

The enthusiasm that I had for being the MLA was stronger at this point than for veterinary medicine. I sold my practice in September but I kept the property. I still receive some rent from that. I also made sure that I am free to start another practice in Victoria four years from now should I, for one reason or other, not win the next election.

In light of my experiences, and the numerous duties which devolve upon an MLA, I would have to conclude that full-time legislatures require full-time members. In my opinion, balancing two careers could lead to burn-out, and could also result in a less than satisfactory job being done.

I would also conclude that if conflict-of-interest laws or guidelines become too rigid, many highly qualified individuals may be discouraged from holding office. Holding public office places not only a financial burden on elected officials, but also pressures in terms of personal life. The current remuneration for MLAs in some provinces is insufficient to entice potential candidates to leave their current positions. I think there are a lot of good people out there whom we are probably hindering from joining our ranks.

Given the current demands placed upon our elected representative, it is highly doubtful whether an adequate job could be done on a part-time basis. That is my perspective. □

Donald MacDonald: The more I thought about what I might say on this topic, the more I found it impossible and perhaps even presumptuous to be dogmatic as to what should

be done in any given constituency. The length of the session, the amount of remuneration, and a number of other factors are obviously components that one has to consider as to whether one is going to be a full-time or a part-time member. I am therefore going to try to put this into a historical context and, like my friend from BC, I will speak personally and end up with essentially the same conclusion.

When I became a member of the Ontario Legislature in 1955, we used to meet for eight to ten weeks a year. The session was fitted in between plowing in the fall and seeding in the springtime, notwithstanding the fact that the province had become a mainly urbanized, industrialized province as far back as the first decade of this century.

The pay had been \$3,900 but had just risen to \$5,400. That \$3,900 consisted of \$2,600 in indemnity. The word "indemnity" is significant. It was not a salary. It was not pay. It was something to indemnify you from the job you were normally engaged in, which was presumably going to be your basic source of income and security. The other \$1,300 was a non taxable expense allowance.

Interestingly enough, when Premier Frost raised the pay from \$5,400 to \$7,000 in the late 1950s the reason he gave publicly was that the job was becoming full-time. I do not know whether it was really perceived as that, except that it was the excuse given for raising the pay to the munificent sum of \$7,000, which back in those days was not too bad.

In terms of resources, you had no office and no staff. If you had letters, you called up the Speaker's office and out of the Speaker's steno pool a charming young lady would come down and you would dictate the letters. She would go away, type them and bring them back, and you might never see her again. You scrounged your own supplies. If you wanted a ruler, eraser or some paper or something of that nature, you requisitioned it from the Speaker's stock of material. That was the way legislatures operated only 30 years ago.

John Roberts, in my view, brought the Ontario Legislature into the 20th century. In the seventh decade of the century, he brought it around the corner in terms of recognizing that all backbenchers, all members needed certain resources. Certainly, the opposition needed resources, if opposition, as an integral, important and critical part of the parliamentary system was going to have the capacity to cope with a government, backed with all the resources of the civil service.

The result was that throughout the 1960s the resources for caucuses were slowly increased. There was also recognition that it was not just to help the caucus, but to help the opposition leaders to cope with the rather formidable resources of the Premier of the province, both in his capacity as Premier and the head of the party. Ordinary MPPs, however, still had no full-time secretary. In fact, as the leader of a party, albeit a party of three, back in 1955 – it took me

six months to get a full-time secretary. As for the average members, they did not get full-time secretaries until the 1970s.

There was no real breakthrough in Ontario until we were able to escape from a traditionalism that was due partly to a government's disinterest in any change and partly to the fact that the people in the legislative setup, who might have been the instruments for bringing about change, were arch-traditionalists, particularly our former Clerk.

In the 1970s, as you perhaps are aware, there had been established in Ontario a so-called COGP, Committee on Government Productivity, to examine the whole restructuring in government and streamlining of the process to make it more efficient. Some of us in the Legislature said, "It is all very fine to have the government become more efficient, but to the extent that it does become more efficient, then the executive branch will be even more dominant of the legislative branch." That is always a concern not only in political science circles, but for anybody who is interested in the operation of parliament. The result of those complaints was that the government established a commission, headed by Dalton Camp and including Farquhar Oliver, thrice Leader of the Liberal party, and Douglas Fisher, a journalist and former CCF member of the House of Commons.

With their report, the floodgates were opened. There were three or four reports on legislative changes. In 1975, the Commission's recommendations were reviewed by a select committee of the Legislature headed by former Speaker Donald Morrow, and virtually all the recommendations were accepted. The Camp Commission indicated that if members of the Legislature were going to be rescued from what was referred to as the "case-history syndrome" – people being overwhelmed with constituency problems and frantically trying to cope with the complexity of government, the bureaucracy and red tape – something had to be done.

So members got not only an office, but a full-time legislative assistant at Queen's Park, and in 1975 there was the public funding of constituency offices with a full-time constituency assistant to pick up on some of that case-history load, so that the member would be freer to become what presumably he was elected for, namely, a legislator. Along with that, there were increases in pay and increases in pensions, and gradually there have been added what might be described, and I think are perceived by the public, as perks, namely, mileage allowances for travelling in the constituency and a certain amount of travelling across the whole province, an accommodation allowance so that when those who happen to live outside Toronto, did not have to use up virtually all of their non taxable expense allotments getting, in effect, a second home, because the House was now meeting for six or eight months a year.

In short, we had gotten to the point where today in Ontario a member is receiving an indemnity – I am not sure of the exact figure – in the range of \$36,000 to \$38,000 and a

nontaxable allowance of something like \$13,000, bringing the total to \$50,000-plus. If you calculate that nontaxable allowance in terms of taxable dollars, I suppose it is the equivalent of \$55,000. As a person who lived on relatively low salaries throughout my legislative career and other careers, I would argue that \$55,000 is the kind of salary a person can live relatively comfortably on.

If a person is going to really fulfil his responsibilities as a member of the Legislature, fulfilling his job as a legislator, sitting in the House, sitting on committees, introducing private bills, doing all of the work related to that; if he is going to look after his constituency with all of the social claims, the economic claims, everything else that goes on in his constituency; if he is going to fulfil his responsibilities on behalf of his party, because he will be called upon to play some role in terms of taking meetings and things of that nature for his party; if he or she is going to fulfil his or her responsibilities in terms of the public, I submit you do not have time for a second job.

When I was attending Queen's University back in the late 1930s, I recall one time coming up to debate the students, the young lawyers, at Osgoode Hall, and I was told by a friend that I should look up J. M. Macdonnell, who had been head of National Trust Company and later became MP for an east-end Toronto seat.

I went to see him because I was interested in going into politics and I just thought it would be useful, since he was chairman of the board at Queen's, to have a chat with him. His advice was "if you are interested in politics, make your pile, become financially independent and then go into politics." As far as I was concerned, the discussion ended right there, because I think serving the public as an elected representative is a lifetime career, worthy to be set alongside medicine or law or the ministry or other professions.

I have two final comments. First section 7 of the conflict-of-interest legislation now before the Ontario Legislature, for example, prohibits cabinet ministers from

practicing a profession, carrying on a business or holding an office or a directorship. Members, on the other hand, are forbidden to make decisions in their capacity as MPPs using inside information for private interests. I grant you that it is not impossible to act and continue to act with integrity, but I suggest that it also might be more difficult, depending on what are your extra-parliamentary activities.

Another point I would like to touch upon is whether being a full-time politician increases the distance between the member and the public since he or she has fewer contacts and experiences outside of politics.

In my experience, the opposite is true. If one is a full-time member of the Legislature, one has an infinite range of outside contacts. You are beseeched individually and collectively by environmental groups, trade union groups, farm groups, teachers' groups, business groups and so on. I would suggest that the kind of experience a person gets in meeting with those groups gives you a breadth of experience in terms of what is happening out in the real world. As a legislator this is more useful than if you happen to be a doctor, a lawyer, or a teacher which may give you a narrower perspective.

May I suggest as kindly as I can that it is just possible that if a person is an industrialist or a businessman, he is not as knowledgeable of the problems of the worker or farmer or the social problems in the province and therefore, although he has some specialized experience it is not broad.

So I conclude, as my friend from BC has concluded, that a full-time House requires a full-time member, at least in Ontario – and I am not being dogmatic with regard to other legislatures. When you have an income level of some \$55,000 plus all the other little perks covering travel, accommodation and things of that nature, you are going to be in the top income brackets and can live well enough, if your objective in life is public service and not making more dollars. □