

Sky's the limit for civil servant salaries

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'Public servants say, always with the best of intentions, 'What greater service we could render if only we had a little more money and a little more power.' But the truth is that outside of its legitimate function, government does nothing as well or as economically as the private sector.' ??Ronald Reagan



As average Canadians struggle with record levels of personal debt, there are tens of thousands of taxpayer-supported civil servants living the high life.

The annual 'Sunshine' list of those earning \$100,000 or more was released recently. It's bigger and better than ever, with a record number of high wage-earners - 88,412.

I'd like to point out the average salary in Canada is roughly \$41,000.

In King Township, CAO Susan Plamondon is the top wage-earner, pulling in \$175,994. Mayor Steve Pellegrini pointed out this is what she was paid in Georgina and in comparison with 10 other nearby municipal CAOs, Plamondon's salary is the lowest. She's 'very fairly paid,' he said.

Municipal CAOs can be worth their weight in gold if they're very good. Their jobs are also a bit unstable and they can be terminated at the whim of council. That's one of the reasons for their remuneration packages.

King is not known for its extravagance, but rather its frugality. So, it's hard to criticize them for paying a handful of their staff these salaries.

The picture in York Region, and across the province, is far different. It has a seemingly sickening and endless list of 'Sunshine' members, commanding millions in remuneration.

Managing a billion-dollar corporation requires expertise from well paid mid- and upper-level management, right?

Well, let's see.

The top 10 civil servants are all over the \$200,000 mark, ringing the till at a combined \$2.1 million - for 10 people!

The top wage-earner at the Region was Karim Kurji, the medical officer of health. He earned a salary of \$294,016.72.

Next was York's CAO Bruce MacGregor, who pulled in an impressive \$291,811.41.

The third highest employee was the associate medical officer of health, Lilian Yuan, who earned \$257,019.26. She was followed by another medical colleague, Erica Weir, associate medical officer of health, who was paid \$250,315.75.

I'm not sure why the Region needs three medical administrators, collecting more than \$800,000.

The highest paid civil servant in the Region is York Regional Police Deputy Chief Bruce Herridge, who earned \$336,387.33 in 2012. He was closely followed by Ken Thurston, director of education for the York District School Board, who pulled in \$313,961.39.

I'd like to point out that these salaries are higher than those garnered by Premier Kathleen Wynne and Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

Supporters of such gluttony say just look at the salaries of the private sector. They can make much more at a private corporation, they say. Hogwash. Let them try to snag a \$200,000 job these days that offers guaranteed security, benefits and a hefty pension.

The salaries and bonuses paid to bank executives and chairs of various multinational corporations are in the millions. Sure, but it's an apples and oranges comparison.

How can you compare running a regional department to running the country, or the province, or a fleet of profit-making oil rigs? Instead of comparing government to other government or private corporations, compare them to non-profit organizations, who are accountable to the public for every penny.

Here's some more food for thought ? \$200,000 works out to about \$115 per hour. There are Third World countries whose GDP isn't as high as York's ?Sunshine List?tab.

The Salary Disclosure Act was passed by the Mike Harris government in 1996 to promote transparency and accountability. Prior to Harris taking over, remember the ?Rae Days??introduced as a cost-saving measure by Bob Rae?

Of course, publishing names of civil servants will not make the issue go away, or shame them into volunteering for wage caps. In fact, many government employees see their jobs as ?cash for life,??another reason accountability is necessary.

When staff salaries outweigh the money spent on services, something is seriously wrong.

It's the ?employers??who make the salary decisions. Isn't that us? And since these are tax dollars, all of us do have a say and have every right to be concerned.

Is it too late to apply the brakes?

Not if there's a political will. Both the province and feds have discussed salary caps for MPs and MPPs and other civil servants. Can senior staff be far behind?

We don't have a bottomless pit of money. We can't just keep printing the stuff in order to satisfy the voracious appetites of our civil servants.

We've allowed government bureaucracy ??at all levels ? to bloat to unprecedented proportions. We are partly to blame.

But we don't have to simply accept the explanations and rationalizations. We can ask for frugality. Actually, we can demand it.

We're lucky that Canada hasn't suffered the economic turmoil endured by the U.S. or most European nations. We are still solvent.

But it won't last forever.

Hats off to those 88,412 employees who enjoy great jobs and great lives. You're welcome!