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Stories of government waste

by **Franco Terrazzano & Kris Sims**

How do you scare a polar bear?

You don't. They are apex predators and could eat you whenever they want.

But that didn't stop the government of Manitoba from spending $150,000 replacing diesel tundra buggies with whisper-quiet electric vehicles so tourists wouldn't frighten the bears away.

Too bad they hadn't seen YouTube videos of the big white bruins sleeping soundly as the old buggies rumbled by.

That roaring waste of money was one of the heavyweight contenders for the Canadian Taxpayers' Federation's 24th annual Teddy Waste Awards.

The Teddy, a pig-shaped golden trophy the CTF annually awards to governments' worst waste offenders, is named after Ted Weatherill, a former federal appointee fired in 1999 for submitting a raft of dubious expense claims, including a $700 lunch for two.

When one can laugh or cry, it's better to laugh and mock the pigs at the trough.

This year, the CTF handed out the trophies during a spoof black-tie galaceremony held in Calgary and in a parody news report posted online.

A former bureaucrat in Kamloops, B.C., owned the podium in the municipal category for living the bureaucratic version of a rockstar lifestyle.

As reporter Jessica Wallace at Kamloops This Week found through freedom of information requests, former Thompson-Nicola Regional District CAO Sukh Gill spent about $100,000 per year for five years on the taxpayer credit card.

He spent taxpayers' money on alcohol, fancy meals, gift cards and jewelry for staff. He spent more than $7,000 on a champagne room in Whistler during a conference. When Gill left the job, he got a form of severance for $500,000.

The provincial champion this year is the Government of Quebec for spending $380 million on the Airbus A220.

Turns out, the Airbus A220 was just another name for the BombardierC-Series jet.

The Quebec government had already blown $1.3 billion on that jet, too.

The National Capital Commission won this year's federal trophy.

The parks and rec board that tends the Rideau Canal and makes sure Ottawa's tulips bloom on time spent almost $11 million renovating the prime minister's cottage at Harrington Lake.

For the cost of that reno, taxpayers could have bought rockstar couple Chad Kroeger and Avril Lavigne's mansion in Los Angeles, Halle Berry's Laurentian getaway and a Muskoka cottage near Goldie Hawn and Kurt Russel's place.

The NCC's runaway reno bill includes about $2.5 million for a backup cottage the prime minister can use while work is happening on the main mansion cottage at Harrington Lake.

Finally, the Lifetime Achievement Award is for the Top Gun class of government waste. We use the big golden pig statue for that one, and it weighs about 10 pounds.

This year, Canada's Climate Delegation won the lifetime achievement award for sending 276 people to the COP26 summit in Glasgow, Scotland, spending more than $1 million.

In contrast, the Americans sent 133 and the Germans sent 120. Germany has double the population of Canada, yet the Trudeau government sent double the delegation.

Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland stayed in Edinburgh instead of the host city and opted for a chauffeur service to get to the conference every day instead of the high-speed train that links the two cities. The car and driver service cost taxpayers $3,000.

This followed the pattern set during the 2015 Paris summit, where the Trudeau government sent more than 300 delegates ? double the American contingent ? and blew more than $1 million.

While the Teddy Waste Awards are meant to be funny, it's a way of smiling through the pain.

Canada is more than $1 trillion in debt. Maybe it's time to stop spending taxpayers' money to make sure a polar bear sleeps soundly.

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