

## Salaries devour plenty of taxpayers' dollars

### MARK PAVILONS

Most of us average Canadians work so that we can live. For us, it's a necessity, to afford life's simple pleasures like paying taxes, utility bills, mortgages and credit card bills. Most of us don't work for the government. But for those who do, life seems pretty good, regardless of your job. Every March, the provincial government releases what's been termed the "Sunshine List," a comprehensive listing of those civil servants earning \$100,000 or more annually. There are tens of thousands on this list, that range from police officers and clerical staff to teachers and health care professionals. The list grew by 23% last year and now boasts 74 civil servants earning \$500,000 or more. To put this in perspective, Premier Ford earns just over \$200,000 and Prime Minister Trudeau makes roughly \$350,000 (that's \$1,000 per day). While some may argue that \$100Gs today ain't what it used to be, it's still double the average wage in this country. It's still damn good money. And let's not forget benefits, regular raises, paid leave and in many cases, lifetime job security. The unbelievable part in all of this is that roughly half of all budgets — federal, provincial and regional — consist of salaries. That means any level of government has only half of what it takes in to spend on needed programs, services and infrastructure. The rest is simply fed down the automated gravy train. Politicians are in a bind. The salaries are all locked in through union contracts. So the same unions complaining the government isn't spending enough on education, health care or policing, are the same ones whose contracts are driving up salaries to unsustainable levels. Enjoying the sunshine are your typical suspects — senior department heads, government ministers, medical officers and countless CEOs of hospitals, utilities and universities. When our health care system is under such strain, does it make sense to pay hospital officials hundreds of thousands of dollars? Six employees of Ontario Power Generation are at the very top of the Sunshine List, with its chair making \$1.2 million. The public health CEO in Grey Bruce made more than \$630,000 last year — a 243% raise since 2018. Closer to home, the retired police chief in York was given a sendoff in 2020 to the tune of \$400,000. It seems that almost every police constable earns \$100,000 or more. In the U.S. the average salary for experienced police officers is roughly \$53,000 (\$67,000 Canadian). When you consider tax base, population, workload and volume of violent crime, it's a bit out of whack. Similarly, a civil servant in the U.S., with eight years experience, earns an average of \$52,000 (\$65,520 Cdn.). Entry level government employees get a little over \$32,000 (\$40,320 Cdn.). Both YRP and York Region are brimming with bureaucrats earning well over \$100,000, and dozens upon dozens making over \$200,000. A few even tipped the scales at over \$300,000. I'm not picking on local authorities — the situation is the same, if not worse — in all other jurisdictions across Ontario. The often-heard argument is that in order to attract and keep qualified staff, you have to pay them well. They could make more in the private sector, we're told. My argument is, let them try! Most gravitate to government positions for the very reason that they're well paid, offer benefits and you're set for life. Annual raises, even in these challenging economic times, are a given. In the real world, you'd be hard-pressed to find mid-level management positions in the \$300,000 range. Does York Region need a dozen lawyers, a handful of real estate appraisers, a bunch of healthy living directors and a supervisor of space and furniture design? Jay Goldberg, of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, calls this a "harsh slap in the face." While tens of thousands of Ontario's children were kept home from school for months on end, the number of teachers making more than \$100,000 still doubled to over 29,000, he said. It's not fair to ask the tens of thousands of Ontarians who just lost their job or took a pay cut to pay higher taxes because government employees haven't shared in the downturn. Governments need to address their labour costs and the first place they should start is at the top of the bureaucrat pyramid. I'm not saying many of these employees aren't doing a good job or aren't worth their pay cheques. I'm not in a position to judge. But these are tax dollars — yours and mine. I don't care what large box chains or banks pay their top officials. For them, it's based on performance and company revenue. We all know that every level of government runs a deficit and has debt. For our governments to continue to pay such high salaries, while going deeper in debt, is just wrong. The Province tabled its budget last week, and said given the billions earmarked for COVID-related expenses, we won't see the financial light of day until 2029. But you can bet the Sunshine List will continue to grow, year after year. We haven't even touched on the well fed federal bureaucrats, but that would take hours upon hours of research to compile lists and comparisons. Suffice it to say, when Ottawa is spending money on "fish fraud," one has to wonder. In many realms of our society, there are salary caps. Perhaps that's something future administrations should consider.

