

Who will stop runaway government spending?

Mark Pavilons



?The real goal should be reduced government spending, rather than balanced budgets achieved by ever rising tax rates to cover ever rising spending.?

? Thomas Sowell

As budget time nears for many levels of government, the public will be bombarded with fancy footwork, pedantic, long-term-gain talk. It's to numb us to the inevitable pain that increased costs, taxes and cuts will bring to average Canadian households.

At the local level, even a modest, 4% to 6% increase can take its toll. On average, it would amount to perhaps a week's worth of groceries.

It's like a masked burglar, being invited into your home at the dinner hour, and cleaning out your entire refrigerator.

Out goes the HP?sauce, 1.5-litre bottle of ketchup, package of lean ground beef, jar of hot peppers, pack of cold cuts, brick of havarti and bag of milk. Think of the classic holiday movie, How the Grinch Stole Christmas, when he cleans everyone out, leaving not so much as a crum behind.

I don't know about you, but I don't relish forking out an extra \$200 or \$300 a year simply for the privilege of living in my community.

Don't get me wrong, I?like my community. I?even like some of my neighbours.

But every year it seems like we're all paying more for less.

In Caledon, we will soon get to enjoy scaled-back garbage and recycling pickup to once every two weeks; an overpaid bunch of councillors (regional councillors in?Caledon earn over \$100,000); and a slow-moving local economy.

Meanwhile in King, there's been a burst of development, road improvements across the municipality, government funding for bridge work, and even a municipal surplus.

That's not to say living in King is cheap. Far from it. Being one of the country's most affluent community with the highest house prices in the land comes with a cost. But it seems most residents are willing to pay them, and few come out to complain at budget time.

From what I've seen in the last two years, there's no fat to be trimmed at the local level.

By contrast, government spending seems quite healthy at the provincial and federal levels.

Federal government waste and mismanagement is estimated to cost Canadian taxpayers between \$158 billion and \$197 billion over the past 25 years, concludes a study published by the Fraser Institute, an independent, non-partisan Canadian public policy think-tank.

?Federal Government Failure in Canada: 2013 Edition? examines auditor general reports from 1988 to 2013 and finds 614 instances of government failure including cost overruns, unnecessary spending, inefficiencies, inaccurate reporting of financial information, and other failures in federal programs and initiatives.

We in North America, have become accustomed to bloated bureaucracies, overpaid civil servants, waste, graft and spending

scandals.

The recent antics of a few senators have made headlines lately. They're just another in a long list of occurrences that strain our faith in the system.

A couple of the more expensive blunders in Ontario include eHealth, ORNGE and the relocation of the gas plants. Tipping the scales at \$1 billion, these costly decisions may haunt the reigning Liberals for some time.

Here's an idea of just what a billion amounts to.

It's 1,000 million. A billion seconds ago it was 1981. A billion minutes ago the Roman Empire was still around. A billion months ago, dinosaurs roamed the planet.

There are at least two dozen countries whose Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is less than \$1 billion.

And yet, our counterparts in Washington spend a billion dollars every eight hours.

By comparison, Canada government spending reached an all time high of \$35 billion in May of 2013.

Total provincial government net debt hit more than \$512-billion in 2012-13. Ontario accounts for almost half (or \$253 billion) of Canada's total provincial debt. Ontario's debt alone is expected to reach \$550 billion before the end of the decade.

The current federal net debt stands at roughly \$676-billion and Canadians are currently leaving a legacy of \$1.2 trillion dollars in debt to the younger generations to come. You're welcome!

I don't know about you, but even contemplating numbers on these scales gives me a headache.

In the face of astronomical amounts of money is the plight of the average Canadian, who earns just over \$40,000 (gross) annually.

We face ever-increasing cost of living, gas prices, house taxes, income taxes, post-secondary tuition, increased wait times for medical care, etc., etc.

There is enough money floating around in our national economy to address all of our needs. Cash flow and revenue are not the issue. Efficient spending is. Always has been.

We've proven we can do it; we've done it before.

In the U.S., the New Deal of the 1930s put millions of Americans to work in quick fashion. They built or repaired roads, hospitals, schools, airports and playgrounds. They fought fires, controlled floods and planted trees.

The ideology at the time was to try something. If it failed, try something else.

What happened to that mentality? Today, we're more bent of doing the same, or what's always been done, regardless of its inefficiency or ramifications.

And we've permitted it, through apathy and indifference. We shouldn't be too busy working for our families to allow our state to fall into the abyss of financial bankruptcy, sparked by ethical decay.

It's our money, people, we have a say in how it's spent! That's something we should never forget, regardless of the party in power.

Whatever happened to the concept of "we, the people"? Just when did democracy turn on its head, leaving us at the mercy of a self-serving bureaucratic monster?

Imagine a society if we controlled the purse strings and forced the issues.

Politicians would earn slightly above minimum wage; salaries of civil servants would be reduced and capped; stay-at-home moms would receive credit; referendums would be held regularly on contentious issues; efficiencies would be rewarded, waste would be punished; green energy would be in; cancer would be beaten once and for all.

Is frugality and common sense spending too much to ask?