

Fingers on the purse strings need to be rapped



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I?love those mind games where you toss out outrageous answers to questions like ?what would you do if ...?

Well folks, I?have a bag full of comments, criticisms, suggestions and recommendations. As do we all.

We have recently seen the passing of major budgets at the provincial and federal levels. York Region District School board also passed their \$1.35 billion budget. Average folk don't get too excited about these things unless it hits them directly in the wallet or bank account.

Really, the only thing average working stiffs care about is whether they get dinged for higher hydro and gas rates, taxes on booze and cigarettes. Rarely do we assemble the troops and protest at Queen's Park about government spending.

And let me tell you, our governments know how to spend!

York Region District School Board's budget for 2015-2016 is \$1,353,734,000 ? an increase of 1.4 per cent from the approved 2014-2015 budget of \$1,335,690,000.

The majority of the budget (94.64%)?is allocated for classroom instruction and direct classroom and school operation related expenses, with the remaining 5.36 per cent allocated for governance, administration and student transportation.

The provincial budget talks about its debt and the fact we are paying \$11 billion a year on interest charges on that massive debt. Does anyone really comprehend just how much \$11 billion is?

Well, it's more than the GDPs of more than a dozen countries across our planet, including famous hot spots we like to visit ??The Bahamas, Barbados, Aruba, Cayman Islands, St. Lucia, etc. It would take us more than two average lifespans just to count to 11 billion.

We could build three aircraft carriers; a couple of nuclear submarines; construct two dozen hospitals; fix the Gardener, end homelessness and poverty in the province. Heck, we could even build our own rocket and send people to Mars!

It's so weird that we are no longer fazed by such astronomical figures. I?remember when \$1 million was a lot of money, or when the Wintario jackpot of \$100,000 was considered huge. Today, our politicians and CEOs talk about \$1 billion like it was pocket change. So sad.

It's also a bit disappointing that more parents don't take an active interest in the goings-on with our local school boards. Trustees, who are elected every four years along with our mayor and councillors, oversee more than \$1 billion. That's a heck of a responsibility, considering that our local politicians juggle and agonize over a \$28 million budget. I?also wonder just how informed parents are of the teachers' dispute and their concerns, which will likely impact the fall school year.

Locally, we're downright frugal and our politicians and staff want to make sure we get every penny's worth of tax dollars.

At other levels, though, I'm sure it's easy to misplace a few million here and there, or if someone shifts a comma by accident, it results in a movement of \$10 million or so. And it often takes months, or even years, to discover such blunders.

With our utility giants, they send out apology letters after over-billing customers for years. They're sorry they overcharged and promise to make amends. If any of us, or our businesses did that, we'd be tossed in jail.

Here are some of my budget priorities if I became premier or grand poobah.

First off, I'd create a Ministry of Frugality, responsible for shaving excess and accounting for every light bulb, every roll of toilet paper.

I would make sure every government department and agency recycles, composts and donates every leftover donut and muffin to local shelters.

Along those green lines, I'd recommend that the large, government limos be replaced by Smart cars or at least hybrid vehicles. Lead by example I say. In summer months, where the trips involve only a few short blocks in downtown Toronto, staff would be required to travel by rickshaw.

All civil servant expense accounts would be scrutinized and curtailed. Limits would be set. There's no sense eating at Canoe when a coffee at Tim Hortons would do.

All government workers, as part of their terms of employment, would be required to donate a set amount of time to charity each year. No exceptions. Even the grand poobah would be expected to serve at a soup kitchen or deliver meals on wheels.

I would implement a penalty system, complete with fines, for government employees caught doing something stupid. This could very well be the golden goose and the answer to all of our funding woes! For minor infractions like parking in fire routes or handicapped spots, fines would be doubled. For acts of stupidity in the office, they would be made to parade around in dunce caps for the day.

Okay, some of my ideas may sound a bit outlandish, but it never hurts to shake things up a bit.

We simply can't continue on this spending spree we're on ? our future generations can't afford it.