

Salaries the biggest cost of running the country

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Governments don't tend to be well oiled corporations. They tend to operate in the red most of the time.

Governments, at all levels, are responsible to us, the taxpayers. We elect them and trust them with looking after the public good. Citizens can be quite demanding at times. We ask for high quality roads and transit options; emergency services; health care and police protection. We expect that our garbage gets picked up at the end of our driveway or laneway on time.

We fully realize that sewers, Internet fibre, fire engines and arenas cost a lot of money to maintain.

Any car owner has known for decades that the cost of labour far exceeds the cost of mechanical parts.

When the cost of our civil servants reaches astronomical proportions ? levels that far outweigh any bricks and mortar ? we have to sit up and take stock of where we're headed.

From where I sit, it has become obvious that we simply can't afford to pay huge salaries to civil servants, year after year, after year. On March 31 of every year, under the Salary Disclosure Act, government employees making \$100,000 is released. It has grown to the War and Peace of pay cheque recording.

In King, our upper tier government is the Region of York. In 2016, York had more than 1,880 employees earning \$100,000 or more! While I haven't calculated the average (it would literally take a day adding up these figures), it's likely in the area of \$135,000. Just on that alone, the total tab for worker bees York in 2016 was \$245 million.

I don't know about you, but when I pored over the figures, I felt sick to my stomach.

York had 13 employees who earned more than \$200,000 last year. This baker's dozen of privileged staffers earned a total of almost \$3.1 million.

Top of the list was the CAO, who made a whopping \$298,125.

By comparison, Premier Kathleen Wynne earned \$208,974 and Toronto Mayor John Tory earned \$184,666 in 2016. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau earns roughly \$340,000.

I've heard the arguments over the years, ad nauseum, that in order to get top shelf employees, you have to pay attractive wages.

I'm not adverse to paying contributing workers their due. But I do question administrative remuneration when results are difficult to quantify, and budgets bleed red ink.

Governments, at all levels, place a lot of faith in their CAOs who basically run the municipality and oversee the staff. They're in demand and the salaries tend to be comparable. Department heads or commissioners are similarly well paid at the regional level.

But union agreements, seniority systems and cost of living increases have upped the ante, and kept salaries rising at an artificially high rate. Annual increases of \$10,000 or more are simply unwarranted and perhaps unearned.

York Regional Police has a complement of 1,529 officers and 605 civilians, serving York's population of 1.13 million people. Here, constables earn over \$100,000 and sergeants, detectives and superintendents are bringing in big bucks.

An average patrol officer in New York, with a university degree and 12-18 months of experience, earns an average of \$52,000 U.S. (or \$69,000 Canadian).

Our top brass earn some very shiny salaries, indeed.

York Regional Police Chief, earned \$272,696 and the deputy chief pulled in \$230,974. This duo enjoyed respective raises \$22,000 and \$13,000 between 2015 and 2016. These are far above cost of living hikes, which many Canadians don't receive. Do they really need 'cost of living' increases?

I'm having trouble comprehending the bureaucratic brass that runs the region's health department. They have three medical officers of health, all of whom earn well over \$200,000.

Can someone explain why it costs more than \$700,000 to oversee a department that's responsible for things like rabies control, giant hogweed, beach water testing, 'a guide to eating fish,' playground safety, and information packages for parents?

Overburdened hospitals; cutbacks to seniors' services and home visits; the nightmare that are LHINs, and regional health departments are part of a massively expensive health care system that's basically quite sick.

I also find it funny (in an odd way) that chief financial officers command huge salaries, when they're dealing with money-losing corporations, and balance sheets that never balance. Have any of them ever recommended staff cutbacks as a way to save money?

Our school boards are also spendthrifts in the salary department, with the York Catholic board taking the prize.

The board's associated director of strategic leadership earned \$174,078. I wonder if 'strategic leadership' includes cost-cutting measures!

Call me jealous, and criticize my comments as the tirades of an average working stiff. Maybe I'm sour because our dog's vet bill has killed any vacation plans we had for the summer. I put \$4 worth of gas in my car the other day because that's the loose change I had in my pocket. Such are the challenges of the little guy who lacks 'sunshine.'

I contribute to all of these salaries, through my income and property taxes, and my purchase of everything from take-out to gasoline. As a taxpayer, I do have a say. The burden of these astronomical salaries may not be fully realized for another decade. That generation includes my children, who may pay the price for our current civil service avarice.