

Political Parties at the Public Trough Again: Buying Your Vote With Your Money

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Yet one more display of self-serving behaviour by parties with MPs in the House. Four federal political parties—the Liberals, the Conservatives, the NDP and the Greens—are helping themselves to yet more taxpayer money . . . while the very taxpayers they claim to represent are having to tighten their belts.

Those four parties already receive a significant amount of free publicity from the media, already have seats in Parliament, and already receive millions of dollars in taxpayer subsidies to promote their candidates and their party brand. And now they expect the beleaguered taxpayer to cover 75% of their payroll costs!¹ So far, the Bloc, the only other party with MPs in the House, has resisted the temptation to put its staffing costs on the public purse and we acknowledge their restraint. The Liberals have about 100 full-time staff between elections, the Conservatives about 60 and the NDP about 30. They're not working for you; they're working for the parties, but you're now paying them. By contrast, the CHP has 4 full-time staff, very little media coverage, no seats in Parliament and receives NO taxpayer-funded rebates.

No doubt the regular contributions of the big parties have dropped off, due to the pandemic. So have the charitable donations of many not-for-profits. We understand; millions of Canadians have faced layoffs, reduced incomes or business closures. This is not an easy time for any organization that depends on free-will donations. But that does not justify taking more money from taxpayers and future taxpayers!

Every dollar doled out by the government adds to our national debt; at the rate of current spending, our grandchildren will be paying—decades from now—for the lavish disbursements of today, including this COVID-related money spent on Canada's most powerful political parties.

The justification, of course, for accepting the 75% wage subsidy at this time is the protection of jobs and family incomes for employees in many different sectors of society, including political party staffers. This may seem justified on compassionate grounds, however, when we look at the benefits already received by the big parties and the taxpayer funds already flowing to them, one wonders if those parties could have managed *without dipping into public funds*.

Let's look at those benefits:

1. **Rebates:** The big parties (those and only those receiving more than 10% of the vote share in a general election), receive a 50% rebate for every dollar spent in the election. Figures for 2019 are not yet available, but after the 2015 General Election, the Conservative Party received \$20,935,787 in rebates, the Liberals \$21,559,484, the NDP \$14,870,600 and the Greens \$1,954,012.² In addition, every candidate running for these parties received an amount equivalent to 60% of the amount spent on his or her campaign, as long as the candidate received at least 10% of the vote. Those millions of dollars could cover a lot of wages. The big parties will receive another windfall this year, as soon as the 2019 reports have been processed. The CHP, and other parties that have not yet achieved 10% of the vote, do not benefit from this arrangement; it seems designed to help only the parties in power.
2. **Tax Credits:** All parties benefit from the generous tax credits (up to 75%) allowed for donors. This is an indirect benefit to the parties, as it allows donors to give more than they could otherwise afford, and is a direct cost to taxpayers.

3. Office Privileges for Sitting MPs: While MPs are supposed to keep their partisan activities separate from their parliamentary duties, the advantages of incumbency for re-election are many. Having office staff to answer the phone and serve constituent-voters, conduct research, etc. is a great benefit. The preparation, printing and distribution of MP flyers, often displaying the party logo—all at taxpayer expense—certainly keep the profile of a sitting MP and his or her party in the public eye.
4. Taxpayer-funded media: Most notably, the CBC carries news stories and interviews with prominent MPs and party leaders and keeps their names and faces in the forefront, even between elections. Their sparse coverage of the candidates and policies of the parties as-yet-unrepresented in the House is perhaps the biggest impediment to an electoral breakthrough for the smaller parties. Yet the CBC is paid for by all taxpayers, including those with political views contrary to the views of the big parties. Our current Prime Minister has upped the ante in this regard by paying out an additional \$595 million to a select group of media outlets that support Liberal policies and ideas. Those who disagree don't get the money. This reminds one of *Pravda* and the censorship of political thought in other historical dictatorships.
5. Raises for MPs: While wage increases for MPs do not directly benefit the parties they represent, they certainly drain the taxpayer's wallet and provide incentive for sitting MPs to meekly submit to the demands of their party leaders. This year, MPs received an automatic raise of 2%, bumping up their already-generous annual salaries from \$178,900 by an additional \$2,800!³ Office perks, travel and other expenses push the envelope. While some MPs have promised to donate this year's raise to a COVID-related charity, I haven't heard any MP talk about rolling back salaries to something more in line with national average wages.
6. Some politicians (mainly Liberals) now want to resurrect the hideous per-vote subsidy,⁴ which was finally eliminated by the Harper government in 2015. They say their fundraising efforts have been hindered by COVID-19 and the financial hardships many of their supporters are experiencing. But they're perfectly willing to take money from taxpayers without asking—and that includes taxpayers who would never vote for them! The particularly nefarious aspect of the per-vote subsidy is that it is a backwards-looking subsidy that rewards (or punishes) parties for four years, based on their electoral results in the previous election. Again, smaller parties and candidates who may have worked just as hard and spent large amounts of their own money receive no benefits if they did not achieve the arbitrary vote threshold.

Left-wing politicians prefer taxpayer funding to contributions from willing donors. They opine that “big money” might influence politicians. They talk about getting “big money” out of politics; why not cut their lavish budgets? Instead, they use the “big money” they take from unsuspecting and unwilling taxpayers to buy public opinion — backed up by the free publicity they get from news media bought and paid for by the same taxpayers.

The Christian Heritage Party just wants a level playing field where every party and every candidate can present ideas and policies on their own merit, where media coverage is fair and where the results of elections are not determined by government control of taxpayer money. To join us, visit www.chp.ca.

Footnotes

¹ www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZSIM7GmqV9w

² www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=fin&dir=oth/pol/remb&document=table1_15&lang=e

³ torontosun.com/opinion/columnists/lilley-mps-take-a-pay-raise-while-raising-your-taxes-during-a-crisis

⁴ www.hilltimes.com/2020/05/04/with-political-fundraising-mostly-suspended-some-mps-floating-the-idea-of-resurrecting-per-vote-subsidy/246272

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