

Backgrounder: 2019 Teddy Waste Awards

Federal Nominees

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Winner)

Nominated for: Most costume changes on a foreign trip

Cost: At least \$1.6 million

Prime Minister Trudeau's visit to India in February 2018 cost taxpayers at least \$1.6 million, and it's not clear what value taxpayers got for their money.

For the eight-day trip, the prime minister only scheduled a half day of official government to government business, but did manage to find traditional Indian outfits to wear for every day of his visit.

While on the trip, it emerged that a Canadian man convicted in a failed attempt to assassinate an Indian cabinet minister in 1986 was invited by a Liberal MP to attend one of the prime minister's events in Mumbai, and even managed to get a photo taken with the prime minister's wife, Sophie.

The prime minister also faced criticism for bringing a Vancouver-based celebrity chef to India to prepare Indian cuisine at the Canadian High Commission, at a cost of \$17,000 to taxpayers.

The trip was such a fiasco that in a year end, when asked his biggest regret of 2018, the prime minister himself said: "This year, the India trip."

Sources:

- CBC [Trudeau's India trip cost more than the government first disclosed](#) September 18, 2018
- Hindustan Times [Justin Trudeau's 'unusual' India trip raises eyebrows](#) February 20, 2018
- Macleans [Justin Trudeau: The Mr.Dressup prime minister](#) February 24, 2018
- CBC ['It's not good': Security report on Trudeau's problem-plagued India trip](#) November 29, 2018
- CTV [Trudeau India trip included \\$17k for celebrity chef](#) June 20, 2018
- CTV [Transcript: Trudeau year end interview](#) December 16, 2018

The Harper and Trudeau governments (Nominee)

Nominated for: Worst corporate welfare "investment"

Cost: \$2.6 billion

In 2009, the Harper government announced a \$14 billion bailout of General Motors and Chrysler's Canadian operations using taxpayer dollars. In the case of the Chrysler, which was divided into a "new Chrysler" and an "old Chrysler," loans were deliberately structured to saddle the "old" entity with the loans while leaving the "new" entity off the hook entirely.

In October 2018, the Trudeau government wrote off remaining Chrysler loans with little fanfare, marked as a single line item of \$2,595,974,536 which appeared in the Public Accounts.

A 2015 CTF study found that the 2009 auto bailouts cost Canadian taxpayers at least \$3.7 billion.

Sources:

- CBC [Liberal government writes off \\$1.1B US loan to Chrysler, plus interest, docs show](#) October 22, 2018
- Macleans [Canadian taxpayers' secretive \\$2.6 billion gift to Chrysler](#) October 22, 2018
- CTF [How much did the 2009 automotive bailout cost taxpayers?](#) November 2015

Global Affairs Canada (Nominee)

Nominated for: Most expensive seat cushions, glassware and credenzas

Cost: At least \$197,000

Global Affairs spent \$127,000 on crystal glassware since 2016, buying over 1,000 glasses at an average cost of \$117, more twice the price of high-end [Tiffany](#) crystal.

Access to Information documents obtained by the CTF showed a troubling pattern of expensive purchases by Global Affairs Canada.

The Canadian embassy in Mexico City spent just under \$25,000 on 86 seat cushions, which works out to \$286 per cushion, while the Canadian consulate in Hong Kong spent more than \$46,000 on tables, chairs and a credenza since 2017.

When asked for comment, a spokesperson for Global Affairs stated "we know that taxpayers' dollars must be treated with the utmost respect."

Sources:

- Global News ['Just outrageous': Government spends \\$24k on 86 cushions for Mexico City embassy](#) July 9, 2018
- Journal de Montreal [Des diplomates canadiens sirotent leur martini dans des verres a 124\\$](#) July 11, 2018

- CTF: [Canadian consulate general in Hong Kong has spent \\$46k on tables, chairs and a credenza since 2017](#) July 16, 2018

The Canadian Forces (Nominee)

Nominated for: Simulated high but real waste

Cost: \$170,000

In February 2018, news broke that the Canadian Forces was planning on spending up to \$170,000 buying special goggles that would allow its senior leaders to experience a simulated version of getting high.

The goal of the goggles, according to the Department of National Defence, was to provide a “realistic, first-hand experience” of what smoking pot feels like. Once wearing the goggles, participants would have to undertake activities such as tossing a ball, exercising and simulated driving.

Sources:

- National Post [Military to spend \\$170,000 so leaders can see what it's like to be stoned on marijuana](#) February 9, 2018
- Global News [Canadian military to spend up to \\$170K on goggles that mimic a pot buzz](#) February 9, 2018

Shared Services Canada (Nominee)

Nominated for: Silly spider scares

Cost: At least \$18,000

On two separate occasions, a spider-scare at a Shared Services Canada office in Ottawa led to an evacuation with 50 employees sent home for two days.

On the first occasion, the building owner paid to have the building fumigated. On the second occasion, the spider was caught and sent for identification, but before the results came back, the office was again fumigated, this time at a cost of \$18,000 to taxpayers.

The spider, which was initially feared to be a poisonous brown recluse spider, was ultimately determined to be a harmless yellow sac spider.

An arachnologist at the University of Toronto characterized the evacuations as “totally absurd and a giant waste of money” noting that “literally less than five” brown recluse spiders had been recorded in Canada in the last century, and that in any event they pose little threat to humans because as, their name suggests, they are reclusive and avoid people.

Sources:

- CBC [Spider scare sends federal government workers home - twice](#) November 9, 2018
- CTV [Fumigation at federal building over false spider sighting costs \\$18,000](#) November 7, 2018

Finance Minister Bill Morneau and Democratic Institutions Minister Karina Gould (Nominees)

Nominated for: Least helpful way to ensure media independence and fight fake news

Cost: \$57 million

As part of the spring 2018 budget, Finance Minister Bill Morneau announced \$50 million in taxpayer subsidies over five years to support media in “underserved communities.” The money would be administered by a nongovernmental organization selected by the government.

In January, 2019, Democratic Institutions Minister Karina Gould announced \$7 million to “enhance citizen preparedness” to combat fake news by making Canadians aware that sometimes things they read on the Internet aren’t true.

Among the initiatives planned are “awareness sessions, workshops and learning material” in the hopes that they will help ensure Canadians “are better equipped to think critically about what they read and share online.”

Sources:

- Globe and Mail [Media sector gets \\$595 million package in Ottawa's fiscal update](#) November 21, 2019
- National Observer [Trudeau government proposes \\$50 million to save local journalism](#) February 27, 2018
- CTV [Feds unveil plan to tackle fake news, interference in 2019 election](#) January 30, 2019
- Huffington Post [Fall Economic Statement unveils 3 new tax credits to save Canadian journalism industry](#) November 21, 2019
- CBC [Democracy in danger](#) January 30, 2019
- Government of Canada [Enhancing citizen preparedness](#) January 30, 2019

Provincial Nominees

British Columbia's Clerk of the House Craig James and Sergeant-at-Arms Gary Lenz (Winners)

Nominated for: The BC legislature spending bombshell

Cost: \$

On November 20, 2018, Craig James and Gary Lenz, respectively the clerk and sergeant-at-arms of the British Columbia legislature, were escorted out of the building by police and suspended with pay.

In January 2019, Darryl Plecas, Speaker of the B.C. Legislature, released a bombshell 76-page report alleging a pattern of lavish and outrageous spending on the part of James and Lenz, causing him to undertake a year-long secret investigation to document their spending by tracking their receipts and expenses.

Plecas alleges that James and Lenz used taxpayers' money to take frequent and frivolous trips to places such as the United Kingdom, Hong Kong, Sri Lanka and Washington.

Plecas also alleges, with hundreds of receipts provided as evidence, that James and Lenz milked taxpayers for such items as:

- a \$3,200 wood splitter with a \$10,000 trailer, ostensibly for the purpose of cutting fallen wooden beams at the legislature in the event of an earthquake (it was stored at James' house)
- a \$700 watch purchased from the departure lounge at the Hong Kong airport (it appears to have been worn by James' at the very press conference where he pronounced his innocence)
- \$1,000 for a whale watching excursion which was claimed as a tsunami awareness exercise
- \$1,300 for tickets to a Seattle Mariners game, which was claimed as attendance at an information session on mass evacuations

Neither James nor Lenz has been charged with any crime and both continue to deny any wrongdoing.

On Feb. 21, 2019, Plecas released a follow-up report providing further details and the legislative assembly retained a retired judge to probe the allegations in both reports.

Sources:

- CBC [Chronology of a scandal: a timeline of the explosive Plecas report](#) January 31, 2019
- BC Legislature [Report of Speaker Darryl Plecas](#) January 2019
- CTV [Wood splitter seen at clerk's residence](#) February 21, 2019
- CTV [Taxpayer-funded trips were 'de facto holidays,' new Plecas report says](#) February 21, 2019
- Global [B.C. legislature set to launch internal probe into allegations brought forward by speaker](#) February 21, 2019

The Government of Manitoba (Nominee)

Nominated for: Feathering Canada Goose's nest

Cost: \$1.48 million

In September, 2018, Premier Brian Pallister announced that Manitoba taxpayers would be subsidizing luxury jacket maker Canada Goose, even though the company is wildly successful and has a market capitalization of around [\\$8 billion](#).

The stated purpose of the subsidy is to train new sewing machine operators, meaning Manitoba taxpayers will be paying \$1.48 million to pay people to sew luxury winter coats for Canada Goose.

Sources

- CTV [Manitoba to spend up to \\$1.48 million to help jacket maker Canada Goose expand](#) September 11, 2018
- Winnipeg Sun [Manitoba needs to cancel its corporate welfare credit card](#) September 16, 2018

Cannabis NB (Nominee)

Nominated for: Rolling taxpayers to show them how to roll a joint

Cost: Unknown

Cannabis NB, New Brunswick's government-owned cannabis retailer, created a how-to guide on its website explaining how to roll a joint.

Listed under the "Cannabis 101" section, the agency notes that rolling is one of the "most iconic ways of consuming Cannabis" and offers such tips as advising the cannabis be ground until it has the consistency (but not, importantly, the smell) of oregano, and to distribute the cannabis evenly "so that your joint does not resemble a hill, with a bulge in the middle."

A YouTube search of "how to roll a joint" returned at least 33 videos with more than 1 million views on the subject.

Sources:

- Cannabis New Brunswick [Know Your Roll](#)
- CTV [Government agency offers lessons on how to roll a joint](#) October 16, 2018
- Youtube search "[how to roll a joint](#)"

Jacques Chagnon, former Speaker of the Quebec National Assembly (Nominee)

Nominated for: Lobster and wine on the taxpayer dime

Cost: Over \$825,000

Jacques Chagnon, former speaker of the Quebec National Assembly from 2011 to 2018, had an expensive palate, ordering lobster daily in-season from the assembly's dining room, even though lobster was not even on the menu. Chagnon was also criticized for hosting afternoon work meetings where wine was served liberally, with the bill regularly exceeding \$1,000, and in some cases as much as \$2,700.

Chagnon also reportedly had his office cover all expenses on various international trips for Quebec MNAs of all parties, including airfare, meals, and alcohol. Only total figures for these trips, which include a \$39,000 visit to Japan and China, a \$38,000 trip to Switzerland and a \$75,000 visit to Madagascar are available, with repeated attempts to get more detailed breakdowns of these expenses being refused by Chagnon's office.

In a June, 2018, interview following public revelations of his lavish spending ways, Chagnon stated that controlling spending on meals and alcohol “never crossed my mind” and that he has “never been concerned about such issues, ever.”

Chagnon’s term as speaker ended in November 2018 after he did not seek re-election as an MNA in the 2018 Quebec election.

Sources:

- Journal de Quebec [Jacques Chagnon prefere le homard](#) June 18, 2018
- Journal de Quebec [Homard et vin: Jacques Chagnon ne regardait pas le facture](#) June 13, 2018
- Journal de Quebec [Gastronomie et bons vins aux réunions du bureau de l’assemblee nationale](#) June 7, 2019
- Journal de Quebec [Aura de mystere autour des dépenses](#) April 23, 2018

The Government of Ontario (Nominee)

Nominated for: Corporate welfare for chickens – and fewer jobs

Cost: \$34.5 million

In November, 2018, the Ford government, which had promised to end corporate welfare during the provincial election campaign, announced a \$34.5-million handout to Maple Leaf Foods as part of a \$660-million new chicken processing facility in London which would be projected to create 1,450 new jobs.

Unfortunately, Maple Leaf also planned to close three other plants throughout the province employing a total of 1,750 people, meaning the move would actually lead to a net loss of 300 jobs.

The Trudeau government also pledged a federal handout of \$20 million towards the plant.

Maple Leaf is led by CEO Michael McCain, a member of one of Canada’s wealthiest families, and the company has a market capitalization of about [\\$3.4 billion](#).

Sources:

- Toronto Star [No more government cash for Ontario companies, Doug Ford says](#) May 14, 2018
- Toronto Star [Maple Leaf foods gets \\$3.45 for London plant from Ontario government](#) November 27, 2018
- CBC [Workers at 3 Ontario Maple Leaf plants left wondering about their futures](#) November 28, 2018
- Globe and Mail [Maple Leaf Foods \(MFI:T\)](#) February 22, 2019

Nova Scotia’s Yarmouth Ferry (Nominee)

Nominated for: Forcing taxpayers to keep the boat afloat

Cost: Over \$10 million annually

A returning nominee from 2017, when it made headlines for losing millions of dollars and sticking Nova Scotia taxpayers with the cost of improvements to the Portland, Maine, ferry terminal, the Yarmouth ferry made headlines again in 2018, this time because taxpayers may be on the hook to pay for U.S border agents staffing the U.S. terminal of the ferry, as well as for upgrades to yet another foreign ferry terminal, this time in Bar Harbor, Maine.

When asked whether Nova Scotia taxpayers would be on the hook for upgrades to the Bar Harbor terminal, or what the total cost would be, the province's transport minister told reporters "I have no idea." In February 2019, Nova Scotia's official opposition party filed court documents to try to force the government to release details of the ferry contract, which the government has repeatedly refused to do.

According to a 2016 report, the cost to operate the Yarmouth ferry exceeded the money spent by visitors by more than \$10 million in under two years.

Sources:

- CBC [Nova Scotia taxpayers may pay salaries of U.S. border agents](#) January 10, 2019
- CTV [Nova Scotia spent \\$10.8 million more on Yarmouth ferry than what tourists spent in province](#) December 14, 2016
- CTV [N.S. transport minister has few answers around Yarmouth ferry's move to new port](#) February 14, 2019
- CTV [Tories sue Nova Scotia government over details of Yarmouth ferry fees](#) February 11, 2019

Municipal Nominees

City of Vancouver's Park Board (Winner)

Nominated for: Most expensive conversations with trees

Cost: \$50,000

The City of Vancouver's Park Board spent \$50,000 inviting local residents to send emails to trees, and paid artists to send replies on the trees' behalf.

The All the Trees project, which ran from August to December, 2018, saw 25 trees in the Jericho and West Point Grey areas outfitted with signs that included an ID number and an email address for people to send emails. The city then hired five artists, paying each \$10,000, to reply on the trees' behalf "within a week."

Asked for comment, one local resident responded "what would be the benefit of doing that" while wondering "how much did they spend on that?"

Sources:

- Global News [Would you email a tree? In Vancouver you can, and the trees will write you back](#) August 26, 2018
- Vancouver Is Awesome [The Park Board is asking people to send emails to a bunch of trees in Vancouver](#) August 21, 2018
- [All The Trees](#) project website

Town of Vulcan, Alberta (Nominee)

Nominated for: Most illogical use of taxpayer dollars

Cost: \$4,340

The Town of Vulcan, Alberta, population 2,000, shares a name with the homeworld of Star Trek character Spock, which has helped turn it into a tourism destination for fans of the popular sci-fi series.

In February 2018, the town council decided to spend \$4,340 for new Star Trek uniforms for its mayor and six councillors.

Sources:

- Calgary Herald [Vulcan amends the town budget...to buy Star Trek uniforms for councillors at \\$620 apiece](#) February 14, 2018
- Vulcan Advocate [Council approves funds for new Star Trek jackets](#) February 13, 2018

The City of Calgary

Nominated for: Waste of Olympic proportions

Cost: \$10 million

The City of Calgary's ill-conceived bid to host the 2026 Olympics cost taxpayers \$10 million, including at least \$1.4 million on advertising.

Calgary 2026, the entity funded by the city together with the federal and provincial governments, retained as many as 46 consultants as part of its bid, far more than rival cities Stockholm (10) and Milan (none).

Calgary held a plebiscite on the Olympic scheme in November, 2018. The Canadian Taxpayers Federation campaigned to reject the plan as unaffordable. Calgarians rejected the Olympic bid 56 per cent to 44 per cent.

Sources:

- Calgary Herald [List of 46 consultants working on Calgary Olympic bid raises questions](#) November 10, 2018
- Calgary Herald [Calgary votes No on hosting 2026 Olympic games](#) November 14, 2018
- Global [Calgary council shuts down 2026 Olympic bid following plebiscite no vote](#) November 19, 2018
- Sprawl Calgary [The 'Yes' juggernaut](#) November 12, 2018

Rural Municipality of Clayton, Saskatchewan (Nominee)

Nominated for: Worst bridge ever

Cost: \$340,000

The rural municipality of Clayton, Sask., spent \$340,000 to build a bridge over the Swan River, and was finally opened on the morning of Sept. 15.

By 4:30 p.m. the same day, the bridge deck had collapsed into the river below. No one was injured.

Local Reeve Duane Hicks, when reached for comment, astutely observed that "nobody expected this."

Following the collapse of the bridge, it emerged that no geotechnical study had been conducted on the riverbed location.

Sources:

- Globe and Mail [New bridge collapses into river in rural Saskatchewan just hours after opening](#) September 18, 2018
- CBC [Sask RM promising investigation into collapse of newly-built bridge](#) September 18, 2018
- Globe and Mail [No geotechnical study done on riverbed where new bridge collapsed](#) September 24, 2018

Vancouver's TransLink (Nominee)

Nominated for: Pricey pigeon control

Cost: \$1,000 per bird feeder

Pigeons are a constant annoyance and even a safety risk for commuters on Vancouver's SkyTrain. Aside from the unpleasant bird droppings, the birds can also trip off automatic alarms that cause the driverless trains to brake.

TransLink has taken many steps to deter pigeons from SkyTrain stations, including installing spikes and nets, and even hiring a falconer to patrol stations with the most pigeons. But the pigeon problem has persisted

Now, taxpayers are paying for birth control for pigeons at a rate of \$1,000 per bird feeder, as a part of a pilot project at VCC-Clark station. In order to work, the pigeons must take a daily dose of the contraceptive, which is not effective if a pigeon misses a dose.

Sources:

- Vancouver Sun [Nuisance pigeons being fed birth control at a Vancouver SkyTrain station](#) February 8, 2019
- Global [B.C.'s solution to tackling the pigeon problem on SkyTrain? Birth control](#) February 7, 2019

Lifetime Achievement Award: Former Governor General Adrienne Clarkson

Nominated for: Soaking taxpayers even in retirement

Cost: At least \$1.1 million

Already the recipient of the 2004 Lifetime Achievement Teddy for her absurdly expensive trips while serving as the Queen's representative in Canada, former governor general Adrienne Clarkson wins an unprecedented second lifetime achievement award for managing to continue soaking taxpayers more than fourteen years after leaving office.

In October 2018, news broke that Clarkson had billed taxpayers more than \$100,000 per year almost every year since leaving office in 2005, for a total of more than \$1.1 million.

An absurd, 40-year-old policy allows former governors general to continue to submit expenses for reimbursement by taxpayers even after they have left office. The policy only requires that aggregate claims over \$100,000 per year be disclosed and no details of the expenses claimed are available to the public.

In January 2019, the CTF delivered a petition to Prime Minister Trudeau signed by more than 46,000 Canadians calling for an end to this outrageous policy, ensuring that former governors general can no longer bill taxpayers for expenses after they leave office.

Sources:

- CTF [6th Annual Teddy Awards](#) March 1, 2004
- National Post [Former Governor General Adrienne Clarkson still bills more than \\$100,000 a year in expenses](#) October 30, 2018
- Globe and Mail [I'm no longer governor general, but I still serve Canada](#) November 2, 2018
- Toronto Sun [Governors general shouldn't be billing taxpayers after they've left office](#) November 1, 2018
- CTF [CTF delivers petition demanding expenses for former governors general be cut off after they leave office](#) January 16, 2019