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Taxpayer group eyeing provincial office

 By DAVID JACKSON Provincial Reporter
 Sat, Jul 10 - 4:53 AM

A broken promise on taxes and an MLA expense scandal have a national government watchdog thinking the time is right to set up shop in Nova Scotia.

The Canadian Taxpayers Federation, often quoted in media reports on government spending and tax matters, has mailed and emailed Nova Scotians and other Atlantic Canadians asking for donations so it can establish a regional office in Halifax.

A letter from federal director Kevin Gaudet that arrived in mailboxes this week says the organization has had calls in the past to set up an Atlantic Canadian office.

"The HST increase and the MLA expense scandal has convinced us that the timing has never been better or more urgent," Gaudet says in the letter.

The sales tax went up two percentage points on July 1, though Premier Darrell Dexter had said in last year's election campaign that the NDP wouldn't raise taxes.

Federation president Troy Lanigan said in an interview from Victoria that mailing lists were bought and about 4,000 letters were sent to Nova Scotians.

He said about 1,000 in total went to New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island and a few to Newfoundland and Labrador.

The organization, founded in 1990 when two groups in Saskatchewan and Alberta joined together, is established in other parts of the country.

The not-for-profit federation bills itself as a citizens group "dedicated to lower taxes, less waste and accountable government." Lanigan said it's also a non-partisan organization.

He said there aren't many groups doing the federation's type of advocacy work.

"There's always a group that says 'Look at us, we need money,' but there's few that are always saying no, we've got to stop that, we've got to say no, we've got to start to contain what we're spending," he said.

Lanigan said a recent example of its work was persuading the Harper government to bring in legislation eliminating old age security for prisoners, using the example of serial killer Clifford Olson.

He said the group also helped turn up the heat on MPs to allow auditor general Sheila Fraser to see their expenses, and it lobbied for the elimination of MPs' mailouts to people outside their ridings.

Lanigan said he hopes the office will open in September.

(djackson@herald.ca)

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