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Secretive MPs should follow Toronto's lead on expenses

Outrageous spending by British MPs caused resignations and early retirements

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Unbelievably, MPs and Senators have refused to allow Auditor General Sheila Fraser to audit how they spend more than \$500 million of taxpayer dollars.

Incredibly, they suggest such an audit goes beyond her mandate.

What have they got to hide? If everything is fine and money has been spent wisely, as they suggest, then they should open the books. The AG should be allowed to do her audit and MPs and senators should make their spending public.

Almost every other penny of federal public spending is subject to value for money audits by the AG and subject to access to information laws. Only MP and senator spending is hidden from the AG and all Canadians.

Taxpayers are being asked to accept the word of politicians that their spending is all above board. That's what British MPs said before getting caught. It's what Newfoundland and Nova Scotia MLAs said before they got caught. It is what the fox said while guarding the chicken coop.

A recent poll by Leger Marketing shows that 88% of Canadians want the books opened up. The Canadian Taxpayers Federation wants to focus this overwhelming demand for greater transparency and has launched a petition demanding MPs open the books.

If the Auditor General thinks spending should be audited, MPs should listen.

Fraser started requesting permission to audit MPs and senators' spending after the British MP spending scandal broke last year.

Outrageous spending by British MPs caused resignations, recriminations and early retirements. British MPs fought tooth-and-nail in court to avoid having the results of a freedom of information request for these expenses released.

No wonder. The information revealed crazy MP spending, including taxpayers paying for: The clearing of a moat at one MP's castle; a nanny; a husband's adult videos; a second home 10 kms from the first home; personal furniture delivered to ineligible locations; \$1,000 a month for food without receipts; Sinn Fein MPs claiming over \$1 million for second homes while never taking their seats in London; an MP hiring his son – who was a full-time student; a tooth brush and a \$1 drain plug, just to name a few.

Before the British story broke, MLA expense abuse caused havoc in Newfoundland where one MLA, for example, was caught with a cellphone bill over \$30,000 for one year.

After the British scandal, Nova Scotians suffered their own MLA scandal. MLAs have been caught repeatedly double expensing items and even billing taxpayers for an Xbox video game. One MLA expensed 12 printers and 11 computers over three years.

It is peculiar and sad that taxpayers may learn more about the spending habits of an unelected, unaccountable, junior staffer or senior federal bureaucrat, than they can learn about the spending habits of an elected Member of Parliament.

One lone MP, Michelle Simson, the Liberal MP for Scarborough-Southwest, has broken ranks and published on the Internet her office expenses by category. She deserves tremendous credit for besting all other MPs who refuse to do the same.

All MPs and senators should be encouraged to take it further, by following the City of Toronto example and publishing online all receipts and invoices and to include their per diems and housing allowance.

Accountability and transparency in government spending seem obvious and a simple thing to accomplish. With the high quality and low cost of today's digital technologies (including digital scanners, the Internet and cheap hosting) disclosing all of government spending should be technologically easy. However, it requires a willingness of those spending the money to be transparent.

And that is exactly what is lacking in Ottawa.

— Gaudet is the federal director of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation

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