

# Caledon Citizen

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## Editorial

# Salaries are big, but they are also reasonable

The province last week released the annual list of employees in the provincial public sector who made more than \$100,000 last year.

The list can be accessed at the provincial government's Web site, by choosing "finance" under ministries (that's how we found it). Consult the list, and if you have friends, neighbours or relatives on the public payroll, and if they made more than 100 grand last year, you can find out exactly how much they were paid, complete with benefits. Precisely what you're going to do with such information escapes us for the moment, but have fun anyway.

There's no mistaking the obvious fact that this list grows every year. That shouldn't be too surprising, however. Inflation is part of life. The price of everything eventually goes up (filled the gas tank in your car lately?), and that includes the price of services provided to the public, and the price paid to those who provide the services.

There was a time when this newspaper would have published the names of all the people serving this municipality and the surrounding area who made more than \$100,000, at the local, Regional, police, school board, hospital (etc.) levels. This year, we are only naming those who work at the very local level, as well as those at the very, very top in other levels. To do anything else would take up most, if not all, if not more of this edition of the paper.

Yes, there are a lot of people on the public payroll making a good chunk of change for the services they render, and there are probably a number of you reading this who might be a little jealous. That's understandable, but we have to apply a bit of perspective to it all too.

Many of these people have undergone years and years of training to qualify themselves for the positions they currently occupy, and a lot of them have been on the job for a good number of years. Training, re-training, updating said training and seniority usually add up to bigger pay cheques in any field, be it in the private or public sector. There is no such thing as a qualified person who owes an apology to anyone because he or she managed to land a well-paying job.

As well, these people often have to deal directly with the public, which is not nearly as simple as it might sound. Members of the public can often be loud, obnoxious, ignorant, rude, ill-informed, impatient, unreasonable, intolerant of facts they don't want to hear and unwilling to listen, especially when they are dealing with people they believe are supposed to serve them. And when they are dealing with public employees, as long as they are not violating laws or resorting to obscene language, etc., these people usually have to take the abuse.

As well, these many of these employees have to deal with frequent calls from the media, which may or may not be a good thing, depending on which side of the conversation you happen to be on.

There are some in the media who would tend toward a "hogs at the trough" analogy when referring to these people, usually a clear sign the editorial writers couldn't think of a better topic on which to comment. We're inclined to look upon them more as people who are well-paid to do various jobs upon which we all depend.

Of course, if you think people can be found to do the job for less money, you might find yourself in a position some day when you can bring that about. But don't blame us if you find the jobs are not being done as well.



## Make smoking more expensive

Being a small-C conservative, I would generally enthusiastically favour what a guy like Bob Runciman is up to.

But his latest move has me wondering why he's only going after half the target.

Runciman, a Progressive Conservative, is the interim opposition leader in the provincial legislature at Queen's Park. Last week, the party's office issues a media release, stating Runciman was taking the government of Premier Dalton McGuinty to task for not doing enough to crack down on the sale of illegal cigarettes. Instead, according to the party, law-abiding families are being expected to pay for that lapse through higher taxes.

"There are no taxes being collected on these cigarettes and the government is simply allowing this to happen," Runciman was quoted as saying in the release. "The government is turning a blind eye to illegal operations, some with ties to organized crime who use the profits to purchase illegal guns."

"Instead of shrugging their shoulders over the loss of \$600 million and whacking law-abiding Ontarians with a new \$60 million tire tax, the McGuinty Liberals should get to work enforcing the rule of law."

Runciman went on to charge that one in three cigarettes smoked in Ontario is contraband.

It's obvious there is a living to be made in dealing with smuggled smokes. Indeed, I have read several accounts that state that's how Paul Bernardo was sup-



Bill Rea

porting himself before society started picking up the tab for his room and board.

I don't have a great deal of trouble with what Runciman is advocating, but I have trouble understanding why he, and others like him, refuse to go a couple of steps further, like imposing even more restrictions on the use of tobacco, if not banning it all together.

As I see it, the situation boils down to simple economics. People like Bernardo have been able to turn a buck with contraband tobacco, not so much because they were able to obtain supplies, but because there was demand. What we need to be doing is taking steps to reduce the demand. In other words, Runciman's attack should be on two levels.

A good way to reduce demand is to make smoking too expensive, and that can be accomplished by raising taxes on tobacco. True, there is a tobacco lobby that will raise a big stink if that happens. Well, let them. In today's climate, as smoking becomes less and less acceptable, who's going to listen?

It's also true that driving up prices is going to drive more smokers into the underground market, but not all of them, and the rest would be forced to quit for financial reasons. And fewer kids would start smoking because their part-time jobs on the weekends won't cover the cost of many decks of smokes.

I grant I sound a little sanctimonious, but I also have sympathy for people who are hooked on cigarettes. I guess the reason I'm sanctimonious is I am a reformed smoker.

I started in my teens because a lot of my friends smoked and, like all kids, I wanted to be part of the group. In those days, it was a lot easier to smoke. I was in high school at the time, and smoking was allowed on school property. In fact, in inclement weather, us kids were allowed to smoke just inside the doors, at the bottom of the stair wells. The school administration was probably not following the rules to the letter by allowing that, but as long as the smokers didn't venture into the halls, no one ever raised a fuss.

I doubt kids could get away with anything close to that today.

And later, when I went to university, smoking was allowed in the lecture halls and seminar rooms. You could say it was even encouraged, since several of the professors smoked.

In my early days in this business, smoking on the job was easy, because it was allowed in council chambers

See 'It's' on page 7