



# OPINION

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

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## Merit pay for everybody

Recently, CTV news used an Access to Information request to uncover the following:

- Approximately 3,000 senior federal civil service managers were eligible for performance bonuses in the last budget year.
- Of that number, 97 per cent — most paid between \$61,000 and \$120,000 — got a bonus.
- To receive a bonus, managers had to be ranked a three to a five on a five point performance scale. Criteria were not disclosed.
- The bonuses averaged \$4,300, for a total price of \$12 million. Recipients ranking a 'three' got a 2.5 per cent bonus, a 'four' earned a five per cent bonus and a 'five' earned a 10 per cent bonus. Some recipients had a part of the bonus added to their base salary as a raise.
- The bonuses were paid despite the fact that a salary freeze is in effect throughout the public service.
- Guidelines on the size and number of bonuses were often ignored.

The federal government's reaction to the story was typically contradictory. First, it was suggested that the money was deserved by all the managers. Second, the CTV report was denounced as a fabrication. Third, Canadians were told the payouts were necessary to prevent a brain drain.

Our government is unwilling to take the plunge and actually try to measure performance objectively, as other industries and even other governments have done.

Taxpayers would be better off if civil service pay was actually linked to fairly objective, publicly accessible measures of performance.

That might create circumstances where some civil servants earn more than they do now. But, provided the worker is in a useful job, real merit pay would ensure that taxpayers only paid more

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Taxes



with BRIAN KELCEY

for better value.

In Canada, civil servants wouldn't have had much trouble selling their twisted version of performance measurement to their so-called political masters. After all, the minister responsible for the senior civil service — Marcel Masse — was once Canada's most senior civil servant himself.

Taxpayers can judge for themselves Mr. Masse is qualified for this thanks in part to the growing observation of civil service habits by investigative journalists, not just at CTV but at the Ottawa Citizen as well.

Earlier this year, Citizen staff revealed that more than 100 senior bureaucrats can authorize their own expense accounts, a policy that allowed one bureaucrat to blow an average of \$50,000 annually on meals, liquor and travel. The same manager forced taxpayers to buy his office furniture for \$15,000.

Ontarians can join the Canadian Taxpayers Federation's quest for better oversight of the senior civil service. Simply mail your views to: the Honourable Marcel Masse, Treasury Board of Canada, Esplanade Laurier, East Tower, 9th Floor, 140 O'Connor St., Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0R5.

## Looking Back ...



The Milton Red Sox infielders were an important factor when the locals took on Ajax in the fourth game of their best of five playoff series in September, 1963. Blake Inglis, Ron Shannon, Glen Dance and Theo Charlton displayed the gloves that they were hoping would make the difference that day.

## Anybody feeling the heat?

Thank the stars for Indian summer. It means the garden hose won't freeze up during the night, and you might need it if your house catches on fire, given the precarious state of some of the Milton Fire Department's rolling stock.

Maybe our burg will be dealt into the next hand of Trivial Pursuit cards with a question along these lines: 'What is the only municipality in Canada to have two fire trucks break down on the way to the same call?'

By the time functioning equipment arrives on the scene for a local conflagration all that might be going on is a burnt bungalow weenie roast, block party style, in the glowing embers of your suburban pride and joy.

To top it all off, this is Fire Prevention Week. Milton council is doing its part to help celebrate, although some pundits may claim they are going over the top with the festivities.

Council has hurriedly scrawled a purchase order for two new firefighting trucks worth better than half a million dollars. Delivery this month, if you please, although the day after tomorrow would be even better.

Let's not confuse lambasting management bungling with giving grief to the grunts. Milton gets value for money from its firefighting force, all appearances indicate.

There is a dedicated coterie of part-time fire-



Rob  
Kelly

fighters, called volunteers although they are paid a modest stipend for the privilege of scrambling around in burning buildings and pulling crash victims from mangled vehicles.

The handful of fulltimers — there are about half a dozen — seem to take the business seriously too, although the management question lingers there, unfortunately, due in no small measure to Chief Harold Penson's forthright admission last week.

Mr. Penson said he hasn't been aggressive enough in pushing for new equipment. He also pointed out that, "these old trucks have shut down or stalled many times, without warning, while firefighters were conducting interior fire attacks."

Let's say Mr. Penson was an airline pilot instead of the fire chief. How would the above paragraph read then? Maybe something like this: 'Captain Penson told the Royal Commission on Airline Safety that, "These old planes have shut down or stalled many times, without warning, while pilots were conducting commuter flights."'

Chief Penson takes the firefighting business seriously, even if he does leave something to be desired with regard to his aggressiveness and communication skills in dealing with politicians.

It doesn't look as if Mr. Penson should be the fall guy for this embarrassment — and thank God that's all it has been so far.

Not if you believe Councillor Marion Howard, who slammed her colleagues for relegating the firefighting equipment replacement to also-ran status in budget priorities.

This, she says, was so advanced electronic bean-counting software could be purchased instead.

That \$400,000 computer network council opted for prior to the panic purchase of firefighting inventory might have come in handy, though.

It could have been used to tally the legal costs facing the Town of Milton had council faced a lawsuit over faulty firefighting equipment that resulted in property destruction, or the loss of something more precious, like a life.

## How your teen handles the homework

I now know how teenagers do their homework in three minutes.

Teens are guided by the Least Effort Principle (LEP), and it is a frustrating experience getting LEPERS to actually think while doing their homework.

Ben is in ninth grade, and he was bringing home grades anywhere from 60 per cent to 100 per cent in math. I was determined to find out why. I proposed a contract. If he let me check his work and followed my suggestions, I would buy him the new computer game he's dying for at the end of the term.

He bought in.

The first night I checked his math homework, there were only two wrong answers. The answers, however, were in the back of the book. He had done his homework without checking if they were right. I asked him why he didn't check, and he said he knew the stuff and it was a waste of time.

My first recommendation was that he check his homework all the time.

A few nights later, I was checking his math homework and again there were some answers wrong. It turns out he did check it. He knew they



Psychology  
in the '90s

with DR. ARNOLD RINCOVER

were wrong. I hadn't told him he then should fix them. I elaborated on my recommendation.

Another night the math homework stated: "First estimate the square root, then calculate the square root to the nearest tenth". Ben only had one answer for each square root. There were two answers for each problem — first an estimate, second the precise answer.

He found the square root using his calculator. His answer was in fact right. Since he had the precise answer and it was right, he didn't see the need for estimating it. I explained that the teacher is not drilling to see if Ben can find the square root button on the calculator, rather he wanted Ben to think, to learn how to estimate.