

# OPINION

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## EDITORIAL

### Grants report truly embarrassing

It's all about the attitude. Sadly, on some level, we all expect government to be wasting at least some of our money on partisan spending. This is Canada, after all. We've grown used to it.

But the reaction of the provincial Liberal government to an auditor general's report on more than \$30 million in grants doled out to groups across Ontario, with little or no documentation to get the money, really rankles.

For months, the government refused to answer questions about the money. Later, it finally agreed to have the auditor general investigate.

The report last week painted a dismal picture of government accountability. A cricket association that asked for \$150,000 received \$1 million.

Other groups that had formed only months before received hundreds of thousands they did not need and have yet to even spend. It is sitting in bank accounts and GICs. Others got money with no paperwork whatsoever. The government should be truly embarrassed. The result?

One minister, Mike Colle, tendered his resignation from cabinet. Premier Dalton McGuinty said he was sorry. And that was that.

Liberals were quick to point out the auditor claimed there was no evidence groups got money because of their Liberal ties. But that is hardly the point.

The fund was effectively \$32 million in seed money to spread the glories of capital-L Ontario style Liberalism among predominantly new immigrant groups.

The message: Stick with us and we'll show you the money.

The idea was to turn them into Liberal converts and it is hard to conceive this tactic was not known by other ministers and even the premier — who was featured in a photograph at a cricket association event where a \$1 million cheque was handed over.

Local MPP Greg Sorbara, the finance minister, says the auditor's recommendations on keeping tabs on how the grants are handed out will be implemented.

His government will formalize a process for new immigrant organizations to get grants. "I don't see this as an election issue," he said.

The implication months ago, from the premier himself, was that anyone who opposed these grants was anti-immigrant. The party's position does not appear to have changed. It is all rather troubling.

They've shown little respect for parliament or taxpayers. They've labelled their critics as racists. They've shrugged off the auditor general's report as an opportunity to entrench a questionable practice.

It is very much an election issue.



## It's not sexism but flawed, nasty politics

Are we still just women playing at a man's game? There has been a lot of talk lately about women and politics, some of it prompted by the exodus of female politicians.

Veteran NDP MPP Shelley Martel cites family reasons for tossing in the towel, as do Liberal MPPs Marie Bountrogianni and Jennifer Mossop. Mary Anne Chambers points to health concerns, while Judy Marsales is fed up with the long hours.

Newmarket-Aurora MP Belinda Stronach, who has returned to an executive position at Magna, includes a desire to spend more time with her two teenagers as part of her decision not to run for re-election.

Much handwringing and navel-gazing has brought renewed calls for changes to a system many see as biased.

Former NDP politician Marilyn Churley jumped in last week to call for "more Janes" running against the "Dicks".

She wants Ontario to move to a system that would support a gender-

balanced legislature. At the polls Oct. 10, we'll have our say on adopting a mixed-member proportional system said to better reflect the popular vote than our existing first-past-the-post system.

I see the merit in considering a change to a system that clearly hasn't given us political representatives — women or men — with a broad range of backgrounds, experiences and perspectives.

But, as a woman, I detest the suggestion the rules have to be changed to give us a fair shot at playing the game, be it politics, business or community leadership.

We need strong, committed leaders who are there for reasons beyond their gender.

I cringe over "warm body" pronouncements such as those by Liberal Leader Stéphane Dion, who promised last July to run women in 33 per cent of federal ridings.

The province's three main parties also vowed to increase female candidates, but are we best served by leaders who have to be courted and



Debora Kelly

cajoled to take the job?

Ms Mossop refused to be a poster child for why politics don't work for women. Instead, she's a symbol of today's couples, juggling careers, families and changing priorities. Plenty of men before her have stated family as the reason for quitting. Better hours, daycare and flexible parental benefits would benefit all politicians.

I'm not suggesting sexism doesn't exist or that it isn't at times challenging for women politicians. But is it any less challenging, for minorities,

the disabled and newcomers? Is it any more different for women politicians than it is in other professions traditionally dominated by males?

Ms Stronach has often commented on the media's obsession with her appearance and personal life. A study examining media coverage during her bid for the Conservative leadership found her appearance was mentioned in 33 per cent of articles, including such bon mots as hot babe and dishy blond, compared to 1 per cent for Stephen Harper and 3 per cent for Tony Clement.

The study concluded she was "sexualized, her business experience trivialized, her political ambitions disparaged". Yet the neophyte came in a solid second to political veterans Mr. Harper and Mr. Clement.

Since then, Prime Minister Harper has not been immune to comments — ridicule, actually — about his appearance. I'll just say flak jacket here.

It's not right, but it's politics, not sexism. Eleven MPPs elected with Dalton McGuinty are quitting — four

are women. Ms Stronach was the 16th Liberal under Mr. Dion's leadership not to seek re-election. Could it be some candidates have issues with leadership? Or see an election loss?

It was also politics, not sexism, regarding the comment posted on Liberal adviser Warren Kinsella's website that Tory MPP Lisa MacLeod would rather be baking cookies than campaigning.

The Tories cried sexism, saying comments like this prevent women from entering politics.

It was more nasty, insulting politicking from Mr. Kinsella, though, this time, he apologized. I am not defending him, but I am dismayed that a woman's gender has again so easily become fodder for a political game.

Negative advertising and ruthless verbal attacks have taken politics to a new low that would have any sane woman — or man — thinking twice about entering the fray.

It's time for change to the political system, all right, but change that will benefit all.

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