

*Standing up for Quebec taxpayers*

# Standing up for Quebec taxpayers

By Claire Joly  
Quebec Taxpayers League

Politicians and special interest groups often forget that someone has to pay for their pet projects. It's as true in Quebec as in any other part of Canada. Until now though, taxpayers objecting to the way their money was spent were pretty much voiceless. That is going to change very soon with the creation of the Quebec Taxpayers League. We will make our supporters' views heard loud and clear!

On federal issues, the League will gladly relay the CTF's positions to a French-speaking audience in order to gather support for change. Ottawa politicians will have a harder time procrastinating. As for Quebec politicians, they have been out of control for decades. They're taxing, they're spending and in the process they cripple our economy. Is it that bad? Yes! Quebec taxpayers bear the heaviest tax burden in the country and the

second highest debt burden in Canada, right after Newfoundland & Labrador. (as a % of GDP)

Public finances are obviously a mess, but we don't know how big a mess it is. Quebec does have a *Balanced Budget Act* in the books and budgets do get balanced every year — or so successive governments have said. In October, Finance Minister Michel Audet proudly announced a surplus of \$37 million. Not so, says Quebec's auditor general who has for years been blowing the whistle on the

government's creative accounting practices. The auditor states, that since the passage of the Act in 2001, the accumulated deficit is at least \$5.3 billion.

The auditor general's office has made 20 recommendations

regarding the accounting practices of the provincial government, some of them going back as far as 1998. Of these 20, only 4 have been

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fully implemented. This is unacceptable.

As a starting point, the new Quebec Taxpayers League will demand the government adopt rigorous accounting practices that comply with Public Sector Accounting Board standards. Taxpayers are entitled to the utmost transparency and accountability when it comes to the use of their tax dollars.

Transparency is a principle that should apply to our elected officials' compensation too. Guess how we treat Quebec Members of National Assembly (MNAs) for doing such a dismal job of watching over our hard-earned money? We give them the highest provincial indemnity in Canada, including a so-called annual allowance that is exempt from provincial and federal income. They also benefit from a "gold-plated" pension plan that the CTF has been so successful at reforming across the country. As for their travel expenses – well – no one knows because this information cannot be obtained under the Access to Information Act. Last year, only one MNA chose to disclose his travel details.

Quebec taxpayers are angry! Occasionally, public outrage has made politicians reconsider an unpopular decision. But most of the time, taxpayers have ended up footing another bill. That is why being organized as well as proactive is so important.

Take for instance the massive increase in automobile licence and registration rates Quebec motorists will have to deal with over the next few years. It was no secret that the government-run no fault insurance scheme has been running a deficit. It was no secret either that two successive governments had raided the compensation fund's surpluses in order to balance their budget. At least \$2.2 billion went straight into the provincial government's operating fund over a period of 8 years, starting in the mid 80's. As a result, today's drivers just learned license fees will double and so will motorcycle registration fees. For motorcycles with more powerful en-

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gines, the rate will quadruple!

That policy may be too late to change, but it's not too late to demand measures that would prevent something similar from happening in the future. That's what the Quebec Taxpayers League will do. Instead of reacting we will be preacting on taxpayers behalf!

The Canadian Taxpayers Federation has shown the way. Their achievements should leave no doubt that meaningful policy change can be achieved by relentlessly speaking out for taxpayers with passion and integrity. That's exactly what the Quebec Taxpayers League intends to do. Like the CTF, we will stand up for our supporters, day in, day out.

We will also share one other important element with the CTF: we will be a supporter-based organization relying on voluntary contributions. If you have friends, families or work colleagues in Quebec please encourage them to contact and support the League! Together with the CTF we will be fighting for taxpayers in Quebec!■