



# Cashing in on being kicked out

**M**ember of the National Assembly (MNA) compensation is anything but transparent. The Quebec Taxpayers League recently blew the whistle on the lavish severance payments former MNAs will collect following the last general election. Media coverage of our findings was extensive and taxpayers throughout the province were outraged. Rightly so!

According to our calculations, 54 former MNAs will receive a total of \$4.3 million in severance payments because they were either defeated or decided to retire after the March 26 election. One former minister will even be going home with a whopping \$140,000 cheque!

People were stunned by these findings. One

reason is that very few people were aware this “transition allowance” (as it is called) existed. It wasn’t even mentioned on the National Assembly’s web site at the time the League was researching it. Furthermore, the amount of money each former MNA is given in severance has never been made public because it is deemed to be personal and confidential information! Any Access to Information request will therefore be denied.

## The \$100,000 Club (12 MNAs got over \$100,000 in severance payments)

Name (party)	Riding	Status	Severance payment	Years in office
Michel Després (PLQ)	Jean-Lesage	defeated	140 812,00 \$	8,31
Thomas Mulcair (PLQ)	Chomedey	retired	135 385,39 \$	12,53
Françoise Gauthier (PLQ)	Jonquière	defeated	128 655,23 \$	5,48
Normand Jutras (PQ)	Drummond	defeated	112 562,22 \$	12,53
Michel Létourneau (PQ)	Ungava	retired	109 187,40 \$	12,53
William Cusano (PLQ)	Viau	retired	108 626,00 \$	25,95
Diane Leblanc (PLQ)	Beauce-Sud	defeated	108 626,00 \$	9,91
Michel Morin (PQ)	Nicolet-Yamaska	retired	104 603,00 \$	12,53
Richard Legendre (PQ)	Blainville	defeated	103 810,88 \$	5,48
Bernard Brodeur (PLQ)	Shefford	defeated	100 580,00 \$	13,07
Claude Pinard (PQ)	Saint-Maurice	defeated	100 580,00 \$	12,53
Michèle Lamquin-Éthier (PLQ)	Crémazie	defeated	100 580,00 \$	9,47

So how in the world can a taxpayer figure out how much their former MNA is receiving in severance? By doing a fair amount of research and getting out a calculator! This is precisely what the League had to do in order to get to the bottom of these transition allowances.

Simply put, the League found that provincial politicians with at least six years of service are entitled to 12 months of salary. The others will collect two months of salary for every year they were in office. It’s not as straightforward as it sounds,

because each former MNA's monthly salary is determined by the most advantageous of two calculating methods.

Needless to say, all MNAs end up with a hefty cheque while taxpayers are being told this is confidential information. Not so! We have the right to know about every tax dollar our elected representatives receive in compensation, so

they can be made accountable for it. The League will continue demanding that all information pertaining to MNA remuneration, including receiptable expenses, be posted on the National Assembly website. We will also be pushing for reform so political compensation becomes transparent and easy to understand. Right now, it's anything but! ■

## Politicians are welfare bums too ...

**H**ardly a day goes by without taxpayers hearing about yet another subsidy being handed out to a business or special interest group. But we rarely hear about the subsidies provincial politicians grant themselves. That's right. Every year our tax dollars find their way into one political party's bank account or another. Every taxpayer is actually subsidizing parties they didn't vote for and even those they strongly disapprove of.

About 13 million tax dollars will be distributed to parties and candidates to cover half of the campaign expenses they incurred during the March 26 election.

All parties that drew at least 1% of the ballots cast, as well as the candidates who obtained at least 15% of the votes in their ridings, will be entitled to a piece of that cake.

All provincial political parties also receive a monthly allowance that has nothing to do with elections, but rather with — wait for it — running their offices and holding meetings! The Chief Electoral Officer's website clearly states this money is to help parties meet the cost of "day-to-day administration, the dissemination of their political platform and the coordination of the political action of its members."

Here's how it works. Fifty cents by registered elector — whether they actually voted or not — is put into the kitty at the beginning of each fiscal year. This will amount to \$2.75 million in 2007-2008. The money is then distributed on the basis of the percentage of valid votes each



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party obtained during the most recent general election. For example, a party that drew 40% of the votes would be given 40% the pot or \$1-million every year until the next election. All the party has to do is produce bills proving the expenses were indeed incurred.

For politicians to be tapping into that kind of public money obviously has many drawbacks. First, the current system gives an unfair advantage to the old parties and their candidates as they are the ones collecting the most tax dollars, thus maintaining the status quo. It also makes politicians

less accountable to their supporters and the electorate in general. Isn't it easier to break a promise when you don't have to rely

as much on voluntary contributions? Or when you know you are guaranteed a \$1 million dollar allowance every year for the next four or five years anyway? ■

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