

Guest editorial: Civic wage hikes are unsustainable

BY NNAIMO FREE PRESS, VANCOUVER SUN SEPTEMBER 18, 2014

The Canadian Taxpayers Federation has long suspected that municipal governments are over-paying their staff compared with the province and private sector.

In an 88-page report released this week, the CTF states statistics released by the provincial government confirm its belief in the discrepancy. Municipal union employees received 38-per-cent hikes in pay from 2001-12, twice as much as the 19-per-cent raise received by provincial government workers.

Hands up, those in the private sector. Did your wages rise that much during that period?

Who pays those public-sector wages? The private sector, through their paycheques and property tax bills. CTF's B.C. director Jordan Bateman states, "With as much as two-thirds of a city's operating budget going to employee wages and benefits, it's no wonder property taxes have skyrocketed in so many communities across B.C."

Nobody is opposed to fair wages and benefits but public-sector unions seem deliberately oblivious to the plight of the private sector that pays their services through hot and cold markets.

While the private sector adjusts — by necessity — to fluctuations in business, there is no such alteration on the public side. Wouldn't it be refreshing to have public-sector contracts tied to the realities of the marketplace, such as growth or shrinkage in GDP, for example?

Some would doubtless argue these generous wage and benefit hikes are one of the benefits of having a union negotiate contracts. But the other end of the teeter-totter is the taxpayer covering the freight. Aren't successful contracts supposed to be win-win? How does the average citizen look at these escalating bills as a positive?

Those with the task of looking after the interests of the taxpayer, city councils, have proven to be woefully inadequate in terms of being able to say no to big public-sector unions adept at flexing their muscles. To that end, isn't it about time that the province legislate campaign contribution limits for businesses and unions? We only find out after the fact which organization or company has helped fund a certain candidate's run for council, and by that time it's too late. At the very least, there should be some method implemented whereby voters know before they cast their ballots which individuals or groups have funded each particular candidate. That information would be very helpful for voting citizens.

Another line in the CTF release states that "municipalities are over-paying the provincial government for technical expertise." Since we're already paying for our civic government's expertise, why should another level of government we pay for bill us again? That's double-billing, and it should be stopped.

The only hope taxpayers have to stop the escalation is a council that will hold the line, and decision day on that is Nov. 15.

Guest editorial from the Nanaimo Daily News

© Copyright (c) The Vancouver Sun