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September 10, 2004

Alberta Taxpayers Foot \$374,000 Bill for Secret Advice

EDMONTON: The Canadian Taxpayers Federation (CTF) today released information obtained through the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act regarding the absence of work performed by Tory insider Kelley Charlebois, for which he received \$373,774.46.



The Ministry of Health and Wellness paid Charlebois Consulting Ltd. \$143,019.56 in 2001-02, then \$119,342.75 in 2002-03, then \$111,412.15 in 2003-04 for "advice, analysis and recommendations regarding strategic direction" and "advice for key and emerging issues."

According to the Freedom of Information response obtained by the CTF:

"The work done by the consultant was advisory in nature; therefore the consultant was not required to produce reports."

The Ministry of Health and Wellness currently has 1,287 employees.

"What advice did Mr. Charlebois give to cabinet that was worth \$374,000?" asked CTF-Alberta director John Carpay.

"Was the advice given by Mr. Charlebois political advice? If yes, why are taxpayers paying for that?" added Carpay.

"Does Health Minister Gary Mar lack confidence in his 1,287 employees, that he would pay hundreds of thousands of tax dollars to a Tory insider as a consultant?" asked Carpay.

"With 25,788 provincial employees working for the Alberta government, many of them in communications, there is no need to give away tax dollars to consultants," concluded Carpay.

The only document provided to the CTF in respect of the \$374,000 paid to Charlebois Consulting Ltd. was a seven-page "Communications audit" from which all relevant information has been blanked out because it would reveal advice to cabinet. The "Communications audit" contains a list of 46 people whom Kelley Charlebois "interviewed," but no further information.

"If this kind of consulting work is truly beneficial to taxpayers, it should be put out to a competitive bid," concluded Carpay.



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Poll

Finance Minister Jim Flaherty has declared it's his responsibility to demand domestic retailers lower their prices to reflect our stronger Canadian dollar. Do you believe:

- The minister is bang on the money**
- The minister should concentrate on policies he can control to reduce costs to businesses and consumers such as business taxes (EI) and regulations**
- The minister needs to do both,**

--30--

lower business costs and demand retailers lower prices

Submit

Results

[Poll Archives](#)

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Wednesday » October
24 » 2007

'Verbal advice' nets Tory insider \$350 an hour

Rod Love, other former aide, awarded rich untendered contracts with Calgary Health Region

Michelle Lang

Calgary Herald; CanWest News Service

Tuesday, May 09, 2006

CALGARY - The Calgary Health Region awarded two Tory insiders untendered contracts worth thousands of dollars this year, paying Ralph Klein's former chief of staff \$350 an hour for "verbal advice" and a one-time cabinet aide \$8,000 to prepare one speech.

Documents obtained by the Calgary Herald under Freedom of Information legislation show consultant Rod Love, who headed the premier's office as recently as last year, has a 12-month, \$42,000 contract with the provincially-funded health authority.

Love's work as a communications and government relations consultant is largely undocumented because he provides verbal strategic advice and isn't required to submit reports, say CHR executives.

Meanwhile, former cabinet aide Kelley Charlebois -- who came under fire in a 2004 auditor general's report for improperly documented contracts with government -- billed CHR for \$26,000 as a communications consultant in the past 15 months.

Love, who is working as a volunteer with the Tory leadership campaign of former CHR chair Jim Dinning, did not return phone calls from the Herald.

Charlebois said taxpayers received good value for his work.

Officials with the CHR, which has a board appointed by the province and receives about \$2 billion from the government annually, said Love and Charlebois were hired for their qualifications -- not their relationship to the Conservative party.

"We get excellent value for them both," said Deborah Apps, the CHR's senior vice-president of communications and community relations. "They're highly professional. They deliver on time. They deal with our time-sensitive requirements."

But the Alberta Liberals attacked the contracts as the latest example of government agencies handing out work to Tory friends, while other critics said the contracts should have gone to tender to ensure accountability.

"This is all about personal favours, buying access to power. It's

fundamentally wrong," said Liberal Leader Kevin Taft. "There's no other way to frame this than as an abuse of the taxpayer dollars."

The CHR contracts led Taft to renew calls for Alberta to implement a cooling-off period for senior provincial government officials and establish a lobbyist registry, an idea being reviewed by an all-party legislative committee.

The health region, which delivers medical services in Calgary and runs the city's four hospitals, also has a 20-person staff for communications and fundraising.

Charlebois -- a one-time chief of staff to former health minister Gary Mar -- defended his work, saying he charges CHR his standard rate of \$8,000 for a lengthy speech, which includes unlimited rewrites.

Details of the CHR contracts come several weeks after the Alberta government faced a barrage of questions in the legislature over Love's work for the province.

The Alberta Liberals said Klein's former chief of staff billed government more than \$400,000 in consulting fees over the past five years.

That includes nearly \$50,000 worth of undocumented verbal "strategic advice" in the months leading up to the 2004 provincial election.

One month before that vote, Charlebois was cited in a report from Auditor General Fred Dunn for collecting nearly \$389,000 in Alberta Health contracts over three years without public tendering or written agreements.

The documents obtained by the Herald show Love signed a year-long contract with CHR last November at a fee of \$3,500 a month.

His work included a seven-hour meeting with the organization's chief executive, Jack Davis, in November to review "winter communications plan and GR (government relations) strategy."

The invoices show Love also billed CHR for a two-hour meeting with Health Minister Iris Evans that month.

Other bills indicate Love met with Davis in December, January and February to consult on CHR's spring communications plan and government relations.

Those three meetings cost CHR \$7,350 -- at \$350 an hour.

Charlebois's work for the health authority included preparing three speeches for Davis and David Tuer, chairman of the board, who spoke to groups including the Calgary Chamber of Commerce.

Charlebois also billed \$1,575 to consult on the region's Healthy U television program and another \$4,500 to review CHR policies.

Both men have worked for the health authority previously. Love earned \$21,000 in 2004-05 and Charlebois earned \$67,650 during that period.

The CHR's Apps said it is necessary to hire Charlebois because speechwriting

is a specialized skill. She said it wouldn't be cost-effective to hire a full-time writer for the handful of speeches region executives deliver a year.

She added it is appropriate for Love to provide strategic advice in a verbal form, noting it is confidential and he "is there for us 24-7."

The contracts weren't put out to tender because anything under \$100,000 is exempt from the process, Apps said.

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