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## Sweet deal for Murray Smith

Paid in full even though he left Washington job five months early

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EDMONTON - Alberta's former Washington representative quit his \$210,552-a-year post five months early this summer and returned to Calgary.

But Murray Smith was still paid an extra \$105,276 in public dollars as though he had stayed on six more months, under a generous "termination allowance" he negotiated to receive even if he did the terminating, documents obtained by The Journal reveal.

Smith would have received the half-year's worth of pay regardless of whether he had been fired, left early or finished his full three-year term in the U.S. capital, according to his contract, which The Journal received today through Freedom of Information and Privacy Protection Act request.

Opposition parties had already complained that Smith, a former Klein energy minister, was getting a cozy patronage job in Washington, complete with large salary, apartment, benefits package and his own \$42,500 fleet car. But their leaders were still stunned at such a rich send-off for a man who left the job prematurely.

"It's one thing if he's squeezed out, fired, or the office is closed," Liberal Leader Kevin Taft said. "It's a real sweetheart deal when he gets paid off like that when he chooses to leave."

The lucrative terms even turned heads among Conservative MLAs.

"Wow," said one Tory backbencher. "I should stop working inside the government, quit, and start working for the government instead."

For nearly three years the Conservative government resisted CBC-TV's request to view Smith's contract. An order from the privacy commissioner forced them to finally hand over the contracts for Smith and Rod Love, who was chief of staff to former premier Ralph Klein.

Stelmach has said there were worries that releasing the uncensored contracts could set an uneasy precedent for the public to access any civil servant's contract.

While Smith inked his contract under the Klein regime, Taft noted that the current premier was intergovernmental relations minister when the deal was made.

"Ed Stelmach's fingerprints are all over this," Taft said. "Ed Stelmach negotiated the deal, he signed the contract, and he tried to block it from public view. I think it speaks volumes about the premier's attitudes towards openness and accountability."

Stelmach did sign off on the contract but ministry officials actually set the terms, said Tom Olsen, the premier's spokesman. The contract also gave Smith five weeks of vacation each year, and allowed him to collect his \$360,000 MLA retirement allowance as of January 2006. Government records show he did not take it at that point.

Smith could not be reached for comment today. The premier and other ministers have long praised Smith for promoting Alberta's energy resources to U.S. policymakers and business leaders, as well as for organizing last year's Alberta Week at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington.

He left early to join an energy advisory board for Toronto Dominion Securities.

Patronage accusations came up again this fall when Stelmach named another former Klein cabinet minister to the Washington job. The government cannot disclose whether Gary Mar got the same "termination allowance" in his contract, said Carol Chawrun, spokeswoman for the Intergovernmental, International and Aboriginal Relations ministry.

Smith's six-months of severance pay, while a rarity for Alberta government officials, makes sense for a major post that requires someone to move to another country, Chawrun said.

"You're talking about people leaving, bringing their families - that's a big deal," she said.

She confirmed that no such provisions exist for officials at Alberta's overseas trade offices in Asia and Europe.

NDP Leader Brian Mason asked why the government wouldn't simply agree to pay moving expenses instead.

"You don't get three-year's pay for two-and-a-half year's work," Mason said. "It's been apparent to me for some time that the Tories take care of their own, and they use taxpayers' money to do it."

Love's \$200,000 contract, meanwhile, seemed to contain nothing out of the ordinary. The salary and benefits for Love and Smith are already released publicly in annual government reports, leading Taft to wonder why the government was being so stubbornly secretive about it.

"It was probably bad tactics because it just fuels the story. Politically, (Stelmach) would have been smarter just to make it public," the Liberal leader said.

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