



Que. still takes most of July 1st budget

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OTTAWA -- Prime Minister Paul Martin's Canada includes a Quebec that continues to dominate funding for July 1st celebrations.

According to documents obtained through the Access to Information Act, this year's budget for Celebrate Canada reveals that the Liberal government continued its practice of directing the majority of government funding to Quebec when it comes to funding for events revolving around Canada Day.

The budget shows that about 70 per cent of the \$7.25-million Celebrate Canada budget was directed to Quebec, even though Canada Day is better known as "moving day" than a national celebration in that province.

Meanwhile, compared to Quebec's \$5-million, Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta received \$691,220, \$323,630 and \$234,835, respectively.

Defeated heritage minister Helene Scherrer, who is now principal secretary in the Prime Minister's Office, approved the unbalanced funding scheme just as the Liberal government became immersed in the sponsorship scandal.

In February, a damning auditor-general audit exposed a shady \$250-million sponsorship program which saw most of the government money from the program being funnelled to Quebec advertising firms to sponsor Quebec events.

Scherrer, who was the first MP to publicly call on former prime minister Jean Chretien to step down, has been replaced in cabinet by another Quebec cabinet minister -- Heritage Minister Liza Frulla.

Canadian Heritage failed Friday to respond to questions about the Celebrate Canada budget. In the past, heritage officials have said Quebec dominates the funding because the Quebec government refuses to fund Canada Day celebrations.

The program provides funding for four events during the Canada Day period, with some of the money also going toward St-Jean-Baptiste celebrations on June 24, the province's nationalist holiday one week before Canada Day.

Canada Day has always taken a back seat in Quebec to the Fete nationale, which occurs exactly a week earlier. July 1 is better known as moving day with about 500,000 changes of address across the province between mid-June and mid-July.

An April memo to Scherrer, obtained by the Ottawa Citizen, recognizes that other provinces are underfunded in the program and a "one-time increase" of 40 per cent was being recommended.

In particular, the memo notes that Alberta "has been operating with a disproportionately low allocation" and its base operating level was raised to the level of other Prairie provinces before the 40 per cent jump was applied.

"The Celebrate Canada Committee for Ontario had also been financially limited in relation to the large population they serve. This funding model reflects an additional \$20,000 on top of their 40 per cent increase to operating budget," the memo said.

As well, it says Quebec's total of \$5 million was being capped and would not enjoy the 40 per cent increase "as they have a significantly higher budget than the other(s)."

But Ontario's share, which is less than 10 per cent of the program's budget even though it represents 40 per cent of the country's population, is actually less money than it received two years ago when it claimed \$853,900 in 2002.

But the overall budget for Celebrate Canada has been cut from \$8.3 million, which is the amount it enjoyed in 2002.

The Atlantic provinces claimed \$541,000 of the Canada Day pot while Manitoba and Saskatchewan each received about \$150,000 for this year.

In the past, some of the funding to the other provinces was also used for St- Jean-Baptiste celebrations for the francophones outside of Quebec. The days funded by Celebrate Canada include Canada Day, St-Jean-Baptiste Day, Canadian Multiculturalism Day (June 27) and National Aboriginal Day (June 21).

Each province forms a Celebrate Canada committee to distribute funding from the federal program.

As in the past, the budget breakdown, obtained by Ottawa researcher Ken Rubin, includes a footnote pointing out that the Quebec committee "always requests an advance of \$2 million for administration and booking facilities."

(OTTAWA CITIZEN)

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