

CANADA

Private lawyers earn \$12 million from Ontario

Favouritism denied as attorney-general's former firm, wife's firm near top of list

BY SHANNON KARI

TORONTO • The former law firm of Ontario Attorney General Michael Bryant and the firm where his wife is employed were among the highest paid private firms retained by the ministry last year.

McCarthy Tétrault, where Mr. Bryant was a lawyer before entering politics, was paid \$487,000 for its services, the ministry's fourth highest legal bill. The attorney general's wife, Susan Abramovitch, is a partner at Goodman and Carr, which billed \$442,000, the sixth highest total.

Payments by the Ministry of the Attorney General to private lawyers in the last fiscal year added up to at least \$12 million and are listed in the "other payments" section of the public accounts. Nearly 30 per cent of this figure went to five major Toronto law firms.

More than 60 lawyers, including 15 from McCarthy Tétrault, were among the individuals who made political contributions to Mr. Bryant's midtown Toronto constituency association in 2004.

The donations are relatively small, since Elections Ontario does not permit annual contributions above \$1,120, but they were made by a virtual who's who of Toronto's top corporate lawyers.

A ministry spokesman said the attorney general has "no personal involvement" in the selection of McCarthy Tétrault or Goodman and Carr when the firms act for the province. "The ministry categorically rejects any suggestion that favouritism of any kind plays a role in our decisions on legal retentions," said spokesman Brendan Crawley.

The total amount paid to private lawyers by the ministry is not possible to determine because only individual accounts of more than \$50,000 annually are listed. Total payments for accounts under \$50,000 by the

ministry were \$49 million last year, although it is not known what percentage of this figure was made up of legal costs.

The attorney general is not the only government ministry to incur outside legal bills. The Ministry of Energy, for example, paid Osler Hoskin Hartcourt \$852,000 in 2004. The Ministry of Health paid more than \$520,000 to Hicks Morley, a Toronto-based firm.

The millions of dollars spent on private law firms by the government comes despite the fact the Ministry of the Attorney General is one of the largest and most experienced legal entities in the country. More than 1,000 lawyers employed by the ministry earned in excess of \$100,000 each in 2004, according to information released under the province's Public Sector Salary Disclosure Act.

The top billing firm according to the province's 2004-2005 public accounts, was Goodmans, which billed \$1.35 million.

Outside law firms are retained if the ministry has a conflict of interest, there is a requirement for specialized expertise or if it is more cost effective, Mr. Crawley explained. "The ministry has hired outside law firms in such circumstances, both large and small, and has done so for decades," said Mr. Crawley.

In opposition however, Mr. Bryant was critical of the Conservative government when it retained an outside lawyer to defend a lawsuit filed by the former chief executive of Hydro One.

During an October 2002 debate in the provincial legislature, he accused then-energy minister John Baird of refusing to disclose how much this would cost the public.

"I'm asking you how many red cents have been expended on outside counsel in order to defend this action, and your answer is that you won't tell me. Is that right?" asked Mr. Bryant.

Mad-as-hell Canadians berate PM over gas prices

'You are ... a waste of hair and skin,' wrote angry citizen

BY DEAN BEEBY

As gasoline prices spiked in late summer, so did the anger of average Canadians — and hundreds of them tried to contact Prime Minister Paul Martin to blast him personally.

Telephone records, letters, petitions and e-mails sent to the prime minister, obtained under the Access to Information Act, show a cranky citizenry convinced that oil companies have been gouging.

"Some criminals wear masks and rob the local Mac's Milk. Other criminals wear Armani suits and rob us blind for essential commodities such as oil," said one correspondent, echoing a widely shared sentiment.

The writers, whose names have been blacked out to protect their privacy, come from all regions of Canada, but are by no means a cross-section of the population. Instead, they're mostly on the economic fringes: retirees, students, hard-pressed families, rural residents, all of whom say they're struggling to cope with soaring gas prices. Many say they're fearful of winter, and the price they'll be paying to stay warm.

"I'm so discouraged, I could cry sometimes from feeling so taken advantage of, so unheard, so vulnerable," says one of 1,450 messages received in August and September on gas prices.

Roughly half the correspondents wanted Mr. Martin to impose price controls, creating a made-in-Canada price reflecting the fact the country is an oil exporter. Most of the rest wanted him to roll back taxes on gas. Many of the letters are articulate and thoughtful.

Many are addressed to

"Paul," though at least one calls him "Mr. Dithers." Some are aggressively disrespectful.

"If you want to get re-elected you better do something to get in touch with real Canadians and I don't mean kissing babies; if I was one I would throw up all over you!" reads one e-mail.

Says another: "You are in my mind a waste of hair and skin."

Others tried overt threats to get the prime minister to act.

"If I do not receive any notice of what you are willing to do to help out your country by Aug. 20, 2005, I will begin a hunger strike." No word if the threat was ever carried out.

One person thought Mr. Martin should experience the cold first-hand. "If I had my way, I would cut off the power and fuel to 24 Sussex Drive."

Still others used a softer approach, attempting to tug at Mr. Martin's heartstrings, such as the mother who said she might have to enter the workforce to help her family cope.

Even a few children contacted Mr. Martin, including one 11-year-old from Quebec who drew a series of poignant pictures showing how her mother had little food money left over after paying for gas.

Mr. Martin receives about a million pieces of correspondence each year, and can read very few of these missives.

"He does have a chance to read some, and is briefed regularly on the general content and trends of correspondence coming into the Prime Minister's Office," said spokesman Marc Roy.

Most of the letters and e-mails received a stock response — "Please be assured that the statements you made have been carefully reviewed" — and many were forwarded to Industry Minister David Emerson's office, which is responsible for preventing price fixing.

THE CANADIAN PRESS



'It's very treacherous out there in the dating world ... so this is a warning system for women,' says Toronto native Tasha Joseph, who created the web site.

Scorned women expose old flames' infidelities online

Website unmask alleged cheats from around the world, writes MISTY HARRIS.

Time heals all wounds. But while you're waiting, revenge makes one hell of a Band-Aid.

That seems to be the motto of hundreds of scorned women exposing their former partners' cheating ways on the Internet for all to see. DontDateHimGirl.com, masterminded by Toronto native Tasha Joseph, attracts an average 200,000 hits a day by unmasking alleged philanderers from around the world.

After just a few months in operation, the site features profiles of 600 men — many of them Canadian — and has another 1,000 under review. Entries include the guy's full name, physical description, history of purported cheating and, in many cases, a recent photograph.

"You know how the FBI has its Most Wanted list?" says Ms. Joseph, now working as a publicist in Miami. "We thought it would be great if you could do that for cheating men. This would be the Most Hated Cheaters list."

If the site's database is any indication, Alberta boys love behaving badly. Edmonton leads the country in male profiles on DontDateHimGirl, followed by Calgary and a number of rural towns throughout the province. Men from Ontario and Quebec are also featured on the site.

"I really do view (the site) as a public service to women," says Ms. Joseph, a self-described two-time victim of infidelity. "It's very treacherous out there



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in the dating world ... so this is a warning system for women who have been cheated on to warn other women about the guys who've done the cheating."

Traffic on DontDateHimGirl has grown exponentially in the last month alone, with a one-day record of 1,236,000 visitors after the site was featured on NBC TV's *Today Show*. Ms. Joseph says she receives about 100 new submissions a day, but doesn't post them until she speaks with the women.

She says she also tries to contact the alleged cheaters, offering them a chance to tell their side of the story.

"Most of them say that the woman who posted (the profile) is crazy, that something is wrong with her, that they're saints," she says. "But out of the 600 guys on the site, maybe 15 or 20 have used the rebuttal service."

Feminist activist Veronica Arreola, director of the Women in Science and Engineering program at the University of Chicago, likens the site to scrawling a man's name on a bathroom door in high school. Although in favour of women looking out for each other, she isn't convinced posting on sites of this kind is the way to do it.

"I think the energy used for anger would be best served at ensuring that women are protected against STDs the old fashioned way — sex ed, condoms, and preventative medicines such as the new cervical cancer vaccine," Ms. Arreola says.

The men profiled on the site would probably agree. At present, a number of them are attempting to launch a class-action lawsuit against the site.

But Ms. Joseph, who created the online database with legal counsel, believes she is protected by U.S. law.

According to a privacy lawyer from Halifax, that may not be the case in Canada.

"If the person's reputation is in Canada, and they are in Canada, and likely the person who posted the information is in Canada, there's more than enough connection for Canadian defamation law to apply," says David T.S. Fraser, chairman of the Privacy Practice Group at McInnes Cooper. But he hastens to add the statements aren't considered defamatory if they're true.

"If you're a slug," says Mr. Fraser, "it's only appropriate people know you're a slug."

NATIONAL Defence to study reactions to crises

The Defence Department has launched a \$200,000 study to find out how people will respond to a biological or radiological attack so emergency workers can better plan how to manage such situations. While there have been many academic laboratory studies on the effects of emotion on behaviour, there is virtually no research involving realistic crisis situations, says David Mandel, the project's lead scientist. The study will look at past incidents, such as the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the U.S. and even New Orleans' response to Hurricane Katrina that could help identify psycho-social effects.

Wildlife-vehicle collisions on rise

When it comes to wildlife and motor vehicle accidents, November is the cruellest month. Swept away by the lure of mating season, deer, elk and moose blunder across highways and roads. The resulting accidents not only kill and injure people, they cause millions of dollars worth of accident claims and leave thousands of wild animals dead every year. And the carnage is getting worse with more motorists on the roads and as new highways and communities spread into rural areas. Ontario and B.C. are dealing with the problem by installing fencing along major highways and clearing brush from roads to improve visibility. Drivers are also being encouraged to slow down, wear their seatbelts and to not assume an animal on a road or highway will get out of the way.

Midwives warn of care crisis

Midwives must be regulated and funded across Canada to address a looming maternity care crisis, the Canadian Association of Midwives says. The association wants the federal government to take the lead role in promoting uniform, national access. Advocates point to a dramatic drop in the number of family doctors providing maternity care through a woman's entire pregnancy. Only 18 per cent of family physicians in Ontario offer maternity care, down from 40 per cent just a few years ago. Midwives are picking up the slack, delivering upwards of 10,000 babies every year.

ONTARIO Toronto officers earn \$75,000-plus

More than half of the uniformed officers in the Toronto police force earned at least \$75,000 last year, despite claims by its union that its members are poorly compensated and paid less than colleagues across the country. The Toronto Police Association is locked in a bitter contract dispute with the police services board, which has included a work-to-rule campaign and a high-profile rally at city hall last week by about 2,000 officers. The contract dispute is largely over wages and the drug-benefit plan for officers.

Minister sorry for 'terrorist' comment

Health Minister George Smitherman has apologized for calling some members of the Ontario Association of Optometrists "terrorists." Association president Shirley Ha wrote a letter to members stating Mr. Smitherman said optometrists are "a bunch of terrorists, and I don't negotiate with terrorists." Spokesman David Spencer said that Mr. Smitherman regrets "his poor choice of words" and said the comments were made in response to some optometrists suggesting they might withdraw services because of fee concerns.

THE MONTREAL GAZETTE

Letter carrier arrested for stockpiling at least 75,000 pieces of mail

MONTREAL • A Canada Post employee in Montreal caught hoarding thousands of letters has been suspended indefinitely.

Arrested Tuesday following a joint investigation between Canada Post and Montreal police, the man is to appear in court early this week.

"Appropriate action will be taken," Canada Post spokeswoman Louise Roy said.

The letter carrier had accu-

mulated at least 75,000 pieces of mail over five years.

"It's huge. We've never seen that," Ms. Roy said. "It's very unfortunate."

Police initially found about 10,000 letters, packages, parcels and envelopes stashed in the man's Montreal apartment.

"His ex-wife called us the next day saying more is hidden (at a cottage) in St. Felix de Valois," Ms. Roy added.

Stealing and opening other people's mail is a crime punishable by a maximum sentence of life in prison.

"He has been suspended until we know what disciplinary measure to take," Ms. Roy said.

A criminal record, however, bars employment at the Crown corporation, Ms. Roy said.

The letter carrier was hired in 1999. Residents of the Park Extension neighbourhood have

complained for years about not getting their mail.

The corporation has now launched an investigation to determine what went wrong and "why didn't we see the problem earlier," Ms. Roy said.

The stash of mail is to be delivered next week, after the letter carrier makes his court appearance, Ms. Roy said.