

Editorial ? ?Sunshine List?: due for an update?

Twenty years ago, when the government of Premier Mike Harris was in its first year in office, it introduced The Public Sector Salary Disclosure Act, 1996, a measure designed to acquaint the public with the salaries of top-level public servants.

At that time, and ever since, the cutoff point was an income of \$100,000 ? an amount few Ontarians of the day earned. When published in the spring of 1997, the List had fewer than 5,000 names.

Now, 20 years later, the list has grown to more than 115,000 names and would be a lot longer were it not for the fact that it no longer includes all Crown agencies' employees, Hydro One's having been removed on grounds it is in the process of being privatized. Interestingly, it appears that few governments have shown interest in following Ontario's lead ? not even the Stephen Harper Conservatives in their nearly 10 years in office.

According to Wikipedia, the only other province with a Sunshine List is Alberta, which first started publishing one only in 2014, following the 2012 election of former premier Alison Redford. There, introduction of the list followed public debate about the severance awarded to the premier's former chief of staff.

The Alberta list must be a lot shorter than Ontario's, since it includes only deputy ministers, senior officials, political staff appointed under the Executive Assistant Order and employees defined under the Public Service Act who work for the offices of ministers and associate ministers.

Interestingly, most of the media attention this time has been given to employees who won't be on next year's list, since the highest-paid public employee was former Ontario Power Generation chief executive Tom Mitchell, who stepped down in August, having raked in more than \$1.5-million, and four of the top 10 earners were executives hired for last year's Pan American Games in Toronto.

In addition to the positions examined in Alberta, the Ontario list includes those employed by municipalities and their services, universities, school boards, hospitals and public health agencies, colleges, most Crown agencies, the judiciary and the Legislative Assembly.

One thing the Ontario list hasn't yet accomplished is to track those who have earned at least \$100,000 by working for more than one public agency.

An example is the case of Warren Maycock, who last year made less than \$100,000 in each of three positions ? as Warden of Dufferin, Deputy Mayor of Orangeville and a teacher employed by the Upper Grand District School Board.

As we see it, the big question to be addressed by the current government is whether the Sunshine List should be updated. One thing to be considered is whether \$100,000 is still an appropriate cutoff point. We don't know, but suspect, that close to 5,000 of the 115,000 public servants on the latest list earned more than \$200,000.

However, one thing for sure is that inflation over the last 20 years has been sufficient to make a salary of \$138,000 the equivalent of \$100,000 in 1996 dollars. That being the case, a good argument could be made to raise the cutoff point to \$140,000 or \$150,000. Additionally, we would like to see the single list that's far too long to be manually searched replaced by multiple lists ? one for provincial government employees and others for municipal workers and the other public sectors (particularly health, education and public protection).

As matters stand, we doubt that anyone in this province of 13 million residents will spend the many hours needed to determine whether a particular public servant is on such an incredibly long list.