

Fees, charges, red tape tangle us all

by MARK PAVILONS

It's been suggested that taxpayers shouldn't have to wait in line or on hold simply to untangle bureaucratic red tape.

And we shouldn't have to pay for it, either.

While technology has opened up avenues to contact various officials and agencies, I think there's an unseen noodle-like network where individual requests go to die.

The Province, through its Protect Ontario by Cutting Red Tape Act, 2025, vowed to cut red tape to make Ontario the most competitive place in the G7 to invest, create jobs and do business.

The legislation was part of the 2025 'Red Tape Reduction Package' that contains over 50 'common-sense changes to improve services, keep costs down and protect Ontario's economy.

'In the face of the ongoing threat of U.S. tariffs, our government is taking action to protect Ontario so we can keep workers on the job, attract new investment and make life easier and more affordable for Ontario families,' said Andrea Khanjin, Minister of Red Tape Reduction. 'We're protecting Ontario by cutting needless red tape, keeping costs down, improving service delivery, and creating the right conditions for people and businesses to succeed.'

I'm not sure how you keep costs down and improve service delivery at the same time.

A lot of this sounds like backtracking or giving people a retroactive break. You don't have to reimburse the public if you were fair to begin with.

The civil service, it's been said, is like a fortress made of papers, forms and red tape.

And, more and more, we're hearing people say they cannot help us because 'it's above their pay grade.' That's just a cop-out.

I get calls all the time from people asking for things outside my area of expertise. And yet, I will try my best to get an answer or direct them to the best source. Why wouldn't I spend an extra five or 10 minutes trying to help?

Fees, fines and charges are dwindling our resources. I recently heard that missed mortgage payments have quadrupled. Toronto issued \$2 million in parking fines in recent weeks. The taxpayers' well is running dry.

The writing is not only on the wall, it's as plain as day. We're all stretched, and some of these added fees may be the straws breaking camels' backs.

We have to keep an eye on our accounts, lest we be overcharged. BMO paid back almost \$4 million because it overcharged customers and failed to tell them about certain fees.

Many retailers are guilty of 'dip pricing' - basically, the price you see is not the price you pay after adding on all the 'extras.'

Apparently, there's a lot of that going around.

I also love government websites that have a pop-up asking if our questions were answered. Who goes through the thousands of negative responses to this? Some bot?

A recent trip to the airport to drop off my daughter revealed more fees and charges. A whopping \$42 for parking for two hours. There was also GST tacked on??Why are we paying tax on an arbitrary charge for self-service?arking on taxpayer-owned land?

When glancing at my daughter's plane ticket, I?noticed a fee for using her credit card to pay for the ticket(!), and an airport improvement fee. I can only imagine the revenue this generates if each and every person who goes through Pearson pays it every day. Just what kind of improvements are we paying for that the feds won't?

When looking at my other daughter's college tuition, there are fees for such things as use of the athletic centre. It's not optional but mandatory, regardless of whether you ever step foot in the place.

I?recently had an issue with CBSA and some ransacked packages. It took me more than an hour searching for a way to contact them via email, and nothing. A note from Canada Post said CBSA?doesn't answer to anyone, and that they are virtually ?untouchable.? Okay, Canada Post comments may be a bit subjective, but wow.

For my treatments at Newmarket's Stronach Regional Cancer Centre, I?have to get a parking pass or dish out \$20 a day for the privilege of parking. While my treatments and medications are covered, there's still the gas and wear and tear on the car for all the travelling. When I went to the city, there was parking and TTC fares.

I?believe parking at hospitals for the critically ill, or those receiving life-saving treatment, should be either free or subsidized. I?don't think that's too much to ask.

Okay, I understand hospitals receive some much-needed revenue from this, but I think fairer rates should apply. I?paid \$28 at Sunnybrook during a two-hour visit.

My wife and I, and my in-laws, all had to deal with recent appliance failures and replacements. We opted for the ?extended warranty? ? a couple of hundred dollars of ?insurance.?

We have this mindset that this ?charge??is money well spent, but I'm not sure. It's limited, and typically, nothing should fail on a new appliance within the first two years. However, we heard from both a repairman and a salesman that modern refrigerators last roughly six years today!

Most of us Boomers are familiar with our parents' almond or yellow washers, dryers and stoves ? some pushing 20 to 30 years of service!

What has changed?

Many of us have ongoing issues with our internet or cable service providers, waiting on hold for someone to answer. I tend to opt for the call-back feature, anxiously awaiting someone to reach out. For what we spend on our TV, internet and cell phones, you'd think the quality of service would be top-notch.

As grocery and gas prices remain at all-time highs, average taxpayers are finding it harder to get ahead. Getting nickled and dimed by endless service charges and fees only compounds the plight of the ?common man.?

And by the way, someone is making a lot of money ever since the penny was discontinued.

Just saying.