

Sunshine List should be scrapped

EDITORIAL

Well, ladies and gentlemen, it's back.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to bring governments across the globe to its knees, the Ontario government, which itself has been impacted substantially by an outbreak of the virus on these shores, dedicated some amount of resources to releasing the 2019 Sunshine List in late March.

As some of our readers will no doubt recall, we wrote a piece following the rollout of last year's list, calling on the Province to scrap what has become an outdated practice. Released every year at the beginning of spring, the Sunshine List highlights public sector employees across Ontario who earn \$100,000 or more annually. Introduced by the Mike Harris-led Conservative government in 1996, the list was, apparently, designed to provide accountability on behalf of public employees and transparency to the taxpayer.

While the Sunshine List may have accomplished that more than two decades ago, today it serves as nothing more than a publicity stunt that feeds into one of the most dangerous personality traits a human being possesses ? jealousy.

All the list has ever really accomplished is embarrassing those whose names are inscribed within its pages year after year. At its very core, the Sunshine List is an incredible invasion of privacy. It always has been, and will remain one until the day it is cancelled.

It seems absurd that, with resources stretched so thin at the government level right now, that any time at all would be set aside to deal with compiling the information necessary to publish the list. Perhaps even more absurd was the decision to actually release it at a time when thousands upon thousands of people are losing their jobs. There will likely be more envious eyes than ever before judging those who made the list. For a second, remember they are community members just like us. Neighbours. Friends.

While there are those, undoubtedly, who look forward to the Sunshine List's publication each year, one has to ask the question ? why? What exactly does the Sunshine List accomplish? Knowing how much money an individual at Town Hall makes has absolutely no bearing on any of our lives. It may, however, have a significant bearing on theirs. Something that was, apparently, designed to improve accountability and, presumably, productivity, today likely has the complete opposite effect.

Disagree? Then answer us this. How many of you would be happy to have your name and earnings plastered in newspapers and around social media for all to see, simply because you earn a good living? Not many, we would assume.

And emphasis should be placed on that last point. A good living. Because that's what \$100,000 a year is now.

Back in 1996, the very first Sunshine List contained 4,501 names. The recently released 2020 Sunshine List, which includes data for earnings in 2019, boasted a mammoth 166,977 individual entries. That's approximately a 3,600 percent increase on the number of people included in that very first list, and a 10 percent rise from last year's total. Extraordinarily, despite inflation rising by around 60 percent since 1996, the cut off point for the Sunshine List remains the same.

For argument's sake, \$100,000 from 1996, when the list was first released, would be worth \$164,868 today. Looking at some other avenues, the average price of a home in Toronto was approximately \$198,150 back in 1996. Today, that average has ballooned to an eye watering \$843,637. Grocery prices have increased dramatically, as has the price to purchase a new car. You'd be hard pressed to find anything that doesn't cost substantially more today than it did 24 years ago.

So, with everything else on the uppy up, why has the Sunshine List remained at that \$100,000 threshold? That question has yet to be answered at Queen's Park.

More than 200 Dufferin County and Caledon residents suffered the ignominy of having their position and earnings called into question last week. As we said last year, and will continue to preach, likely, for years to come - the practice is wrong and should be halted immediately.