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Ouellet's unexplained 'expenses' are an important part of a much larger outrage

A Calgary lawyer I know distributes a bumper sticker. It depicts Jean Chretien behind bars, accompanied by the words "We can only hope."

It refers to the "sponsorship scandal," a.k.a. "adscam."

Based on the reports of the Auditor General and the Public Accounts Committee, it's clear that up to \$100 million was stolen from the public treasury. Not just wasted. Stolen.

To find out more about it, I asked an opposition member of the Public Accounts Committee to describe in a nutshell how Adscam worked.

Picture an hourglass, he replied.

In the upper half you had the political bosses--Jean Chretien, Alfonso Gagliano, Don Boudria, Denis Coderre, David Dingwall and Jean Pelletier.

Unbeknownst to Parliament they ran a political slush fund of a quarter-billion dollars, ostensibly to cultivate goodwill for the federal government in Quebec.

They quietly shoveled this money over six years to people in the lower half of the hourglass, the latter being a half-dozen Liberal-friendly private advertising agencies in Quebec.

These people dispensed it for public projects or to place advertisements, mostly in Quebec. Various crown corporation bosses were involved as well--Andre Ouellet at Canada Post (who re-

signed in disgrace last month) and Marc LeFrancois (fired from VIA Rail last winter).

Some of the money went to legal (if not very useful) public purposes. But about \$100 million went out to known individuals for no apparent reason at all.

The contact man in the middle of the hourglass was civil servant Chuck Guite.

Guite came into the project as a fourth-tier bureaucrat, yet he reported directly to the cabinet, and also dealt personally with the advertising agencies. His stated policy was to keep few records.

Question. Did Chretien involve himself personally in sponsorship decisions?

Answer. Yes. In fact he was warned by the head of the civil service in 1997 that because he himself was approving detailed sponsorship funding decisions, he was taking personal responsibility.

Question. Were the political bosses up above steering funds to the Liberal Party?

Answer. Perhaps a little. However, the Liberal Party did not get anything close to \$100 million.

Question. So who did?

Answer. We don't know. The RCMP are investigating. But then the RCMP commissioner now takes orders directly from the federal cabinet.

This is what so infuriates my lawyer friend with the bumper

stickers. After the Watergate cover-up, he points out, the Americans put their Attorney General in jail for a crime far less significant than Adscam. In his view, that's what makes America a great nation.

Canada being Canada, he fears that Adscam will bog down in politically scripted inquiries and lackluster police investigations.

We must not let this happen! Canadians must demand honest, accountable and constitutional government.

Ten thousand Canadians have already gone on line to www.smartnup.ca and sent a prepared e-mail letter to cabinet minister John McCallum.

It asks him to make Andre Ouellet account for his \$2 million undocumented expense claim at Canada Post. McCallum has said he isn't going to do anything about it.

McCallum has not yet replied to those ten thousand Canadians. If you'd like to increase the heat, go on-line and send the letter to McCallum.

- Link Byfield

Link Byfield is chairman of the Edmonton-based Citizens Centre for Freedom and Democracy.

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