

Q & A WITH GARNET GARVEN AND
ADRIENNE BATRA

In Manitoba, today we are dealing with an issue regarding Hydra House, which deals with the alleged misappropriation of \$1 million of the taxpayers' money and questions arise whether the government knew about it or should have known about it at an earlier time.

Right now there is debate going on about the public accounts committee, which will investigate the Hydra House scandal. The debate is regarding whether public servants should be called on to testify, to let their knowledge be known.

Of course, we have seen with the sponsorship scandal, there seems to be a greater awareness about the public accounts process, and those that can testify before it. In Manitoba this would be somewhat more unusual, to have public servants testify regarding their knowledge of a particular program within government. But certainly on a base level when you talk to individuals in Manitoba, I think most Manitobans say: "whatever it takes to get the answers." But you've alluded to the fact that we don't have whistleblower legislation in Manitoba.

How do you think the calling on of current public servants to testify on matters that they may have been involved with, in programs, if that is a positive thing for democracy in general?

Adrienne Batra: Well, that's a very good question, Kelvin. I did speak of whistleblower legislation. I think it is important to protect our civil servants in areas like this. The federal sponsorship scandal, when that blew—that committee, the public accounts committee, organised very quickly. It's not the same in Manitoba; where there is a much more arduous process in order to get the public accounts committee to meet. One is the government House leader, is the essential decider whether or not they meet. So, I believe that the public accounts committee should be at the call of the chair, which is, interestingly enough, chaired by the opposition. It's in the better interests of the opposition to have the public accounts committee to meet, as opposed to the government, which is understandable. But having civil servants give testimony, I think, is important, and the reason why I say that is for the simple fact that they are men and women that are looking at the numbers on a daily basis. The Minister, although I would never say that he or she is not responsible, can only give the information that he or she is given by the civil service. And so I think it is important that the Deputy Minister at

the time, and the senior civil servants that were involved in the Hydra House process from the outset—and I know they would go back to the Filmon days—I think it is beneficial to the public to have full disclosure as to what happened.

Garnet Garven: This notion is a fundamental point: it's the question of how it changes the historical nature of the public service and the issue of accountability, and certainly it's important to have public servants. There are lots of vehicles where information comes out now, but this notion of transferred blame on public servants is a concern in terms of how it changes the balance between ministerial accountability and the role of the public service. I think it's important to get at truth issues here, but whether in fact this is transfer of blame now to the administrators, and away from decision-makers, is an issue that we're going to have to be careful of, because it can change the historical and fundamental nature of the public service, and what it means to have a professional public service. You could create a partisan model which we've strived for years not to adopt.

Just a comment on the gun control debate. I think it demonstrated in pretty vivid terms that the government who has introduced the legislation will focus only on benefits, and never admit the costs; whereas the opposition of course, focuses on the costs which aren't always just costs. Some of them are actual harms and I think that's important: that we should talk about not only cost-benefit, but costs and benefits and harms.

But my question is really for Adrienne. Our government frequently says, "get out and vote, get out and vote." But that is a once in four years or so activity, and equivalent to people who go to church to be hatched, matched, and dispatched. There is no appetite created for political or civic involvement. I was surprised you didn't comment on the recent American election, where there was no end of referenda questions for people to consider. And to use referenda to actually shape their society through spending decisions and legislative initiatives, and...

Adrienne Batra: I was just waiting for a smart question from the floor about that. I didn't bring up the American experience, because that in and of itself can be a very divisive issue, but that's an excellent point.

There were 11 states in the U.S. that just in the last week had referenda on a variety of issues, one of course is the issue of gay marriage, and those particular 11 voted against it to maintain the traditional definition of marriage. But I think that the point is, that it brings to the forefront

the fact that citizens can make a decision, and can put a very important, and albeit divisive issue on a ballot and make a difference.

In Manitoba, we've seen the different communities that don't want to see the expansion of gaming—they, too, have put issues on a ballot in a separate referendum, other than what happens in an election, and they voted against it, and some have voted in favour of it.

In Sweden, they have referenda—that is, citizens can put a question on the ballot. They've voted almost 86 times to increase their taxes in Sweden. So obviously, we don't want to that in Canada. But the point is, that regardless of the issue, divisive or not, agree or disagree, it's important that we give citizens the tools to be able to put something out there, and to make their voices heard.

To your other point regarding apathy, and why we don't have people coming out and voting, I don't think that people really and truly believe that putting an X beside someone's name, or a political party's name, necessarily reflects everything that they truly and fundamentally believe in, and that's why I think things like referenda are so very important.

First, a quick comment to Adrienne. You may remember that almost 90 years ago in Manitoba, there was a Liberal government that brought a law in to provide for citizen-initiated referenda. That law was eventually ruled unconstitutional.

My question is to Garnet. This is the issue: you put innovation, entrepreneurship, risk-taking as one of the profiles of the new public servant. In my experience, when I was at the federal level, that's something that you have to be very aware of. It has to be nurtured. It's actually very, very difficult within a civil service to encourage entrepreneurship, and risk-taking, and innovation, because the civil service tends to be conservative and rigid in many respects.

Garnet Garven: I think you're right, and that's the challenge that we have. It really was the more substantive framework that Professor Schwartz was talking about: a decision process; a way in which to make better choices and better decisions.

But I think it's also not helpful to think that analysis is not being done in government in all sectors. The benefit-cost (and that's the right ratio: benefit-cost, not cost-benefit) on these issues is being done extensively. Those who have been involved in Cabinet hear the details and the studies that go on. You may not like their analysis, you may think that more needs to be done here, but there are comprehensive reviews being done.

The question comes down to: how do we make the political decisions and choices? I think we have to get better at it, and I think the values

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framework can help people, and also political decision-makers, make better choices.