

Lawrence of Urbania arrives at the patronage well...by David Russell

by Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Thursday, August 04, 2005

<http://politicsrespun.org/2005/08/lawrence-of-urbania-arrives-at-the-patronage-well/>

In the right light it shimmers, its red velvet chamber casting a starry mirage in the eyes of yearning pork-barrel feeders. A shiny black steed approaches from the west, its triumphant occupant alone in the back (for of course he has a driver), his Fedora low across the brow with only the occasional nod to passersby he hopes soon will come to see him as important as he sees himself. He glides to a halt on Parliament Hill, welcomed with open arms by He who need only a whim to fill vacancies in the vaunted upper chamber: "Hello Larry!"

Dear God. Just what we needed.

As if he needed anything else to reduce his credibility, Prime Minister Martin [announced his newest slate of inductees](#) to that granddaddy of political patronage, the Canadian Senate. At the top of the list, Vancouver's own departing mayor, Larry Campbell.

That's right, the same Larry Campbell who nigh but a month ago announced that politics just wasn't for him. Among his reasons for not seeking re-election, despite an inexplicable approval rating in the seventy percent range, were his distaste for partisan politics, his frustration at the glacial pace of public policy initiatives and his growing impatience for meetings, meetings and more meetings.

Uhm, Your Worship? Has anyone explained just what you'll be doing in the Senate on those rare occasions you're expected to show up and do the people's work? It generally has to do with partisan politics, reviewing glacial-paced public policy initiatives and meetings upon meetings. But at least you get a pay raise, free travel, nearly limitless hooky days and taxpayer-funded haircuts. And hey, you don't even have to bother getting elected.

Which, of course, is where Martin's credibility takes a beating on his most recent appointments. To be sure, he did appoint a couple of former Tories to give the impression these were not all plum pudding appointments for political friends. Ironically, if there has to be a federal senate - a questionable premise at best - appointee and former Tory Hugh Segal is likely the most qualified of the bunch to bring some expertise in federal governance to the house of sober second thought, though certainly Liberal Dennis Dawson brings MP experience. Oh, and he's from Quebec; let's not forget that.

For all Martin's talk of abolishing cronyism, appointing people based on merit and changing the way business is done in Ottawa, senate appointments are the most glaring examples of same old, same old.

Traditionalists love to argue the constitution does not permit elected senators, a notion that is categorically untrue. For if senate appointments are the Prime Minister's prerogative, he could simply choose to appoint senators elected by the people: no constitutional amendment required. At the very least, if he lacks the power to rid us this revenue-sucking beast, Martin could open the appointment process in a

manner that would allow greater scrutiny of those we're inviting into the upper house. Parliamentary committees could examine and recommend candidates based on criteria set by elected representatives. Even if the final say remained with the PMO, elected officials could at least narrow the field to a screened group of candidates who would best do the job.

But that, of course, requires a Prime Minister confident enough in his own leadership not to need to clutch desperately at whatever vestiges of power he can. Is Larry popular in Vancouver? Yep. Could that help the PM's electoral fortunes there? Maybe. Good enough.

For Da Vinci fans, at least it looks like we'll have teleplay fodder for years to come: when Da Vinci's City Hall finally runs its course, as Da Vinci's Inquest did after seven years, you'll know what you'll be watching next.

For the rest of us, we'll be paying for Larry's new job for years to come.