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LOCAL BUSINESS

Did you catch the semi-annual report from federal auditor-general Denis Desautels? It's a real beauty for those who support government efforts to subsidize research and development through tax credits.



Under the Scientific Research and Experimental Development tax-credit system, 11,000 corporations claimed \$10 billion in expenses for a total credit of \$2 billion. What do you think the benefit was to the Canadian economy?



If your final answer was a paltry \$55 million, you lose. Your answer was correct, but as a taxpayer, you lose.



In words reminiscent of the HRDC internal audit, the auditor-general found when it came to awarding tax credits, guidelines were unclear, and regularly circumvented. Hundreds of millions of dollars in credits were handed out in secret, without adequate follows to determine if the money was spent appropriately.



That criticism spreads beyond the failed research-and development credits. In talking about the billion dollars spent on aboriginal education services, Desautels wrote: "It is not possible to determine how education funds are actually spent."

I couldn't stop smiling as I drove along Highway 1 towards the Port Mann Bridge, listening to a taxpayer-sponsored government radio commercial telling me the new B.C. budget has no megaprojects. I had to grin because while the ad was playing I was driving past the SkyTrain construction with its huge concrete pillars, huge rails and large equipment. Gee, looks like a megaproject to me, and if I'm not mistaken, those are our future tax dollars at work.

I say future tax dollars because the project is being done with borrowed money. Of course, no one knows how much borrowed money, which adds an element of financial suspense for the taxpayers.

Do you think the total amount of tax dollars being spent on lawyers to defend a variety of lawsuits for the government qualifies as a megaproject?

Speaking of your tax dollars at work, you know those billboards accompanying our highway construction that advertise that happy fact? Given that all the money for highway construction has been off-loaded to a separate agency and the money is borrowed, they actually aren't our tax dollars at work: they're our children's, because they're the ones who will ultimately pay the debt and interest costs on all that construction.

I'd be thrilled to have my tax dollars go to help families faced with the enormous financial and emotional challenges associated with trying to help their autistic children, but with with exception of a recently announced small-scale

