



# So you want to be a Canadian senator...

## Dear Answer Guy:

For some time now, I've been wondering how to become a Canadian senator. I've heard those guys make great money. Plus, they get to travel a lot, free of charge. As a long-haul trucker with more than a million kilometers under my belt, I feel I am specially qualified to sit on my arse for days on end. Can you help me? I want to be a winner.

Yours Truly,  
Alejandro Brucellosis

## Dear Alejandro:

Here are a few "dos" and "don'ts" to get you started.

The first thing you need to know about the Senate of Canada is that it is unelected, which means, by definition, it is unaccountable. This has an upside. For one thing, you don't have to worry about the fact that most people will think you're an idiot. In reality, you can pretty much say and do anything you like without fear of official reprisal.

If, for example, you believe that global warming is a fraud perpetrated on right-thinking Earthlings to distract them from completing their preparations for the invasion of mutant pod people from Zenon by way of the 12th dimension, then go right ahead and sing it from the rooftops. No one really cares.

If, on the other hand, you perceive that the sitting government's policies for penal reform are a might draconian and that scarce public resources would be better spent on a national system of early childhood education, you'd be wise to curb your tongue. That's because Canadian senators receive their appointments at the pleasure of the prime minister. And this one's a little particular on the whole law and order thing.

Apart from this, you should make a checklist to see if you possess the minimum qualifications.

Are you a citizen, aged 30 or more?

Do you own land worth at least \$4,000 in a province of Canada?

Do you live on that property, from whence you would be prepared to represent your "region" when your presence is not required for Senate business in the nation's capital of Ottawa? If not, can you pad a travel expense account without getting caught?

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These are all crucial assets and abilities to acquire when considering a career in the Canadian Senate, especially that last one. A cautionary tale will serve the point.

Consider the lamentable case of Senator Mike Duffy, a former broadcast journalist, and, until recently, Prime Minister Stephen Harper's BFF. Appointed to the Senate in 2009, Duffy spent some of his time at a shack in Prince Edward Island (the region the law says he represents in the Upper Chamber), but most of his time in Fat City, where his actual residence is. Only, though still allegedly, he billed his "costs", traveling to and from P.E.I., like a frequent flyer with a rotten homing instinct. The result: He had to pay back \$90,000 to the Senate's Board of Internal Economy. That's when the plot thickened.

Noticing that his pocket book was a little light (apparently a salary of \$130,000 a year doesn't go as far as one might think), he and his "friend" Nigel Wright worked out a deal whereby the latter would pay the former's expense tab, no questions asked. The problem was this is not the sort of thing a prime minister's chief of staff—which is what Wright was when he wrote the cheque—is supposed to do.

Mortified, he offered to resign. At first, Harper wouldn't hear of it. Then, under increasing public pressure, the PM relented and Wright was out, Duffy was consigned to sit as an Independent in the Senate wilderness, and the Official Opposition New Democrats were orgiastically demanding for the heads of everyone involved, forthwith.

The moral of the story, Alejandro, should be clear: In the Canadian Senate, it's not what you do, but what you can get away with, that counts.

That said, try not to kill anyone, declare war against your country or go bankrupt, as these are about the only circumstances that would automatically preclude you from becoming a senator. Well, that and, as previously mentioned, embarrassing or annoying the prime minister.

Take my advice, my friend, and you, too, can be a winner. Trust me. I know about these things. | ABM

The views expressed in this column are those of the author and not necessarily those of Atlantic Business Magazine. Feedback: dchafe@atlanticbusinessmagazine.com