

A Taxing Story

City for All Women Initiative (revised Dec 2010)

Cast:

Narrator –

Municipal Government -

Provincial Government –

Federal Government –

Woman Mona –

4 citizens to hold Social Safety Net:

Unemployed, Sick, Disabled and destitute, Homeless

Mayor Jim Watson

Room set up

Narrator and 3 levels of government will enter room and sit at table in front.

Mona will walk around the room sweeping throughout the skit.

Four citizens will sit in chairs in the middle of the room.

Props:

- *One long table at front of room for 4 to sit (Narrator, Fed, Prov and Mun), tent cards tell who they are. In front of federal is a piece of paper and pen that the province will sign.*
- *Four chairs in the centre, signs for the four people to wear around their neck and money they have tucked in their pocket, scarf under their seat.*
- *Net rolled up*
- *Three boxes that fit one inside the other. Largest box is gold, medium box is silver with CHST written on it, smallest box is brown.*
- *Skit text copy for each level of government and Mona.*
- *Municipal, Provincial and Federal government wear a sign.*
- *Play money.*
- *Signs of services placed inside the smallest, municipal box (index cards): employment and training, Ontario Works, child care, public health, social housing*
- *Signs: 50 cents, 42 cents, 8 cents (index cards)*

- *Baby doll, broom, apron, shoulder purse.*
- *Federal government dresses very rich and provincial government rich.*
- *6 Peach Scarves (CAWI symbol)*

Narrator carries in net rolled up. Federal government carries in large gold box with other boxes inside it, inside the municipal box are index cards with services, money scattered in the big box. Mona carries baby, broom and shoulder purse which contains money signs, play money, and 2 peach scarves.

Play Opens:

- *Seated in the centre of the room are 4 people wearing signs: Unemployed, sick, homeless and hunger, disabled and destitute*
- *Levels of government are outside the room, out of site*
- *Woman Mona comes walking in with her baby and broom in hand sweeping her way into the centre of the room. She continues to move around the room sweeping throughout the skit.*
- ***Narrator** enters right behind her carrying social safety net and takes a seat at the table.*

Narrator: We invite you to hear this story about Mona, (pointing to woman sweeping) and how the way our taxes are collected and distributed are affecting her life.

Narrator: To help tell the story, here come the three levels of government now.

Federal, then provincial, then municipal enter the room. Federal government carries a large gold box. All levels of government carry their skit text. They take their seats at the table next to the narrator.

Narrator: This story begins with the experience of the Great Depression in the 1930's when thousands of Canadians found themselves unemployed and in deep poverty.

(Each person with a sign stands up, and turns around one by one so that others can see what their sign says. then sits down again.)

People were unable to pull themselves out of unemployment and deep poverty, illnesses increases and inequalities grew. There was a realization that in order to change this, there needed to be a network of social programs. So in the 1940's and 50's, the Federal government created many social program in Canada and with it more social equality.

(With a big smile, Narrator hands Federal government the net in a bundle, the Federal government smile too, walks out and places bundle of net on the floor and proceeds to unfold it. Citizens are watching with great interest)

This collection of social programs became known as a SOCIAL SAFETY NET, because it would catch when they needed support in their lives. Medicare, ODSP, Social Housing, Public Health, Education for all, Affordable post-secondary education and more.

As the Narrator reads off the list of social programs, the Citizens stand up, turn around their signs and then turn around so everyone can see. They read: GAURANTEED INCOME, HEALTH, DIGNITY, HOME. They each turn around to show everyone, sit down and hold onto the corners of the net, so it is stretched above the ground.

Canadians paid into this system with their taxes, creating greater equality for everyone. Everyone contributed some money, everyone benefited.

(Citizens take money from their pockets and pass it to the federal government)

Cities became better places to live as everyone's basic needs were assured and there were greater opportunities for everyone to succeed.

(Federal government returns to her seat, nodding proudly as Narrator reads the following.)

In this way, the Federal government took an active role in the day to day lives of Canadians. The federal government delivered some programs themselves, but mostly passed on money to the provinces to deliver many of the social programs, *(federal government passes money to the province, province smiles and counts it)*

But the federal government put conditions on how the provinces spent federal dollars for social programs like public health, child care, housing, and education, so it was fair for people wherever they lived in Canada.

(Federal wags finger at provincial government, then points to a paper, requiring the Provincial government to sign. The Provincial government pretends to be signing with reluctance.)

But in 1993, things started to change with the pass of the Canadian Health and Social Transfers (CHST). This changed the way that the federal government distributes money to the provinces. It gave the provinces more freedom to spend the money as they wanted, but it also gave them less money. It was a smaller cheque, but now it was blank!

Federal Government: *(says to Provincial government)* **I've got an idea! You get less money but you get to do with it what you want!**

(Federal government pulls out the medium silver box with CHST written on it and passes it to province, placing money inside. The province accepts it gleefully)

Provincial Government: **Yes! Yes! We are now the masters of our own destiny. Finally we have the powers we need! No more you telling us "You must do this, or do that!"** *(Federal and provincial governments embrace)*

Federal government: *(says to audience putting her hand up to not let the province hear her secret, while province looks gleefully at her box)* **That means we, the federal government, get to keep more money! We can even give the people a few tax breaks to distract them. And we can give even bigger tax breaks to the rich and the private companies to keep them happy. They'll be so happy to have more money in their pockets; they won't notice they'll have to pay for things that used to be free!**

Narrator: **This was the first "download" – less federal money but greater powers for the province to decide how to spend the money. But it was not too long before the honeymoon was over.**

(Federal and provincial governments turn away from each other abruptly with arms folded in a huff.)

Provincial Government: **At last we have the powers we richly deserve, but we have less money from the federal government to spend! There must be a way out of this! What could we possibly do?** *(Ponders in deep thought)*

Aha! I have an idea! What if we were to download some of our responsibilities for health and social services onto our municipalities???
(Chuckles, pointing the municipality) – Hello tax lovers, this is how we will make this work!

Province pulls out of its box the small municipal box which have cards inside of services to be downloaded. She takes the cards out, reads the cards off one by one placing them into the box.

Province: employment and training, Ontario Works, child care, community/public health, social housing,

then passes the box to the reluctant municipal government, placing a few dollars into the small box..

Municipal Government: *Takes the box saying But, but....*

Wow, this is exciting. We are the level of government closet to the people so perhaps we can do this best.

But wait a minute we already have lots to do without a lot of money to do it.

We already do so much:

- **Roads**
- **Libraries**
- **Recreation**
- **Drinking Water**
- **Sewage**
- **Public Transit**
- **Emergency Preparedness**
- **Recycling**
- **Parks**
- **Garbage Pick Up**

And now you want us to take on social services too. We will need a lot of money to do this you know. You better give us new ways to raise money or give us lots lots for the income taxes you collect.

(reads cards and throws them into the Net, if not, our Net will be shrinking.)

- **Child care**
- **Public Health**
- **Long term care**
- **Social Assistance**
- **Housing**

Narrator: This was the second download. The municipalities had more responsibilities, but they did not have as many ways to raise money as the federal and provincial government.

Sadly, this meant that the social safety net began to shrink at there was less Affordable Housing, less long term care, less social assistance, public health and childcare. *(as Narrator says this the Citizens begin to fold up the net)*

Why did this happen? Well, it has to do with how taxes are collected. The federal and provincial government have income taxes and sales taxes, while the municipality only has property taxes and user fees to raise money. Of every dollar that you pay in taxes, here is how it is distributed.

(Woman tax payer walks over to the governments, reaches in her purse to pay her taxes)

Federal government: *(Women pulls out 50 cent sign, and gives it to federal government, federal government holds it up for all to see, kisses it and sits back satisfied)* We are so thrifty! We can give tax cuts and tax breaks to buy our way to the next election victory!

Provincial Government: *(Woman Mona pulls a 42 cent sign out of her purse and passes it to the province, who holds it up for all to see. Then turns to the municipality patting her on the head)* **If we balance our budget and run a surplus, so can you! In fact, we will make it law that you cannot run a deficit.**

Municipal Government: *(Woman reaches in her purse and hands the municipality the 8 cent sign, the municipality holds it up for all to see)*

Oh my, how are we going to make this work! How are we going to balance our budget, let alone create surpluses!! We have no choice! We must increase

property taxes *(Put hand out)*...**recreation fees** *(put hand out)*...
water and sewage *(Put hand out)*...**garbage** *(Put hand out)*...
bus fares *(Put hand out)*...**parking** *(Put hand out)*...
licences and permits *(Put hand out)*...

(After naming each increase, the municipality pauses to put out her hand causing the woman to reluctantly dig in her purse to pull out another bill and hand it to the municipality who puts it in her box, then extends her hand for the next payment)

Municipal Government: *(looks in box, worried)* **We still don't have enough money. I know we will just have to reduce services and the number of city staff, too. We must balance our budget!**

Narrator: **This is the third and final download from government onto individual taxpayers.**

Mona: But, you can't cut those services. I need those services, my community, my children, my parents need these services! If the city cuts back the services, how am I going to meet the needs of my family?

I realize it is important to pay taxes. In that way we all contribute to a healthy community. But there must be a more fair way to do it!

(She stoops low with the weight of the world).

Narrator: Wow, what a taxing story! Mona, I have had enough of this. We can't go on like this. We need to get together. There must be something we can do!

(Narrator speaks to the woman Mona for the first time, woman passes her baby to the Federal government and broom to the Provincial government and walks toward Narrator. And puts on her peach scarf)

Mona: I have been thinking the same thing. Did you know that Ontario is the only province where municipal property taxes pay for social services?

Narrator: What's wrong with that?

Mona: Well, property taxes and user fees are regressive, that means the amount we pay is not according to how much we earn.

Narrator: Yes and did you know, that even if you rent an apartment, your landlord charges you property taxes through your rent.

Mona: I know; I pay the rent. But income tax is a progressive tax, the

amount you pay is based on how much you earn. So as long as only the federal and provincial government can collect income taxes, it would be better that they pass on enough money to cities to pay for the full cost of social services that cities deliver.

Narrator: Cities aren't what they used to be. They now play an important role in the health and well-being of our communities. Our city can do a great job of delivering social services like public health, social housing, long term care and child care. As the government closest to the people, city governments are in an important place to hear our concern. But cities need enough funds to do it right.

Mona: Did you know that CAWI joined with other community groups and City Council a few years ago to call on the province to take back the costs of public health. We wanted to give them a message that cities need more funding from the province if they are to deliver social services. And good news - the Province listened.

The Province is passing on \$28 million this coming year to help cover the costs of social services, and more will come each year. We call this "uploading".

Narrator: Yes, and I heard people say during the election that the money that the city saves from this "uploading", should be reinvested into social services.

Mona: Yes, CAWI joined with People for a Better Ottawa and the

Coalition to Move Ottawa Forward to give this message to the candidates. And some of them listened. Our new Mayor Jim Watson committed to putting \$14 million in Social Housing and \$1 million into recreation to be able to freeze recreation fees.

Narrator: But I guess we will see if that becomes a reality in the budget process this coming winter.

Mona: Yes, listen why don't you join with CAWI and other community organizations to call on Council to invest all the \$28 million back into social services where they belong.

(Mona passes Narrator a peach scarf)

Narrator: Look, here come Jim Watson now.

Mona: Mayor Jim Watson, we thank you for your campaign commitment to put \$14 million of the upload dollars into social housing and another \$1 million into recreation. We want to make sure all the \$28 million goes into social services.

Jim Watson: Thank you for your message. I and the other members of Council will need to hear this same message from many people. We have many budget pressures you know.

Mona: We have lots of people. There are many of us who have benefited from these social services, we want to see them maintained.

(Mona turns to Narrator, Citizen in the chairs put on their peach scarves, they all turn to the audience and get them to start chanting)

Put the money in the Net! Put the money in the Net!

**Put the money in the Net! Put the money in the Net!
Put the money in the Net! Put the money in the Net!**

Jim Watson: *(smiles and tosses his money in the Net, as everyone cheers).*

Mona: **Thanks Jim and when the Provincial election and Federal election comes, we will work with you for a more fair tax system.**

Narrator: **Yes, Great idea! Who else here will join us?** *(Narrator and woman look back at audience)*