**Canada’s bid for UN Security Council seat could mean costly campaign**

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Canada is on track to spend millions over the next three years in its bid to win a rotating two-year seat on the United Nations' Security Council — even as some inside and outside the UN say the election process needs an overhaul.

According to the government's own estimates, Canada has already spent almost $500,000 on its campaign, which pits Ottawa against Ireland and Norway for the two available spots, opening in 2021.

That includes everything from postage stamps to travel to hospitality. It does not include the salaries of the 10 government employees appointed to work full-time on Canada's bid.

"Whatever the number is that they're admitting to, you can be certain it is [many] times more," says William Pace, the executive director of the World Federalist Movement, which advocates for more transparent elections at the UN.

The five permanent veto-wielding members on the Security Council are the U.S., the U.K., France, Russia and China, also known as the P5. The remaining 10 seats are distributed to countries on a regional basis.

"In terms of prestige … it's a tremendously important achievement for a government," Pace says of membership on the Security Council. ''But I think the way they have to campaign to get the votes has become unacceptable."

Pace estimates almost one-third of the 193 UN member states are "undemocratic", which forces some Security Council hopefuls "to buy votes from countries that they ought to be insisting stop causing wars and denying human rights and committing religious and racial discrimination."

He does not suggest that Canada is following that path.

## Horse-trading for a seat at the table

Pace says giving aid money to developing countries in return for votes is a common aspect of "horse-trading" for a seat at the UN's top table.

Then there are the free trips for UN ambassadors, which have become de rigueurfor any country hoping to be elected to the council.

New Zealand's envoy to the UN, Gerard van Bohemen, says the trips are a costly and unfortunate aspect of the election process, but "everybody does it now, including developing countries."

Van Bohemen hosted about 60 ambassadors over four, week-long trips to New Zealand during his country's campaign for a Security Council seat starting in 2015.

He says the trips were not meant to buy votes, but he thinks they garnered some "affection and loyalty," as well as built a greater understanding of his country and its challenges, such as climate change.

On the day of the vote, delegates will find small gifts piled on their desks in the General Assembly, left by those running for a seat on the council.

In addition to the gifts and financial incentives, Pace says "vote-swapping" among member states for posts on various bodies and organizations is common. "You vote for us on this and then we'll vote for you on that."

## Rising cost of competition

Canada is running against Ireland and Norway for two available seats in the Western European and Others Group (WEOG). UN member-states are divided into five geographic groups to ensure regional representation. Two seats open in the WEOG group — which includes New Zealand, Israel and Turkey — every two years.

Some regional groups prefer an internal rotation or pre-selection process, eliminating competitive elections on the day of the vote.

In less than one month's time, five new countries will be elected to the council for a two-year term, beginning on Jan. 1, 2018. Peru, Poland, Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea and Kuwait are all currently running unopposed in their respective regional groups.

"The Western group … thought it was a good example that they would have contested elections," says Pace. "But I believe the world would benefit from the literally hundreds of millions which would be saved from these elections every few years if they would find a different [voting] mechanism."

## Canada back in the race

Canada announced its intent to run again in 2016.

Despite winning a seat on the UN Security Council every decade since its inception, in 2010, the Conservative government withdrew its candidacy when it became clear it would not receive the votes required to secure a seat.

The projected operational costs for Canada's Security Council bid for fiscal year 2016-2017 were provided by the Department of Foreign Affairs and made public following a request by Conservative MP Guy Lauzon. Of the 10 employees assigned to work full-time on Canada's campaign, almost all were reassigned from within, according to a government spokesperson. Two additional staff based at the Canadian Mission in New York City were hired locally.

* [**Canada's pitch for UN security seat will cost 'financial and political capital'**](http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/un-security-council-1.3494537)
* [**Trudeau unveils Canada's plan to seek 2021 UN Security Council seat**](http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canada-united-nations-security-council-1.3491917)

According to calculations by CBC News, the total remuneration for the 10 employees assigned to work on Canada's bid is between $868,000 and $1.05 million per year.

"In terms of democracy, of course competition is good," says ambassador Carl Skau, Security Council co-ordinator for Sweden at the UN. It allows the membership to choose the country they feel is the best fit for the job, but he concedes the system has flaws.

"Looking at some campaigns, I think that they have probably crossed the line in terms of what are reasonable costs," says Skau, without naming names.

Sweden spent $4 million on salaries, envoys and receptions in the last two years of its campaign, according to the government's cost breakdown.

Media reports suggest Turkey spent $85 million on its campaign when it won a seat on the council in 2008. Australia reportedly spent just under $25 million when it won a rotating seat in 2012.

"We have taken initiatives in the past to try to find some kind of rotation scheme for the WEOG group," Skau says. "To find that formula has proven to be very, very difficult."

He adds that contested slates can also make it "awkward" for countries to choose "between friends."

## Worth the cost?

Canadians will probably never know exactly how much is spent ''because there are so many intangibles," Pace says.

Despite the cost, New Zealand's van Bohemen maintains a seat at the council is worth fighting for — and that it can be won without compromising principles.

"We don't think it's appropriate to leave it entirely to the big guys to call the shots," he says. "Countries like Canada and New Zealand have to be prepared to step up."

Voting takes place by secret ballot, so it's never clear until the day of the election whether the money and the effort have paid off — something that Australia's ambassador famously and undiplomatically referred to as the "rotten lying bastards" factor after Canberra lost its bid for a seat on the council in 1996.