



November 25, 2009

Royal visit cost Canadians \$2.57M

By PETER ZIMONJIC, NATIONAL BUREAU, SUN MEDIA

OTTAWA — They came, they saw, they spent the shirt off our backs.

The visit of Prince Charles and his wife Camilla, the Duchess of Cornwall, cost Canadian taxpayers an estimated \$2.57 million, according to documents released through access to information.

The same documents estimate a proposed visit to Canada in June/July 2010 by the Queen, would cost the public purse another \$3.64 million.

"This is as good an argument as I have ever heard for a republic of Canada," said NDP MP Pat Martin. "It's time for us to get rid of the monarchy and grow up.

"Most Canadians tolerate the monarchy so long as it doesn't cost anything, but in this day and age, in these economic times, that's an absurd amount of money for the pleasure of their company."

The documents, obtained by Ottawa researcher Ken Rubin, show the estimated cost of hotel rooms for the royal couple and their entourage was almost \$138,000 for the 10-night, 11-day stay.

Other spending highlights from the November trip include \$50,000 to design a website specifically for the visit, almost \$320,000 for communications and media staff and another \$630,000 to pay the salaries for the royal visit team.

Taxpayers will also have to pay \$41,000 for programs and luggage tags printed for the visit.

A part of the estimated budget for the visit was a \$500,000 allocation for the costs of having Prince Charles attend the Remembrance Day ceremony in Ottawa. The documents say it didn't cost that much in the end, but that the government would not have the final figures until sometime in 2010.

Deirdra McCracken, the director of communications for Heritage Minister James Moore, says the visit was planned "with the current economic situation in mind" and that all "cost savings were examined where possible."

McCracken also said discussions for the Queen's visit in June/July were well underway and the dates of that trip "will be announced shortly."

That visit will prove to be more costly, with \$1 million having already been budgeted for special Canada Day ceremonies to honour the visit of the Monarch.

"In light of the current fiscal situation of this government, with us running the biggest structural deficit in history, a visit from the Queen is a cost we just can't bear," Martin said. "We should consider doing this by conference call or e-mail, it would be a lot cheaper."

peter.zimonjic@sunmedia.ca