

## Governments often sing their own praises

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The federal government is taking a hammering from the opposition on the promotion of its Economic Action Plan, and while the criticism may be merited, there's plenty of it to go around. Is there a governing political party anywhere that hasn't trumpeted its accomplishments on the taxpayers' dime on the eve of an election call?

That doesn't make it right, of course, but it does make it an all-too-common practice. And that's what should anger taxpayers. It's time to put a stop to it.

According to a recent Canadian Press story, the federal government is spending \$26 million on advertising its Economic Action Plan over three months on TV and radio. The ads, which began in early January and wrap up at the end of March, have been featured in the most costly time slots, including the Super Bowl, the Oscars and Hockey Night in Canada. They link to the Economic Action Plan website. While government defenders say the ads aim to inform Canadians about the programs and services available to them, critics say the ads give no specific detail and are geared to praise the Harper government — all at the expense of the taxpayers. According to the story, what galled Liberal MP Mike Savage most was that an “absolutely obscene amount of money” was being spent promoting an action plan “with no action left in it... This is an abuse of government resources. It's offending Canadians, it's confusing Canadians and it's angering Canadians.” NDP MP Pat Martin expressed similar sentiments that the Conservatives are “carpet-bombing the country with self-serving messages at the taxpayers' expense.”

That expense is not insignificant. Market experts featured in the story called the expenditure huge, even exceeding the spending of some major retail advertisers.

If the federal government continues its blatant promotion of its accomplishments, it may spend its way into the political doghouse, but would that be fatal? That's debatable. Canadians may not approve of such spending, but they've demonstrated a willingness to put up with it on other occasions when it has been practised by other governments, provincially or federally. The P.E.I. government, for example, was criticized last year for its own proliferation of highway signs informing Islanders that this road or that construction project was being brought to them by the Ghiz government.

If voters don't want their tax dollars spent this way, they have to send that message to their governments in whatever way they can. There's no clearer message than the X on the ballot. Federally, that opportunity may come sooner rather than later, but until it actually presents itself, voters are left with contacting their politicians personally. They should do it.

### An idea worth pursuing

Prince Edward Island should look into the benefit of a tuna catch-and-release fishery as a means of broadening opportunities for Island tuna fishermen and expanding the tourism season.

Dr. Mike Stokesbury, a Canada Research Chair in ecology of Coastal Environments and professor at Acadia University,

recently told Island fishermen that “in no other place in the world are the Bluefin tuna of this size available to anglers on day trips so close to shore.” There’s an opportunity, he said, to develop a catch-and-release industry that could be run in a “responsible, regulated and sustainable way”, while attracting tourists nationally and internationally. That’s an idea worth exploring.