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From: Ernest Cheung

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To: <pa-consultation@cab.gov.hk>

Subject: Comments on Further Development of the Political Appointment System as Proposed by the Government

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I take time from my busy work schedule to express my views on the above mentioned proposal by the Hong Kong government because many of my friends and associates share my feelings that the government's incessant and insatiable demand for more of our resources to expand the bureaucracy is becoming very frustrating and worrisome to us.

To begin with, if the government is bent on creating positions for deputies and assistants to the secretaries of the bureaux, their rationale and justifications for doing so can always go into infinity. We ask ourselves the question of whether or not Hong Kong today is better off than we were before we had appointed political officials to head the bureaucracy. Frankly speaking, we do not feel any difference as far as efficiency is concerned, except the government is now obviously bigger and appears busier, with an extra burden on the taxpayer.

We were opposed to the appointment of principal political officials in the first place, and we remain so today, because we have not seen the benefits of it compared with what the system used to be. But now we are being told this is just the beginning of more nightmares to come for the taxpayer, because the government wants to bring in more political appointees to the system.

The bureaucracy is already very big, and it beats us to see why it is not possible to draw from existing resources from within each of the bureaux to lend support to the secretaries, if indeed that is what is needed. For us, it remains to be seen if the role and functions of these deputies and assistants would be different from those of the civil servants. How can the government be so sure that there would be no duplications in their role and functions? We are just not convinced the creation of such positions is absolutely necessary and would improve the efficiency of the system.

With each creation of a public position, the government becomes bigger. Over time the government gets bigger and bigger because it does not have to earn a living. It is all too easy to go to the taxpayer anytime the government feels in need of more money. The public expenditures in Hong Kong have

been increasing as a percentage of our GDP since a few decades ago. It is now over 20% of Hong Kong's GDP, compared with 18% in the early 1980s and even lower in earlier times. We are being forced to accept and shoulder the cost of an ever growing bureaucracy.

With government, once something gets established, it will for certain become permanent. Then, it just gets piled up higher and deeper in no time. Yet, the government tells us they intend to maintain a small government and a big free market. Well, how big is big, and how small is small? When that cannot never be well defined and when we see continuing growth in government expenditures over time, unfortunately, the best thing for us to do is not to put all of one's faith in the government.

Government expenditure in Hong Kong at 20% of our GDP is a huge number, because we do not maintain a military, and we are a city state, where economies of scales are vastly and readily possible.

It is a joke to tell people future generation of politicians would be nurtured by such a system. There are no deliberate arrangements in the civilised world to breed future political leaders this way. Democratic governments throughout the world do not run training camps with a specific agenda to breed future generations of politicians. Political leaders come from the community through voluntary participation and a commitment to public service, subject to scrutiny of the very people who elect them to office, not from government sponsored training camps.

The government's proposal is an arrangement put forward by its career bureaucrats turned politicians. They got there not through elections but by direct political appointments. This is why that is a system they only know, and that is a system they want to preserve. This is the biggest joke I have ever heard in a free society's political development.

I have recently run into someone from Denmark. This middle class salaried person from that country told me he has a wife, who works part time as a nurse, and two young kids. His personal income tax rate is 75% of his gross income in his country. Every time they go out and spend money, it draws a sales tax of 25% on their disposable income.

They have surrendered their lives to the will of their government, I said to myself. How can anyone who has listened to that dreadful story not feel that way?

I am sure it was not the Denmark there was decades ago. The change over time must have been likelier than not ever so gentle and subtle, ever so benign and seemingly painless, all on a bait of good and responsible

governance. A frog has been boiled to death in a pot, from icy cold water, over not totally unbearable simmering heat, over time, of course, without the frog's knowing the cause of its death.

The government's proposal of more political appointments does not seem to cost us an arm and a leg. But, it adds up. This is how we have got to where we are today, letting our government spend ever more money over time, to over 20% of our GDP right now.

Let's remember this: By nature, all governments are capable of being a big spender even when they are on our watch.

Let's do what we can to prevent Hong Kong from becoming another thoroughly boiled frog.

Ernest Cheung

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