

Quebec: The most corrupt province

Why does Quebec claim so many of the nation's political scandals?

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Marc Bellemare isn't a particularly interesting man to look at, so you'd think the spectre of watching him sit behind a desk and answer questions for hours on end would have Quebecers switching the channel en masse. And yet, the province's former justice minister has been must-see TV over the past few weeks, if only because of what has been flowing out of his mouth.

Bellemare, who has been testifying in an inquiry into the process by which judges are appointed in Quebec, has particularly bad memories of his brief stint in cabinet, from 2003 to 2004. The Liberal government, then as now under the leadership of Premier Jean Charest, was rife with collusion, graft and barely concealed favouritism, he says—the premier himself so beholden to Liberal party fundraisers that they had a say in which judges were appointed to the bench. "It happened in [Charest's] office. He was relaxed, he served me a Perrier," Bellemare testified. The two spoke about Franco Fava, a long-time Liberal fundraiser who, according to Bellemare, was lobbying for Marc Bisson (the son of another Liberal fundraiser) and Michel Simard to be promoted. "I said, 'Who names the judges, me or Franco Fava?' I was very annoyed. I found it unacceptable," Bellemare recalls. He remembers Charest saying, "Franco is a personal friend. He's an influential fundraiser for the party. We need men like this. We have to listen to them. If he says to nominate Bisson and Simard, nominate them.' "