

TIMES COLONIST

Chamber chief's nasty note has Barlee assistant fired up - Neither

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side is apologizing for letters written with acid-dipped pens - By Les Leyne - Times Colonist staff - Photo When the manager of the he Saltspring Island Chamber of Commerce fired off a nasty note to Tourism Minister Bill Barlee for being a no-show at a Victoria tourism conference, he figured it'd be ignored.

Instead, Jeremy Moray got an even nastier note back from Barlee's executive assistant. "I've been writing the occasional letter to politicians for 30 years and I've never seen anything like this," Moray said Thursday.

The verbal sparring was sparked by a conference last month of about 150 tourist information booth operators. Things got off to a bad start when an assistant deputy minister standing in for Barlee told the crowd that the minister couldn't attend and that Barlee worked 10 times harder than anyone in the room.

Moray expressed his disappointment in a later letter to Barlee, saying he was disgusted Barlee hadn't seen fit to attend in person and criticizing the "supercilious" attitude of ministerial staff.

Front-line tourism promoters work hard at their jobs, wrote Moray, "without the luxury of cars and planes at our beck and call."

The letter brought a blistering rejoinder from Barlee's executive assistant, Michael Geoghegan, who wrote that he was responding "because, quite frankly, Minister Barlee is too much of a gentleman to give your letter the response it deserves. "As hard as it may be for you to believe, a cabinet minister's life does not consist of lazy days filled with sipping champagne and flying first class to various exotic locales," wrote Geoghegan, adding that Barlee "probably does work much harder than you, but since you obviously feel you could do a much better job, I would encourage you to run for political office."

He questioned how many other 60-year-olds Moray knows who regularly work 30-day stretches with no time off.

Far from having cars and planes at his beck and call, Geoghegan wrote that the Osoyoos MLA drives his own car back and forth between home and Victoria every weekend to be with his constituents. "Perhaps if he did have a personal jet at his disposal it would be easier for us to squeeze more meetings into his already packed agenda, but I guess that solution would not make you happy either," wrote Geoghegan.

Both he and Moray were unrepentant for their stinging letters.

Geoghegan said it didn't appear Moray wanted the typical letter of apology, so he didn't give him one. "It seemed to me [Moray's] letter was unfair and uninformed. The overwhelming majority of politicians from all parties make tremendous personal sacrifices," said Geoghegan.

Moray said he was surprised to have hit "such a raw nerve" with his letter. But these people need to be hauled into line," he said - tourism booth operators are helping build B.C.'s tourism empire and Barlee should have been there.

Barlee was on the road Thursday, driving to Nanaimo for a tourism meeting with a stop in Ladysmith for a meeting and a return to Victoria later.