

EO Files (March 2011)

“THINGS WE DO, PEOPLE WE MEET - Reflections in Brief”

Cash Handout : What’s the problem ?

The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) believes that the fiscal surplus of the government is an asset of the public that should not be regarded and spent as “unexpected fortune”. The government should, following the well-established prudent practices in financial management, allocate the surplus to the most needed services. However, if the SAR government believes that a “cash handout” is the best way to spend its current surplus, then the eligibility criteria for cash handout recipients should be set in a less restrictive manner.

There is an obvious moral hazard in setting the eligibility criteria for the handout on the technical status of “permanent residents”, because several hundred thousand “non-Hong Kong residents” who had permanently migrated overseas are eligible for the cash handout. Meanwhile, several hundred thousand new arrivals, who already consider Hong Kong as their home, are not eligible for the offer. These new arrivals have been in Hong Kong for less than seven years, yet most of them have been working humbly or been looking after their families in Hong Kong. That is why I said earlier that the offer “does not make sense”. (Some have been calling the new arrivals “locusts”. These are obviously derogatory and unfair remarks.)

Nevertheless, I understand that the views of Hong Kong people on the issue are diverse. The problem lies with the Government using the technical definition of “permanent residents” as a crude drawing line that leads to this community divide.

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