



Will the House open its books for Fraser?

CTV.ca News Staff

The auditor general says a performance audit of the House of Commons would ensure taxpayers are getting their money's worth.

In an interview with CTV's Tom Clark on Power Play, Sheila Fraser sought to clarify her intentions with her proposal, which has ruffled the feathers of MPs of all stripes on Parliament Hill.

"The audit could potentially include things like human resource management, management of information technology, security on the Hill, and of course there would be an element which would be financial management given the size of the budget," Fraser said.

"And potentially in there we would look to see what were the controls, what were the processes around reimbursing MPs expenses, and do a sampling of some to see if those rules were actually being followed."

CTV's Ottawa Bureau Chief Robert Fife reported Tuesday that there are specific reasons why MPs don't want to let Fraser conduct her audit.

Sources say that when one MP was caught misspending, the MP was simply told to repay the money. Police were never called.

In another case, a staffer racked up more than \$17,000 in fraudulent charges on an MP's expense account, including \$4,000 from the private Parliamentary liquor store. The MP repaid the money, although he was advised to forget about it.

"MPs are trying to stall until the summer recess," Fife said. "But she's a tough lady and she has the public behind her."

Fraser said her proposed audit would look at the administration of the House of Commons, which would touch on the expenses of MPs. But she said her audit would not be a painstaking account of every receipt.

"We never had any intention, or certainly it was not our proposal, to go into a detailed audit of all the expenses of the MPs," Fraser said.

"And I'd really like to clarify too that this is not an audit of performance of MPs. The electorate will judge that, not an auditor. So I'm concerned that there's been this misunderstanding and MPs in particular I think have interpreted this to be something quite different than what we proposed."

Nearly two weeks ago, the all-party Board of Internal Economy denied Fraser's request to conduct a performance audit on the \$533 million spent by the House and Senate each year.

In its decision, the board said such an audit is outside of Fraser's mandate. However, previous auditors general have probed the government's books.

Since the board's decision, many MPs have said they would have no problem opening their books for the auditor general, but others claimed it was unnecessary given that accounting firm KPMG already audits the House of Commons' financial statements.

But Fraser said a performance audit is "quite different" because KPMG's probe of financial statements doesn't check "if everything has been according to the rules."

Board members have recently indicated they would like to meet with Fraser and perhaps negotiate the terms of an audit.

But Fraser nixed that idea, saying "you don't really negotiate an audit," but said she would be happy to have a discussion with the board to alleviate some MPs' concerns.

One thing Fraser will not do is go forward with an audit without the board's approval.

"We've always taken the position that we need an invitation and we will see what transpires."

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