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Tories float solution to MP expense feud

By Gloria Galloway
Globe and Mail Update

But House Leader won't reveal details of proposal that would end controversy swirling around Auditor-General's request to review House of Commons books

The Conservatives have come up with a idea for ending the controversy around the disclosure of MP expenses that they say they will present to the other parties for approval.

Conservative MPs "had a great discussion about the Auditor-General auditing the House of Commons and the Senate - in other words, the institutions of Parliament. We came up with a proposal," House Leader Jay Hill told reporters after his party's caucus meeting Wednesday. "But, out of respect for colleagues in other parties, I want to take that to them first and foremost."

Mr. Hill said he would bring the proposal to the Board of Internal Economy, the secret committee of MPs that is responsible for House of Commons expenses. Two weeks ago the same board refused a request [<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/mps-refuse-to-let-auditor-general-review-their-expenses/article1568131>] by Auditor-General Sheila Fraser to examine the way the House of Commons spends its money.

MPs have since spent a week in their ridings listening to complaints from constituents over that decision. A new poll released Wednesday suggested that Canadians overwhelmingly believe their Members of Parliament are breaking the rules on expense claims.

The Harris-Decima poll of just over 1,000 respondents conducted for The Canadian Press found that 80 per cent believe it likely that MPs are claiming expenses against the rules while just 12 per cent think it unlikely. And 85 per cent of those surveyed said they were concerned about the MPs' refusal to let Ms. Fraser look at their books.

The poll also suggested that any party leader who publicly endorses the Auditor-General's request will come out a political winner - although a plurality of 45 per cent say it won't change their partisan support.

The Bloc Quebecois has consistently maintained it is willing to let the auditor look at MP expenses. The remaining three parties have come to that position reluctantly. Mr. Hill would not say when the board meets, so it is unknown how soon the issue could be resolved.

Liberal Leader Michael Ignatieff said he has written to Speaker Peter Milliken, who chairs the Board of Internal Economy, indicating that his party would welcome another discussion with the Auditor-General around reviewing House of Commons operations.

The Liberal Leader said after his party's caucus meeting that his own expenses are publicly available online. "That's the way it should be," he said. "That's the position the party supports. And I have just said that we think the Auditor-General wants to make sure the financial controls are good and right and serving Canadians. We are entirely in favour of it."

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