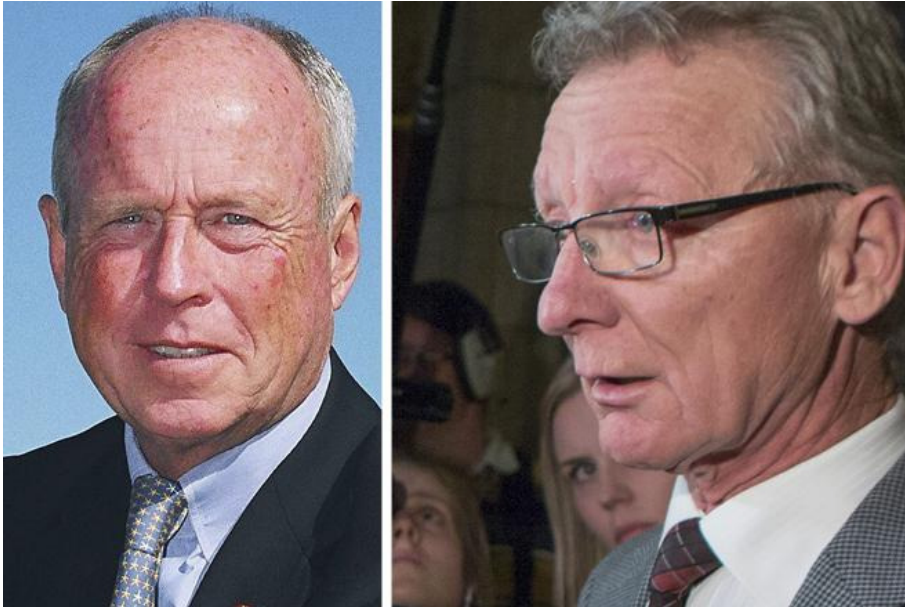


Senate audit to boost NDP message of 'real change versus more of the same,' says pollster Lyle



By [ABBAS RANA](#) | June 8, 2015

Auditor General Michael Ferguson's explosive audit report into Senators' expenses, revealing close to \$1-million dollars in misspending, could inflict serious political harm on the Tories and Liberals in the next election but is likely to help the NDP, which has no representation in the Red Chamber, says a leading pollster.

"They'll have a chance to use it as an opportunity to drive a real-change-versus-more-of-the-same wedge and it allows them to equate the Liberals with the Tories," said pollster Greg Lyle of Innovative Research in an interview.

The AG audit report is scheduled to be released on Tuesday, but late last week several media reports revealed that Mr. Ferguson has referred the expenses of nine current and former Conservative and Liberal Senators to the RCMP for investigation. And another 21 from both sides of the aisle have been asked to repay money, including Senate Speaker Leo Housakos (Wellington, Que.), Government Senate Leader Claude Carignan (Mille Isles, Que.) and Liberal Senate Leader James Cowan (Nova Scotia).

These 21 Senators have the option to challenge Mr. Ferguson's findings before former Supreme Court justice Ian Binnie, named the Senate arbiter last month.

Sen. Housakos and Sen. Cowan said in media interviews that they would challenge the AG's findings.

CTV reported last week that the nine current and former Senators whose cases have been referred to the RCMP are: Conservative Senators Pierre-Hugues Boisvenu (La Salle, Que.), Don Oliver and Gerry St. Germain; and current and former Liberal Senators Colin Kenny (Rideau, Ont.), Sharon Carstairs, Rose-Marie Losier-Cool, Bill Rompkey, Rod Zimmer and Marie-P Poulin.

On Thursday night, following media reports, Sen. Boisvenu announced that he would sit as an Independent in the Upper Chamber.

The federal spending watchdog initiated the audit process in the fall of 2013 on the invitation of the Senate. Mr. Ferguson's auditors examined the expenses of 117 current and former Senators who served in the Red Chamber between April 2011 and March 2013.

All Senators received draft reports of their audit in late February and early March with an opportunity to personally meet with auditors offer more documentation and explain any of the flagged expenses. About a month later, Mr. Ferguson sent the final report of his findings to all Senators so they knew exactly how it would appear in his report.

Mr. Ferguson encouraged Senators whose expenses have been flagged to write a 500-word response to be included in the final report. Since late April, all Senators and leadership on both sides have been putting together their media strategies.

Sen. Kenny issued a press release Friday that his statement included in the AG's report reflects his views on the process and findings, and that he "fully expects to be vindicated at the conclusion of the process."

Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Que.) expelled all Liberal Senators from the national Liberal caucus in January 2014 chiefly to avoid the political fallout from the report. But it remains to be seen if an average Canadian would understand the distinction that Liberal Senators are not members of the national Liberal caucus.

The New Democratic Party has never been in power and therefore has no representation in the Upper Chamber. The NDP supports the idea of abolishing the Senate but it's unclear how they would achieve this in power.

In the 105-member Upper Chamber, there are currently 50 Conservatives, 29 Liberals, six Independents and 20 vacant seats.

Misuse of Parliamentary resources has not been limited to the Upper Chamber. Over the years, Conservatives, Liberals and New Democrats have accused each other of using taxpayer money for partisan resources.

Last year, the Commons Board of Internal Economy determined that 68 NDP MPs inappropriately used Parliamentary resources related to their satellite offices in Montreal, Quebec City and Toronto. The BOIE instructed all 68 MPs to pay the House back \$2.7-million.

The NDP has denied any wrongdoing and has filed an application to contest the BOIE decision in Federal Court. The New Democrats have accused the Conservatives and the Liberals of collusion and have described the BOIE as a "kangaroo court."

NDP House leader Peter Julian (Burnaby-New Westminster, B.C.) told *The Hill Times* last week that his party would raise the issue of Senate abolition, and that the misspending revealed in Mr. Ferguson's report would be one of the reasons offered in support their argument to Canadians.

"When you've got nearly half of the members of the Senate under investigation, when you've got a dozen members of the Senate—half of them Liberals, half of them Conservatives—that are going through judicial proceedings, police inquiries, I think those are strong arguments for Senate abolition," said Mr. Julian.

But Liberal deputy House leader Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Man.) said that before raising any questions about others, the New Democrats first should address the misspending on satellite offices.

"If you live in a glass house, don't throw stones. Half of the New Democratic caucus in itself has been requested to pay back almost \$3-million for monies that were inappropriately spent. That's a considerable amount of tax dollars," said Mr. Lamoureux.

Conservative MPs were reluctant to answer questions about the flagged expenses of their Senate colleagues and what it means for their party in the next election.

Conservative MP Bob Zimmer (Prince George-Peace River, B.C.) told *The Hill Times* Friday in the Commons foyer that he'll "let somebody else to speak to that."

Conservative MP Lois Brown (Newmarket-Aurora, Ont.) said: "Senators invited the auditor general in. We expect that people will comply with the rules of the House and people need to pay attention to taxpayer dollars and how they're spent. It's up to the Senate."

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