

CRA charity audits: Committee has 'no plans' to look into alleged interference

Independent investigation needed to clear the air: NDP

By Kady O'Malley, [CBC News](#) Posted: Aug 18, 2014 12:57 PM ET Last Updated: Aug 19, 2014 3:33 PM ET

The Conservative-controlled House of Commons finance committee appears to have rejected a New Democrat-backed bid to launch a full probe into the Canada Revenue Agency's ongoing political activities audits of certain Canadian charities.

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Committee members met behind closed doors for 45 minutes on Tuesday morning to debate an NDP motion to look into allegations that some charities may have been targeted for political reasons.

Although parliamentary rules forbid MPs from disclosing anything that happened during the in camera session, NDP MP Murray Rankin told reporters that he was "disappointed" in the outcome.

"All we want is accountability," he said.

"There are newspaper clippings this thick with allegations of political interference," he noted.

Rankin believes that public hearings would allow both the agency and the government to "clear the air" on the audit process.

"I still think the government owes Canadians an explanation."

In a statement released later, the NDP called for an "independent investigation" into the audits.

"Canadians must have complete confidence in the integrity of the CRA and our tax system," it quotes Rankin as saying.

"However, I fear that the evidence strongly suggests that the Conservative government has been misusing the CRA to target its political opponents."

Instead, the statement noted, the Conservatives used their majority to hold today's committee meeting in camera, and the meeting itself ended after 30 minutes, "with no plans to study the allegations."

Under House rules, any committee member can force the chair to convene a meeting by

submitting a letter signed by at least two other MPs, although there's no requirement that it be held in public.

Before heading into the committee room on Tuesday morning, Rankin told reporters that he intended to bring forward a motion to open the meeting up to the press.

That, too, was apparently rejected.

'Shameful' to suggest political interference: Keddy

Speaking with reporters after the meeting, Conservative MP Gerard Keddy said it was "shameful" to suggest the audits were the result of political direction, and accused the NDP itself of attempting to politicize the process.

"The fact that some entities are being audited shows the system works," he said.

"I don't think anyone likes being audited," Keddy noted.

"The whole system is set up with checks and balances to make sure the integrity of the system is intact."

Like Rankin, Keddy declined to provide any specific information on what the committee discussed — or, for that matter, whether the NDP motion had been put to a vote.

"The committee is master of its own destiny, and will decide if there will be more meetings," he said.

On Monday evening, a spokeswoman for Revenue Minister Kerry-Lynne Findlay told CBC News that it's up to committees to "independently decide what business they choose to study.

"As Minister Findlay has repeatedly said, the rules regarding charities and political activities are long-standing," Rebecca Rogers noted.

In a statement provided to CBC News after Tuesday's meeting, Rogers said the minister "has absolute confidence in the professionalism, integrity, and fairness of CRA officials who administer the charities program."

"The only politics in this story are the political motivations of the NDP."

Tuesday's special summer session was triggered by a formal request filed by Rankin last week after his initial letter to committee chair James Rajotte elicited no response.

"The Conservative government has given the CRA thirteen million dollars in special funding to conduct political activities audits of charities," he wrote in his letter to committee clerk Christiane LaFrance.

Committee would provide 'safe space' for charities to discuss audits

"Media reports suggest that these aggressive and time-consuming audits are disproportionately

impacting organizations that have been critical of government policies in fields such as the environment, poverty and human rights."

As such, he suggested, the committee "could provide a safe space for charities to shed light on the impact of these aggressive audits, and to help get to the bottom of allegations of misuse of Canada's tax agency for political ends."

"If these well-publicized concerns voiced by many in the charities sector can be addressed by the Conservative government at the Committee, that would likewise provide a valuable service," he added.

On Monday, Rankin told CBC News that he's been pressing the issue "every way I know how."

"I have tried to bring it to the House of Commons in Question Period, to Minister Findlay in a letter, calling for an independent review," he said by email.

"I then asked the Chair of the Finance Committee to convene a meeting — then received no reply. The time has come to compel a meeting of the Finance Committee at which this disturbing matter can be addressed."

Full text of NDP MP Murray Rankin's request

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