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Governor-General's spending to be probed

Committee will examine budget, mandate

Follows on public outrage over ballooning costs

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OTTAWA—A parliamentary committee is launching a study that will examine the mandate of the Governor-General.

The government operations and estimates committee will review the spending of Adrienne Clarkson's office and examine the over-all purpose of having a Governor-General's office in Canada.

Committee chair and Liberal MP Paul Szabo said there was consensus among committee members that the matter was worth studying, particularly in light of public concern about the office's ballooning costs.

"There seems to be some questions that have been raised in the public," the member for Mississauga South said. "Why do we have a Governor-General? What is the mandate? What benefit do we get? How much does it cost to have this?"

This month, the Star revealed that Clarkson's circumpolar tour, in which she was accompanied by prominent Canadians such as author Jane Urquhart and filmmaker Denys Arcand, cost \$5.3 million. The government projected the trip would cost about \$4.5 million. The foreign affairs department, which was responsible for most of the cost, has cancelled a second tour.

The Governor-General is the Queen's representative in Canada.

The committee will also review the budget and estimates of government departments that spend money in support of the Governor-General's office, such as foreign affairs.

NDP MP Pat Martin, whose motion sparked the study, said the trip's inflated cost and questionable purpose points to the latitude allowed in the vice-regal office, which should be reined in, he said.

"If she wants to gather together the horsey set of Toronto and go for a trip somewhere, we'll decide what we want her to do and we'll decide how much we're willing to spend and that will happen in advance," the Winnipeg Centre MP said. "We won't find out about it after the fact, as has been the current practice."

The committee will examine the link between the Governor-General's office and the Canadian Constitution, and will likely push to allow MPs to have input into the appointment process, Martin said. Randy Mylyk, press secretary for Governor-General Clarkson, said the office will cooperate with the review.

"It's very much the purview of members of Parliament to scope out those areas of study and review that they wish to undertake, (and) it's very much part of our mandate and very much in the spirit of what we do to accommodate and answer any questions that they have."

Between 1995 and 2003, the Governor-General's budget grew to \$20 million from \$10 million. Expenses covered by other departments rose to \$15 million from \$307,000. Clarkson was appointed in 1999 for a five-year term.

Tomorrow the committee will review the estimates of the privacy commissioner, the public service commission, Communications Canada and the Governor-General's office.

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