

Liberals 'going to implode', Alliance official says

From page 1.

boss would be willing to discuss the issue if he was available.

Vaughan-King-Aurora MP Maurizio Bevilacqua and Thornhill MP Elinor Caplan did not return phone calls.

In fact, Ms Caplan's staff said earlier this week that she was not even prepared to grant an interview on "good news story" about a federal loan to a business in her riding "while this other business (the controversy over Mr.

Martin) is on the table."

Ms Kraft Sloan, a supporter of Mr. Martin if and when a leadership race opens up, said it's upsetting he is no longer serving as finance minister after Mr. Chretien replaced him with deputy prime minister John Manley.

Mr. Martin, who served as Canada's highly regarded finance minister since Mr. Chretien's Liberals were elected in October 1993, now sits as a backbench MP representing his Montreal riding.

"I think it's a very unfortunate situation. I think a lot of people would prefer

to see Mr. Martin as finance minister," said Ms Kraft Sloan, adding she is confident Mr. Manley will perform well in his new job.

At the same time, Ms Kraft Sloan argued Liberals should stand behind Chretien as the party's current leader.

But Jack Hurst, past-president of the York North Alliance riding association, said Canadians are no longer willing to throw their support behind Mr. Chretien, whom he said has mismanaged the latest string of controversies resulting in Mr. Martin being removed

as finance minister.

"Seventy per cent of Canadians say he has to go. I think Mr. Chretien has overplayed his hand on this one.

"This is the last straw. This (Mr. Martin) is the heir apparent," Mr. Hurst said.

He said ongoing scandals of the Liberals, including the Human Resources debacle, are finally beginning to take their toll on the government.

"We're halfway through the Liberal government's third mandate and it's held things together pretty well so far. I commend them.

"With the obvious problems they have in caucus, they have been able to keep it under wraps for so long," Mr. Hurst said.

"How do you spell corruption? Liberal. L-I-B-E-R-A-L. How do you spell relief? They are going to implode."

Greg Sorbara, Liberal MPP for the provincial riding of Vaughan-King-Aurora, said he sympathizes with the plight of the federal party but isn't getting involved.

"But they smell blood, so that's what they do."

Mr. Sorbara, who said his party is focused on winning the next provincial election, stressed that Ontario Liberals are fully independent from their federal counterparts.

"We're obviously cousins. But when we're asked if you're on Mr. Chretien's side or Mr. Martin's, we take a pass."

Meanwhile, Ms Kraft Sloan said she doesn't know whether Mr. Martin was fired or his departure was a mutual decision between he and Mr. Chretien.

"I have no idea. I was not privy to those conversations."

Mr. Martin has maintained he was fired, saying despite a telephone conversation with the prime minister Sunday afternoon, he learned of the one-man cabinet shuffle while listening to CBC radio in his car later that day.

While Ms Kraft Sloan said it will be up to Canadian voters to determine how important the controversy is, she said opposition parties are enjoying playing up the controversy.

"If I were in opposition, there would certainly be concentration on other issues," she said, pointing to the environment as an example.

"But they smell blood, so that's what they do."

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