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Calandra pushes senate reform

BY SEAN PEARCE
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The Canadian Senate: should it stay or should it go?

Following an historic week in the red chamber that culminated with a vote to suspend Senators Mike Duffy, Pamela Wallin and Patrick Brazeau without pay for allegedly filing fraudulent expense claims, the York Region Media Group sought out your MPs to get their thoughts on the scandal and the future of the nation's upper house. All of the MPs we got in touch with agreed the senate needs a shakeup.

York Region's Conservative MPs generally agreed the senate needs to be reformed. A few took it further saying if that's not possible, then the upper chamber should cease to exist.

Conservative Oak Ridges-Markham MP Paul Calandra agreed with his colleagues the senate had acted properly by suspending the three senators last week. In regards to the future, Mr. Calandra said he remains in support of the current bicameral system and believes the senate still serves an important purpose in our system as a chamber of sober second thought.

However, the red chamber needs reform and he's hopeful a clear path forward will emerge out of the case now before the supreme court. Ideally, senators should be elected rather than appointed, even if that means only electing nominees, as Alberta does, and there must be term limits rather than the current situation that sees appoin-

tees retain seats until age 75.

"It can't be the way it is now," the Stouffville resident said. "That's not acceptable in the 21st century."

If change isn't possible, then abolition may be the answer, Mr. Calandra added.

House leader and Conservative York-Simcoe MP Peter Van Loan said his position is reflected by the government's bill that aims to allow for the election of senators and to limit their terms to nine years.

"We are also asking the court to confirm whether the senate can be abolished and, if so, the process to do it," he said, adding the Conservative Party of Canada added the option of senate abolition to its platform in 2008 when he was minister of democratic reform.

York Region's lone Liberal, Markham-Unionville MP John McCallum, described the process that resulted in the suspensions of Mr. Duffy, Mr. Brazeau and Ms Wallin as "flawed", but added it ultimately came with the right outcome. It's premature to discuss the future of the senate given the ongoing arguments before the supreme court, Mr. McCallum said, but noted his opinion is that the senate still has value, although reform is needed especially when it comes to the appointment process.

"I think Canadians are right to be angry and frustrated at the senate," he said, adding a better vetting process for prospective senators is a must. "I think that they need to change the rules and make sure this sort of thing doesn't happen again."

FLYERS

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