

NAFTA-gate probe to be made public

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OTTAWA — The federal government's top civil servant has pledged to make public the results of an investigation into Canadian leaks that damaged the presidential campaign of U.S. Senator Barack Obama.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper handed responsibility for an internal inquiry to Kevin Lynch, the Clerk of the Privy Council, after it emerged that his chief of staff, Ian Brodie, sparked the so-called "NAFTA-gate" affair in a conversation with reporters from CTV News.

Mr. Lynch pledged in a letter to Liberal MP Navdeep Bains that the results of the internal probe will be made public, and will include the "verbal" leaks - not only the later leak of a diplomatic memo.

Mr. Bains said he is encouraged by the assurances, but added that Mr. Brodie and Michael Wilson, the ambassador to Washington, should still step aside until the probe is completed.

The leaks led to reports that Mr. Obama's campaign had reassured Canadian diplomats through back-channels that the candidate's calls for renegotiating the North American free-trade agreement were political rhetoric, not serious plans.

The leaks hurt Mr. Obama before two crucial Democratic Party primaries in Texas, and especially in Ohio, where the campaign of Hillary Clinton was revived with strong showings.

Mr. Brodie told CTV reporters during the media lockup for the Feb. 26 budget that Ms. Clinton's campaign had reassured Canadian diplomats that her tough talk on NAFTA was just posturing, a reporter with the network has revealed. But when the network aired a story the next day, it reported mainly on the Obama campaign.

Mr. Wilson, the former Tory finance minister and one of Mr. Harper's most high-profile political appointees, has acknowledged that he spoke to CTV reporter Tom Clark, but would not say what they discussed.

A later leak to the Associated Press newswire, revealed a Canadian diplomat's summary of a meeting between Mr. Obama's economic adviser, Austan Goolsbee, and Canada's consul-general in Chicago, Georges Rioux.

The summary described Mr. Goolsbee as saying that Mr. Obama's calls to revamp NAFTA "should be viewed as more about political positioning than a clear articulation of policy plans." Mr. Goolsbee said the summary misrepresented his statements.