

Parliamentary oversight of executive procurement: Lessons from the Contractors-General of Jamaica and Belize.

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Abstract

Parliamentary oversight of discretionary spending is increasingly becoming a mere formality. Nowhere is there greater scope for alleged and actual corruption than in the case executive discretionary spending. Both Jamaica and Belize have embarked on an experiment of parliamentary oversight of executive spending through the instrumentality of parliamentary commissions. These commissions, called Contractors-General in Jamaica and Belize, are built on the legal framework of the parliamentary ombudsman, and the new office replicates the strengths and weaknesses of the older institution.

Thus the Office of the Contactor-General is ostensibly independent of the executive, with near unfettered power to investigate and monitor the grant of licensing, permits and contracts. However, only in a limited way is the office funded directly by Parliament and it has no power to enforce its findings and decisions. The necessity of the office relying on the executive for supply, in the first case, also relying on Parliament for the enforcement of its recommendations, in the second case, operate as constraints on its effectiveness.

In the case of Jamaica the Contractor-General scheme has been further modified with the introduction of a National Contracts Commission to provide additional oversight of procurement by the executive. The new legislative scheme has imposed on the commission the additional duty of promoting transparency in the procurement processes.

The paper examines the structure and efficacy of the Contractor-General and the potential instructions it offers for parliamentary oversight of executive procurement in the Commonwealth Caribbean.