





back



believed the auditor was interttering on their natural turf. The auditor was demanding "extensive data" (gasp!) before determining whether ad spends were in the public interest or a staggering waste of taxpayers' money. He tried to steer campaigns away from television and radio. He was disinclined to take direction from the ponytails of the advertising world and other "experts". In other words, he was making his presence well and truly felt.

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But when it came to the crunch, the government backed the word of Hawke over the pesky, nit-picking due diligence of the Auditor-General.

Dumping McPhee means one of two things: either the government tried to implement a silly and unworkable policy and then had to step back once it became clear that the theory didn't meet the practice — or it didn't like what he was doing. He was slowing things down. He was being too literal in the application of the guidelines — although this raises the question, what on earth did they expect? A rubber stamp from the auditor? That seems a

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rather ambitious hope.

Of course, this government doesn't really need oversight does it? They clearly handled the insulation program in such a competent and thorough way that taxpayers would feel totally confident that no one need look over their shoulder.

In making this decision, the government has to own a couple of inconvenient truths. It has dumped the watchdog only months out from an election, a time which generally records significant spikes in taxpayer-funded advertising. It has dumped McPhee at a point when much of its integrity agenda is stalled either by bloody-minded and self-interested opposition intransigence, or by its failure to get its own house in order.

It has treated McPhee badly and has to wear the discomfort of his negative opinion about the change. And it has opted ultimately for more political flexibility over rigorous accountability.

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Some new dawn.  
Katharine Murphy is national affairs correspondent.

**⚡ Dumping McPhee is more than a bad look; it is a spectacular backflip when you consider Labor's pre-election posturing. ⚡**

