

'It smells of a coverup'

Decision to move air ambulance made last summer, Liberals allege

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The provincial Liberals are accusing the government of making the decision to transfer the air ambulance out of St. Anthony months before an independent report recommended the move.

Liberal Leader Yvonne Jones also suggested last fall's resignation of former cabinet minister Trevor Taylor — who represented St. Anthony — was due to the impending move.

Taylor has already denied that accusation in a recent letter to The Northern Pen newspaper.

In the House of Assembly Wednesday, Jones questioned Health Minister Jerome Kennedy.

She said documents obtained from Eastern Health refer to a meeting between Corey Banks, the director of the Medical Transportation Program and Labrador-Grenfell Health officials Aug. 21, 2009.

The documents suggest moving the air ambulance to Happy Valley Goose Bay was discussed and the move would likely face opposition.

"I ask the minister today to confirm that on that day, the decision was made to move the air ambulance from St. Anthony to Goose Bay, seven months before Wes Drodge's report was ever received by your government," Jones said.

Kennedy denied the decision was made before the report recommended it.

"All it amounts to is independent confirmation of Mr. Drodge's report and the confirmation that this government has made the right decision," he said.

Kennedy's spokeswoman later confirmed no one from the Department of Health was at the August meeting.

But Jones suggested Banks, being a government employee, got his marching orders from someone higher up the political food chain and the Drodge report was nothing but a "cheap rewrite" of



Yvonne Jones

Banks' report.

"This report by Drodge only rubber-stamped those recommendations and the minister knows that," she said.

But Kennedy said a briefing note clearly shows no decision was made at a Sept. 14, 2009 meeting.

That document was later provided to The Telegram.

"While there was a discussion regarding relocating the air ambulance from St. Anthony ... it was decided no consideration would be given to relocate this air ambulance at this time," the briefing note states.

After question period, reporters asked Jones how she reached her conclusions.

"When you get the director of the air ambulance service ... circulating notes around and informing health boards ... there would be a change in air medevac services, to me, that constitutes a decision being made somewhere up the line," she said.

"My experience in 15 years being around the political and public service is that as a public servant, you take direc-

tion from government, and if not, you're shown the door."

"It smells of a coverup," Jones continued.

"I believe that it is a coverup and I really believe that the Drodge report was nothing only a front for government to justify what had already been done."

Jones also said the premier and Kennedy misled the people of The Straits-White Bay North by not disclosing the move during the byelection to replace Taylor.

The byelection was won by the Liberals.

However, on May 11 in the House, Jones accused the government of moving the air ambulance as punishment for the byelection loss.