

Speaker accused of bias over Opposition funding vote

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Newfoundland and Labrador's Liberal Opposition leader accused the legislature's Speaker of partisan bias Tuesday after the Liberals lost a bid for a larger budget for their political operations, a charge Speaker Roger Fitzgerald is denying.

Liberal Leader Yvonne Jones accused Fitzgerald, who was elected as a Tory, of voting along party lines even though the Speaker is supposed to be non-partisan.

Fitzgerald broke a tie vote Tuesday among six members — Tories on one side, the Liberals and the NDP on the other — of the house of assembly management commission to vote against an increase in base funding for the opposition caucus to \$250,000 from \$100,000.

"He broke the tie and he sided with the government on each and every occasion, which causes me to believe this is a biased process," she said.

The vote's outcome means the Liberals won't get an extra \$150,000 to run their office and hire staff, despite a consultant's report recommending the increase.

Fitzgerald denied late Tuesday that partisan politics had anything to do with his vote. He said his decision was based solely on the information and arguments presented during committee meetings, and that even without the extra money, the Liberals will have enough money to be an effective opposition.

Jones said two staff researchers will be laid off after the upcoming session of the legislature closes for its Christmas break.

Liberals currently hold three of 48 seats in Newfoundland and Labrador's house of assembly, while the New Democratic Party has one.