

May take legal action over funding cuts: Liberals

Last Updated: Tuesday, December 2, 2008 | 1:29 PM NT

[CBC News](#)



Yvonne Jones said the Liberal Opposition is considering a lawsuit over a cut to its research funding. (CBC)

Newfoundland and Labrador's Liberal Opposition said Tuesday it is considering a lawsuit over a recent decision that cut its research and staff funding.

The three-member Liberal caucus has cried foul since the governing Progressive Conservatives used their majority on a legislative committee to override independent advice on funding for the Opposition.

The House of Assembly Management Commission voted in November against a consultant's recommendation that the Opposition receive an extra \$162,000 for policy and research resources.

In a statement, Opposition Leader Yvonne Jones said the Opposition believes the commission may have violated their duties laid out in the House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act.

Members, she said, "have a statutory duty to base their decisions on adequate information. We have reason to believe that government members, as well as the chairperson, breached these statutory duties."

The Liberals have accused Speaker Roger Fitzgerald, who chairs the commission, of bias because he voted with fellow Progressive Conservatives in denying research funding for the Opposition.

The Liberals were reduced to just three seats in the October 2007 general election. The PCs hold 44 seats, while the New Democrats have one.

Jones said government members erred by not seeking clarification from an independent consultant on funding advice. "To decline to seek clarification of these recommendations at this late date was to abandon that process and to take up partisanship again," Jones said.

Meanwhile, the Liberals say they will be abstaining from management commission meetings while the legislature is in session.

The House of Assembly Management Commission was created in the wake of a legislative spending

May take legal action over funding cuts: Liberals

scandal that erupted in 2006, when Auditor General John Noseworthy began releasing reports on how several politicians and a former senior civil servant had received questionable payments. The scandal led only to criminal charges — none of which has yet been proven in court — against five individuals.

As well, Derek Green, chief justice of the Newfoundland Supreme Court's trials division, recommended overhauling management of the legislature with a new body. The management commission's meetings are open to the public, its decisions are a matter of public record and its spending decisions undergo external scrutiny.