

Government being heavy-handed: Jones

Compares provincial Tories to Harper Conservatives
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Gibbons/The
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THE TELEGRAM

It wasn't as raucous as question period in the House of Commons Tuesday. But the House of Assembly was also full of partisan shouting and heckling when Liberal Leader Yvonne Jones started question period by comparing the Williams government to the federal Conservatives.

"The prime minister's attempt to attack democracy and eliminate funding for opposition parties was certainly the actions of a heavy-handed leader," Jones said.

She then compared that to a recent decision by the House of Assembly's management commission which voted to deny the Liberals extra funding for research staff while unanimously approving more cash for both the government and the NDP.

That brought on groans and shouts from the government side of the House.

"Don't try and compare us to what the Harper government has done in Ottawa," responded an angry Premier Danny Williams.

In a news release earlier in the day, the Liberals said the party is considering legal action over the decision to deny the caucus extra funding.

It also stated the two Liberals on the commission would "abstain from attending any future meetings of the commission the House of Assembly is in session due to legislative responsibilities and workload commitments."

During question period, Jones and Williams went back and forth, both accusing the other of trying to spin the story to their own benefit.

Jones pointed out the Liberals didn't ask for the extra cash, that it was recommended by an independent consultants report.

"The management (commission) makes the decisions. The consultant doesn't make the decisions," countered Williams.

"I don't care what they recommended, I concur with the management commission."

Outside the House, Williams denied extra funding for the Liberals was voted down for partisan reasons.

"This is not an attempt, under any circumstances, to suppress a small opposition," he said.

Williams said the money the Liberals are getting now is more than enough for the caucus to do their duty.



Liberal Leader Yvonne Jones addresses media outside the House of Assembly Tuesday afternoon.

Photo by Joe Gibbons/The Telegram

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"I'm not one who's afraid of opposing view points I can tell you right now. And I'm also a big believer in that a strong opposition makes better government," he said.

Williams said if the Liberals can show through their questions or research that government could be doing something better, he would welcome their input.

Williams also said he didn't think the Liberals had a case, even though a group called Democracy Watch has said they may.

But he said if the Liberals prove their case, the government would honour a courts decision. Jones also spoke to reporters. She said the party isn't sure if it will pursue legal action as it will cost them money and a lack of resources is what the whole argument is about.

In addition, Jones said the Liberals aren't boycotting the commission meetings.

"It's not a matter of us not wanting to participate. It's a matter of us taking our parliamentary duties and responsibilities and placing them above any other committees that were involved with," she said.

Jones said the Liberal members are too busy getting ready for question period to attend the commissions next meeting, scheduled for tonight.

NDP Leader Lorraine Michael will be the only non-government MHA at that meeting. "It's my responsibility as a member of the commission to attend," she said.

Michael also said she still supports the independent report that recommends giving the Liberals the extra money.