

## **Taxpayers on hook for Foley Melvin's legal bill?**

By AMY SMITH Provincial Reporter



Nova Scotia taxpayers could be on the hook for Heather Foley Melvin's legal bills.

Ms. Foley Melvin, the chief executive officer of Conserve Nova Scotia, was accompanied by Halifax lawyer Grant Machum during her testimony before the legislature's public accounts committee Wednesday.

She said it hasn't been determined whether she or the province will pick up the legal tab.

"I haven't received a bill and therefore haven't discussed the payment of that yet," she told reporters afterward.

"I am here today because of the position that I have at Conserve Nova Scotia and that is a provincial government position. It has yet to be determined who will pay for that. Certainly, he will be paid. I needed his advice and I needed his counsel."

Ms. Foley Melvin said she hired a lawyer after learning NDP MLA Graham Steele had tabled a motion that the committee ask the House to find her in contempt for declining to answer certain questions during her first time before the committee on Nov. 1.

"We were told that it would lead to criminal charges and I absolutely got a lawyer," she said. "I was absolutely concerned about being charged criminally."

Premier Rodney MacDonald, the man who appointed her as head of Conserve Nova Scotia, said he doesn't think the province should pay her legal bills.

"It was her lawyer and she should be paying for the bill," Mr. MacDonald said. "The Department of Justice, if any employee is in a situation like that pertaining to their job, we would make sure there would be advice and that was done so in this case."

Interim Liberal Leader Michel Samson said Ms. Foley Melvin had access to Justice Department lawyers and Nova Scotians shouldn't be out of pocket because she sought advice from a private-sector lawyer.

New Democrat MLA Dave Wilson agreed.

"The Department of Justice has 70 lawyers on staff that are being paid through public funds, through taxpayers of the province, and by no means should Nova Scotians pay for additional private counsel with this issue," he told reporters.

During the meeting, committee chairwoman Maureen MacDonald assured Ms. Foley Melvin that criminal charges were not a threat.

"Nothing you can say here today in fact can form the basis nor support a cause of action, either civil or criminal, so you should not be labouring under the misconception that this has implications in that regard," she said.

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