

## Questions raised about hefty bills

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A Six Nations band councillor is raising concerns about how provincial and federal money is being spent by natives on the land negotiation process.

According to a public letter from the Coun. Claudine VanEvery-Albert who is the cochair of the finance committee of the Haudenosaunee negotiations, large "non-specific" invoices have been submitted and money paid for uncontracted, undocumented work.

She said in her letter that she is "uncomfortable" about two invoices that were submitted to her committee, debated and set aside earlier this year. Her concern increased in March when she learned that at least a part of the invoices had been paid without her knowledge even though she's the co-chair of the committee.

The invoices submitted were from Lynda Powless, publisher of the Turtle Island News, for \$216,000 and one for \$143,000 from Aaron Detlor, a Six Nations lawyer who set up the Haudenosaunee Development Institute.

The Powless invoice simply says: "Communication and media advisory, crisis media management, press strategy, consulting, advisory Mohawk Chief Allen MacNaughton 2008-2009 \$216,000."

Powless has acted as a media adviser or public relations consultant for the Confederacy, as well as the cigarette company, Grand River Enterprises, and the Dreamcatcher Fund.

Neither invoice contained dates or times or hours that were being billed for and neither Powless nor Detlor had any official agreement or contract to be paid, said VanEvery-Albert's letter.

The councillor did not return phone calls or email messages.

Powless was unavailable for comment due to a family emergency, according to someone who answered the phone the Turtle Island office. Detlor declined to comment except to say the letter has "significant inaccuracies" and is now "the subject of actual litigation."

"My purpose is not to discredit any individuals but to ensure that the people of Six Nations are made aware," wrote VanEvery-Albert. "The negotiation budget is the Six Nations peoples' money and everyone has a right to know how it is being spent."

The councillor made a strong request to a committee that oversees negotiations to ensure all disbursements -- not just an overall audit -- be made public.

"(These are) just two of several instances where, in my view ... there have been questionable organizational and spending practices with regard to the negotiations budget," said VanEvery-Albert.

"These actions ... speak to weaknesses in the areas of accountability, transparency and conflict of interest guidelines."

But, according to Confederacy Chief Allen MacNaughton, the lead negotiator on the talks, VanEvery-Albert has had this "explained to her" repeatedly.

Expressing his disappointment at the information being made public, MacNaughton said that band council isn't required to report on the specific amounts people are paid and he characterized the letter as part of a "power struggle" and a roadblock being thrown in the way of getting the job done.

According to VanEvery-Albert, MacNaughton, who has been divorced from Powless for 15 years, is the one who authorized payment to Powless, co-signing her cheque.

The other co-signer was Steve Williams, who did not return phone calls from The Expositor. Williams, a friend of Powless, was made the cochair of the finance committee in March, replacing Aaron Detlor.

MacNaughton said there is no personal connection that benefited his ex-wife.

"Lynda came before (Confederacy) council and basically volunteered to help out in 2006. Council agreed she was going to handle our PR."

MacNaughton said he wasn't quite sure when the volunteer work became a paid position but noted that many people who were working for the Confederacy began to get wages when money became available.

There was a controversy in 2008 when the community learned that people they thought had been volunteering for the cause were actually getting paid.

The Confederacy chief said he expects Powless and Detlor will take legal action against the band council.

In fact, Coun. Helen Miller confirmed Tuesday that council has received a letter from Powless objecting to the content of VanEvery-Albert's letter and announcing she intends to sue band council.

Funds for the negotiation process come from Canada and Ontario in an even split.

According to a spokesperson for Indian and Northern Affairs, each government has funded almost \$2-million over the last three years to the natives to ensure they can meet on equal footing at the negotiation tables.

The money is flowed through GRETI -- Grand River Employment and Training Inc. -- and paid after being approved by the finance committee for negotiations.

Brant MPP Dave Levac said that he was tipped off about the large invoices submitted for payment but when he checked with the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs he learned the government traditionally tends not to restrict spending once money is released to natives.

"The government will evaluate this particular situation but told me the hope is that this hasn't tainted the negotiation process. We try not to make assumption about how things are done."

Brant MP Phil McColeman was startled by the size of the submitted invoices and said he spoke to the Minister of Indian Affairs this week.

"He said both sides need to be well-funded. This could be a concern but it could also be good value for good service. I hope the good people of Six Nations are looking at it because we all need to be transparent to the everyday person in the community."

Hazel Hill, a spokesperson for the Haudenosaunee Development Institute, said VanEvery-Albert's letter contains inaccuracies.

"This is just internal politics. If someone is hired by the Confederacy they're not accountable to band council. It's just a political ploy."

Hill said the amounts asked for in the Powless and Detlor invoices weren't the final amounts paid.

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