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Opposition says former CEO double-dipping

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The StarPhoenix

June 5, 2004

REGINA -- The Saskatchewan Party says a consulting contract that comes on the heels of a \$66,250 severance package given to former Saskatoon Health Region CEO Jim Fergusson amounts to double-dipping.

Friday in question period, the Opposition called on Health Minister John Nilson to reveal details of Fergusson's 12-month contract.

"The offensive thing is that we have a health district that runs desperately short of money, it needs money everywhere . . . and then we're paying out twice to one individual," said Sask. Party MLA Don Morgan.

Draft financial statements peg SHR's fiscal year deficit at \$6.4 million. The province also expects its health authorities to come up with \$20-million in savings from administrative efficiencies and service and program changes.

Morgan said he's been hearing widespread concern about the money going to Fergusson, who made \$265,000 annually before his resignation effective Monday.

The government needs to set clear guidelines on executive compensation in health regions to rule out contracts that pay such rich severance as in Fergusson's case -- equivalent to three months salary and benefits -- for administrators who leave voluntarily, said Morgan.

There also should be tougher rules against executives receiving consulting contracts immediately after resigning.

"They're choosing not to provide the particulars of this contract. How do the taxpayers know how much money is being spent, why it's being spent, what the decision was? When it's public money, you have a right to those answers," said Morgan.

SHR board chairman Bob Bundon said he has no plans to release details of Fergusson's consulting contract now although it may be made public when the region's annual report is released at the end of this fiscal year in 2005.

He said Fergusson was not benefiting from double-dipping because the severance was settled as of May 31 while the contract commenced on June 1.

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