

## Assembly Pays Legal Bills

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### Stephens Lawsuit Over

Jay Barrett/KMXT

It appears that the Mel Stephens versus the Kodiak Island Borough lawsuit is finally over. The assembly voted 5-to-2 last night to pay the legal bills of its members -- something that has caused months of tension and contention.

There was never any question the legal services of the borough's contract attorney, Matt Jamin, would be paid. But fees for three members of the assembly who hired an Anchorage firm have been up in the air -- until last night.

Those three members were Louise Stutes, Tom Abell and Reed Oswalt. They opted for their own attorney after disagreeing with the borough's position in the lawsuit. Stephens, a former assembly member himself, sued late last year claiming Assemblywoman Sue Jeffrey missed too many meetings and should be removed of office. A judge did order Jeffrey removed in December, but the assembly reappointed her later that month.

Despite both sides claiming the high ground of wanting to put the controversy behind them, it was still a long and arduous process. At one point Assemblyman Tom Abell made a thinly-veiled threat that more lawsuits were in the future if his attorney fee was not paid.

He would not elaborate when assembly members Jeffrey and Pat Branson questioned him on the statement. Branson called Abell's comments innuendo and said a new lawsuit was ridiculous.

After setting a cap on the fees for the Stutes, Abell and Oswalt attorney, the resolution passed with only Jeffrey and Chris Lynch voting no.

An earlier resolution offered by Abell was intended to bring closure to the process by binding the assembly members to a pledge not to appeal the

judge's final order, which was rendered on April 4th. It failed on a 3-to-4 vote.

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