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NXIVM pressed district attorney

Soares says group intensely lobbied him to prosecute ex-consultant

By James M. Odatto Updated 11:47 am, Tuesday, March 6, 2012



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Albany County District Attorney David Soares during a news conference at the Capitol Thursday, Mar. 1, 2012, for a bill to extend the statute of limitations on filing claims for sexual abuse. (John Carl D'Annibale / Times Union)

In an interview last week, Albany County District Attorney **David Soares** said his office's experience with officials of NXIVM, who went to him with a story of being victimized five years ago, was an "extraordinary" time during which the group repeatedly pushed him to use his powers of prosecution against a former NXIVM consultant.

Soares said that he received "tremendous pressure" from NXIVM's representatives and lawyers. He said he eventually resisted their urging that he continue to pursue charges against **Joseph J. O'Hara**.

Soares, seeking re-election this year, said he allowed a NXIVM legal aide to spend time — Soares estimated weeks — in the district attorney's office to work on a case against O'Hara. Soares said that arrangement is not uncommon when his office prepares financial crimes cases. The NXIVM case involving O'Hara, an Albany-area entrepreneur, has recently drawn attention after revelations that Soares allowed **Kristin Keffe**, a top aide to NXIVM founder Keith Raniere, to operate within his office as a sort of victim's advocate.

More Information

An Albany County grand jury indicted O'Hara in 2007 for grand larceny after NXIVM officials and lawyers working on behalf of NXIVM and its key financial backers, Clare and **Sara Bronfman**, called on Soares to investigate O'Hara, Soares said. Three months later, a state judge dismissed the case. Soares said he then resisted numerous pleas from NXIVM lawyers and the Bronfmans to try to re-indict O'Hara. Soares said he was also approached by former Massachusetts Attorney General **Scott Harshbarger** and former Arkansas Supreme Court Justice Richard Mays, also a former prosecutor.

They showed up in person to persuade him to go after O'Hara, Soares said. Harshbarger has not returned calls for comment. Mays said he could not discuss "client business," although he did say he and one of his daughters were NXIVM students years ago.

"I think the individuals in this case had more access to resources, so there were always personal visits," Soares said. He said NXIVM President **Nancy Salzman**, **Clare Bronfman**, Keffe and various lawyers insisted he meet with them for unscheduled visits. "When we were told they were coming it was almost as if we had to drop everything," he said.

He said he came to believe that NXIVM, or the Bronfmans, wanted to use the district attorney's office as "leverage" in separate "legal matters" involving O'Hara.

Representatives of NXIVM, the Bronfmans, Ranieri, Salzman and Keeffe have declined to talk to the **Times Union**.

The Bronfmans sued O'Hara over \$2 million in loans to him for personal or private investments. At the time O'Hara had been working for NXIVM as a consultant. The sisters, heiresses to the Seagram's fortune, have been major underwriters of NXIVM. They have resumed litigation against O'Hara recently. He is also under indictment in Texas for allegedly bribing a public official, which he denies.

Assistant District Attorney **Chris Baynes** said he was Keeffe's chief contact in the office. She was not an intern, Soares said. She did not have authorization to use district attorney resources, Baynes said.

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