

Keeping secrets

Liberals say government anything but transparent

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Liberals say recent court cases which try to curtail the powers of the province's information and privacy commissioner are just another step in keeping information from the public.

"This is, without question, the most secretive government in the history of this province, bar none," Liberal Justice critic Kelvin Parsons said Tuesday to reporters outside of the House of Assembly.

Earlier in the day, The Telegram published a story about how province has gone to the Supreme Court to limit the powers of the commissioner.

In one case, the province is contending that some information should be exempt from the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (ATIPPA) because of solicitor-client privilege.

In a March letter, noted in The Telegram story, privacy commissioner Ed Ring claimed the government's interpretation of solicitor-client privilege would effectively neuter the right for people to get information from the province. Parsons agreed. "If that's going to be the case, that legal advice can always make something exempt from the act, government simply has to go out and get cursory legal advice on any given issue that they don't want ever to be revealed and use that as an excuse," said Parsons.

In another case, the province is suing to block the commissioner's access to a wide variety of records.

Parsons compared the privacy commissioner to a referee in a sport and said he is supposed to be able to decide which information can be released or not.

But he said the government is now trying to take the referee out of the game altogether.

The Williams government has often claimed that it is open, transparent and accountable, but Parsons says it is "none of the above."

