

Amended moose accident bill passes

Government amendments 'waters down' Liberal resolution: Parsons

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Tom Hedderson

The committee wants better brush cutting along the highways, more hunting licences issued and moose fences erected along the most dangerous stretches of road.

Mount Pearl city Coun. Lucy Stoyles joined the committee after her daughter was seriously injured in a moose collision this fall.

She spoke to reporters shortly after the debate began in the lobby of Confederation Building.

"We don't want to be unrealistic," Stoyles said. "We know that the government is not going to say 'OK, we're going to fence all Newfoundland.'"

Stoyles said she wants the committee to work together with government and possibly the insurance industry, to start to solve the problem.

"We've got to start somewhere (but) status quo is certainly not what we're looking for today," she said.

Back inside the House, Environment Minister Charlene Johnson proposed a number of amendments to the Liberal bill. Instead of conducting a new study, Johnson proposed the government "build upon its work to date by analyzing in detail, on an ongoing basis," a number of existing reports.

Johnson proposed the bill should also read that government would "report its

findings" to the people of the province, replacing language committing to accepting recommendations from a study. Opposition House Leader Kelvin Parsons was not impressed. He said he could not support the amendments which he said allows the government to do "absolutely nothing."

"I'm not going to get caught in their cagey language," Parsons said. "I'll certainly not vote yes by what has been put forward (by) the minister which waters down what was a well-intentioned, well-explained proposition."

After Parsons' emotional rebuke, Transportation Minister Tom Hedderson calmly told the House he wants to make sure the government responds to the petitions signed by thousands of people.

"We're here to try, both sides of the House, to come to some agreement to how we can deal with the carnage that's happening on our highways," he said.

Hedderson revealed his daughter's friend was killed in a moose accident about a year ago, and he said he wants to meet with the committee and work with the opposition to address the issue.

"This is too serious an issue to get into petty politics," he said. "I will work with the devil himself if it brings about change that can make our highways ... safer for everybody."

Meanwhile, NDP Leader Lorraine Michael was disappointed by the amendments.

She said this is a perfect example of an issue which could be handled by an all-party committee.

Michael has said before the province should have more of a committee-based structure which could deal with issues in a less confrontational way.

She also talked about a number of initiatives Sweden has used to reduce moose-vehicle accidents.

In the end the vote came down along party lines.

The government voted for the amended resolution, while the opposition parties voted against it.

It

was the Liberals who introduced it, but the government which amended and passed it.



Kelvin Parsons

Opposition Leader Yvonne Jones introduced a private members bill Wednesday in the House of Assembly asking government for a comprehensive study on how to reduce moose-vehicle accidents in the province.

The bill also asked government to implement the recommendations such a study would produce.

Jones accepted a 20,000-name petition from the Save Our People Action Committee last month.

She tabled it and a second petition with an additional 6,000 names on it, earlier this week in the House.