

Lower Churchill dominates question period

Premier says no firm timelines for sanctioning project in place

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— Photo by Joe Gibbons/The Telegram



Liberal Leader Yvonne Jones (left) and Premier Danny Williams speak to the media following question period at the House of Assembly Monday afternoon regarding the Lower Churchill project.

Liberal Leader Yvonne Jones told reporters Monday it will be years before the proposed Lower Churchill project will be developed.

And Premier Danny Williams admitted the province no longer has any firm timelines in place to see the project sanctioned and get underway.

In the House of Assembly Monday, Jones asked a number of questions about the progress of the Lower Churchill including how much work has been done so far on the Maritime transmission route, if environmental impact studies for that route have been filed and if technical problems could delay the project

from taking power to the other Atlantic provinces and down into the United States.

"There absolutely will be technical issues that will impact upon the project," replied the premier. "Anybody with a clue at all would know that there's going to be some technical issues when you do a \$6-billion to \$12-billion project. (But) I can tell the honourable member opposite that there will be no technical difficulties that will be a complete obstacle that would ever prevent that project from happening."

He then told Jones to "stop reading Quebec propaganda" put out by Hydro-Quebec and carried in mainland newspapers like the Globe and Mail.

But the Opposition leader suggested Williams was dodging her questions.

"It is a very typical show that you see in question period. Whenever the government has the heat put on them, when there are questions they do not want to answer, the first thing they do, Mr. Speaker, is they stand up and attack the person who is asking the questions (and) question their patronage," Jones snapped back.

Meanwhile, Natural Resources Minister Kathy Dunderdale told Jones the province will only file an environmental impact study for the Maritime route if that's the final route chosen.

After question period Williams and Jones spoke to reporters.

That's when Williams said there is no timeline for the project.

"It's difficult to pin down a date," he said. "We're just going to keep moving forward."

Williams then listed what the province has done towards the project so far including filing environmental assessments for the proposed generating sites — and the transmission path to the island — and the agreement reached with the Labrador Innu, which has yet to be ratified.

"I'd like to do it tomorrow, quite frankly. Get it done. But we can't rush it and we do have a strategy in place," the premier continued.

Jones said though "everyone in this province wants to see the Lower Churchill project developed," the project is still years and years away from becoming a reality.

She said a route through Quebec is looking more and more unlikely and an environmental assessment on a maritime route could take three to five years to complete, if and when the paperwork is eventually filed.

"It's been a soapbox for the government. It's been a platform for them to basically stand as fighting Newfoundlanders and taking on Quebec. But at the end of the day we're nowhere near getting a deal done on the Lower Churchill," she told reporters.

Jones said she would like to see the province move towards discussions with Ottawa and the government of Quebec to get around the current impasse.