

'Serious weaknesses'

Parsons says House 'dysfunctional' as spring session ends

*BY DAVE BARTLETT
THE TELEGRAM*

The House of Assembly adjourned for the summer Thursday with the government heralding a successful sitting and the opposition parties levelling a number of criticisms.

Government House leader Joan Burke spoke to reporters outside the House as the final debate was raging on the floor of the chamber.

" I thought we had a very productive session of the House," Burke said.

Among the 31 pieces of legislation passed were six new acts, including the Children and Youth Care and Protection Act, the Health and Protection of Animals Act and the Human Rights Act, which replaced the existing Human Rights Code.

The House also passed the 2010 provincial budget over 43 sitting days, which ties for the longest sitting under the current government.

But both the opposition parties were still upset with the outcome of a Liberal private member's motion which was voted down by government MHAs Wednesday.

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That bill called for a number of reforms to House procedure including improvements to decorum, the delivery of the wording of bills in a more timely fashion and the creation of a parliamentary committee structure as other legislatures across the country already have.

Opposition House leader Kelvin Parsons described the sitting as a "very tumultuous" one.

He went so far as to characterize the current way the House operates as "dysfunctional."

"I've never seen such a more dysfunctional House of Assembly in my 12 years here," Parsons told The Telegram.

He said the session showed the government has "some serious weaknesses."

Parsons said a lot of issues were debated from the accidental expropriation of the AbitibiBowater mill in Grand Falls-Windsor — and the contamination left behind by that company — to the fishery to the Lower Churchill project.

Parsons contends there's no way the Lower Churchill will be developed within the next 10 or 12 years.

"The premier can say what he wants. He can condemn Quebec all he wants," he said.

"The bottom line is it's off the rails."

NDP Leader Lorraine Michael echoed much of what Parsons had to say.

"We had a couple of important pieces of legislation pass. My concern is that we don't have a truly consultative process in dealing with legislation," she said.

As an example, Michael cited the new Human Rights Act, which she said passed too quickly and left a number of gaps.

"This government wants control and the way in which it just pushes things

through in short periods of time shows they want control," she said.

"I will continue to call for a committee structure where draft legislation comes to a parliamentary committee (and) that committee really deals with the content of a bill," she said.

Reporters also asked Burke if there was anything left undone.

"Not a thing. The order paper has been cleared," she replied.

But the opposition parties say they are still waiting for whistleblower and anti-replacement worker laws, and both agree it's likely those reforms won't be coming under the Danny Williams administration.