

E-mails prove interference in MUN search for president: faculty

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[CBC News](#)

The faculty association at Memorial University says a trail of disclosed e-mails proves that the Newfoundland and Labrador government crossed the line during the search for a new president.

The e-mails, obtained by the Liberal Opposition through provincial access to information legislation, showed that Education Minister Joan Burke was equipped with a list of questions before she met with two candidates last January.

Burke said Wednesday that the questions — including notes about to what extent the candidates would back government policies, including more autonomy for Memorial's Sir Wilfred Grenfell College in Corner Brook — were merely talking points for a wide-ranging discussion.

But Ross Klein, president of Memorial's faculty association, said the government still does not understand how it interfered in the search process.

Burke drew heavy criticism from academic groups across the country this summer, when she revealed that she had effectively vetoed both candidates — including acting Memorial president Eddy Campbell, who the university's board of regents later revealed was the search committee's preferred choice — after meeting them in January.

"It appears as though the minister and the government isn't aware of the degree to which this behaviour, or these actions, have interfered with the ability to find the kind of candidate that we all want to have leading the university," Klein told CBC news.

Premier Danny Williams has said that Burke stepped in for him to promote the benefits of the province to candidates, and not conduct a de facto job interview.

Burke told CBC News on Wednesday that she took time to highlight the province's assets to the two finalists.

Klein said the wording of the questions, prepared for Burke by officials in her department, show that Burke intended to vet the candidates.

"It doesn't look like an interview trying to understand who a person is, nor does it look like an interview where one is trying to sell the virtues of the province and what a wonderful place this is to live," Klein said.

"They appear more to be questions designed to filter out an individual who doesn't have the same view that the government believes should be held by the individual, or the same view held by government."

The process for finding a president appears to have been thrown into disarray through this summer's disclosures. The board of regents, in statements issued last month, said that Burke had interfered in the process, and called on the house of assembly to rewrite the Memorial University Act so that government would have no role at all in choosing the president.

The current legislation allows cabinet to approve or reject the final selection of the search committee.

Burke said this summer that she refuses to serve as a rubber stamp to the university.

Earlier this week, an attempt by Burke's office to put the controversy in the past appeared to backfire. A news release issued with quotes from both Burke and Campbell was hastily withdrawn, with government admitting that Campbell had not approved it.