



Where have all the Muskrat Falls cheerleaders gone?

Stan Marshall's blunt assessment of project met with silence from former champions like Danny Williams

Terry Roberts · CBC News ·

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Danny Williams championed the Muskrat Falls project, saying its green energy would be appealing for environmental and economic reasons. (CBC)

Danny Williams boldly stated in late 2010 he was so confident in the Muskrat Falls project that he would put his own money on the line, if he could.

Would the former outspoken Newfoundland and Labrador premier, who resigned from politics just weeks after making that statement, and inking a deal to develop the project, say the same thing today?

- **Would put own money on Lower Churchill: Williams**

That's a question CBC would like to put to Williams, but the No. 1 champion of the controversial and costly hydroelectric project has declined interview requests in recent days.

"Danny isn't available," was the latest email response from Williams' communications director, Elizabeth Matthews Williams.

- **Danny Williams 'unequivocally positive' about Muskrat Falls**

CBC received the same response from Williams on June 24, the same day Nalcor Energy's new CEO, Stan Marshall, delivered the shocking news that the construction cost of the project has soared by 30 per cent and is now projected to exceed \$9 billion.

That's before financing costs, which are expected to add another \$2 billion-plus.





Danny Williams said in 2010 he was so confident in the deal to develop the Lower Churchill he would put his own money on the line. (CBC)

The power station at Muskrat Falls is also two years behind schedule, and Nalcor and contractor Astaldi are locked in a dispute over costs, with Astaldi seeking hundreds of millions more in additional payments.

Marshall stated bluntly that Muskrat Falls was the wrong choice for Newfoundland and Labrador's power needs, and that it will impose "severe hardship" on rate payers, with utility costs expected to skyrocket in the coming years.

So does Williams now regret his unyielding support for the project? Did his desire to get back at Hydro-Quebec over the lopsided Upper Churchill deal cloud his judgment when it came to Muskrat Falls?

"It's part of the reason I got involved in politics," Williams once said of the Upper Churchill deal.

Williams is not talking, so we don't know.

His silence is noteworthy, considering he was defending the project in April, telling a Halifax audience he remained "unequivocally positive" about Muskrat Falls.

- **'That's the cost of doing business': Danny Williams defends Muskrat Falls, Ed Martin**

He's not the only one refusing to answer questions about what Stan Marshall agrees has grown into a boondoggle.

Dunderdale, others also silent

Kathy Dunderdale, who was premier when the project was sanctioned in 2012 at a cost of \$6.2 billion, has also avoided questions, holding firm on a self-imposed media moratorium that she implemented after leaving politics two-and-a-half years ago.

"She is continuing to live her private life," the former premier's daughter, Sara Dunderdale, told CBC on Wednesday.



Kathy Dunderdale resigned as Newfoundland and Labrador's premier in January 2014. (CBC)

High-profile lawyer Jerome Kennedy was the province's natural resources minister when Muskrat Falls was sanctioned, and like the two former

Progressive Conservative premiers, he has not responded to an interview request.

Ed Martin is also laying low, despite having his successor, Stan Marshall, lay the blame squarely at his feet.

Martin steered the ship at Nalcor until his controversial departure in April.

When asked recently why he continues to have faith in some Nalcor executives — most notably Gilbert Bennett — who continually reassured the public that Muskrat Falls was a viable project, Marshall made the following comment:

"When I started in business I thought it didn't matter who was at the helm, that a big organization with momentum could achieve a good result. It really depends on who is in charge, the direction that is given to the people."

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