

Williams slams Quebec letter

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Premier accuses Quebec of trying to block federal funding request

Premier Danny Williams says Quebec has written the federal government asking it not to grant a joint funding request from Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia.

According to Williams, this province and Nova Scotia filed an application with Ottawa in late June for funding under the Public Private Partnerships (P3) Fund to help pay for a proposed subsea, high-voltage cable which would link the two provinces.

The cable would be necessary if this province is able to develop the Lower Churchill hydroelectric project and opts for the Maritime transmission route as opposed to wheeling power through Quebec.

“ We subsequently learned recently, within the last week or two, that the government of Quebec (has) actually sent, I think under Premier Jean Charest’s signature --- although I haven’t seen the letter --- a letter objecting to our funding (request),” Williams told The Telegram Thursday.

The premier called the actions of Quebec “disgusting.”

This isn’t the first time Williams has accused Quebec of trying to obstruct the Lower Churchill development.

In May, Williams let loose on that province in a scrum with reporters, after Quebec’s energy regulator decided not to grant Nalcor Energy’s request for capacity on the Quebec power grid. That decision is being appealed. “It’s one thing to be obstructionist in their own province and to try and block the regulatory process there,” he said.

“But then to turn around in a matter which really isn’t any business of theirs at all, which is the Maritime route, and try and block that? It just goes to show how predatory they are when it comes to competitors in the electricity market.”

Although the funding application was submitted by two provinces, Williams said the benefit of the cable — and the Lower Churchill in general — would be good news for up to six provinces, including Quebec, not only for the power it would generate, but for the jobs and raw materials that will be needed to build dams at Muskrat Falls and Gull Island.

Williams suggested that isn’t enough for Quebec.

“If it’s not for the benefit of Quebec then nobody else is to have it. That’s the attitude of the premier of Quebec,” he said.

When asked how he found out about the Quebec letter, Williams said he “ heard it through the grapevine” as well as through senior federal Conservative Party officials within this province.

“I wasn’t copied on the letter,” Williams said. “I didn’t even receive the courtesy of that.”

A federal Conservative source confirmed to The Telegram knowledge of the contents of the letter, although the source had not personally read it.

Williams said he has discussed the letter with Nova Scotia Premier Darrell Dexter.

Dexter wasn’t available for an interview Thursday, but Nova Scotia Energy Minister Bill Estabrooks said he’s aware of the letter.

“Mr. Charest (should) mind (his) own business,” Estabrooks told The Telegram.

“ He’s completely out of line to dismiss a project that has been submitted to the federal government.”

Estabrooks said that’s especially the case considering the regional co-operation demonstrated by the project.

The Telegram called Charest’s office, but the call was not returned by deadline.