

Danny Williams slams Muskrat Falls critics

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Posted: Jan 14, 2012 12:02 PM NT

Last Updated: Jan 14, 2012 11:51 AM NT

Former Newfoundland and Labrador Premier Danny Williams has dismissed as "garbage" a new round of questions about the viability of the Muskrat Falls hydroelectric megaproject that he shepherded before resigning from office.

"I'm very disappointed in Dave Vardy's comments, and the kind of nonsense that he's getting on with," Williams told CBC News, responding to written criticism this week from the former senior civil servant, who co-authored a letter to the St. John's Telegram laying out a series of concerns with how the provincial government has handled the Muskrat Falls case.

Vardy and former colleague Ron Penney criticized government for not extending a Public Utilities Board review, and questioned the amount of information that has been made available on a "project [that] exposes us to significant risk."

In a subsequent interview with CBC, Vardy said he knew of many people who strongly objected to the Muskrat development plan, but were afraid of speaking out because their comments might put relatives employed by government at risk. "I think that's very unfortunate," Vardy said earlier this week.

That comment in particular appears to have irritated Williams.

"Basically [they are] saying that it's a small community and people are afraid to speak out. What kind of garbage is that?" Williams said in an interview.

"To try and sort of taint it with some insinuation that people don't want to speak out on this is absolutely absurd, and it's irresponsible," said Williams.

Vardy, a former cabinet secretary and an ex-chair of the Public Utilities Board, and Penney, a former deputy minister of justice, said the stakes on the \$6.2-billion Muskrat Falls are high enough to warrant an extension of the PUB's ongoing review.

Earlier this week, current PUB chair Andy Wells criticized Nalcor, Newfoundland and Labrador's Crown energy corporation, of disclosing almost no information in a timely manner for the regulator's review, which must be completed by March 31.

Williams told CBC News that he sees no reason to extend the deadline, and that the process has been open so far.

"As I understand that, that's a firm government time that has been set ... I think they'll meet that deadline," Williams said.

"The information they need will be provided to them. Whether they get a chance to do more consultations, I suppose, there will be some restriction on that, but as I said lots of

consultations have already been done. So I think they'll come up with that decision within the timeframe."

Williams announced his decision to step down as premier days after reaching a November 2010 deal involving Halifax-based Emera Inc. to develop part of the long-planned Lower Churchill megaproject at the Muskrat Falls site.