

Plenty of opportunity for input, minister says ... Continued from page A1

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"The idea that it's not going to be properly reviewed, and this idea as well that there's going to be some sort of debate in the House of Assembly, but not a vote, I just don't understand," Penney said.

"If the government doesn't change its mind, we're going to have basically a half-assed report and it's not going to be helpful in terms of informing debate."

Natural Resources Minister Jerome Kennedy said the public has had plenty of opportunity to have its say, despite the fact the government has turned down the PUB extension.

Kennedy said there was an environmental assessment process, Nalcor had more than 20 open houses last year and there has been numerous opportunities for commentary in the media.

"At the end of the day, the (PUB) public presentations, I'm not sure what they will add," Kennedy said.

As for the PUB's concerns Nalcor has been dragging its feet on filing information, which has left the PUB in a bind, he said the report from outside experts Manitoba Hydro International later this month will review all technical aspects.

"What the PUB is being asked is a very specific question. The answer in my mind can be yes, no, maybe or we don't have enough information," Kennedy said, referring to the least-cost option for electricity.

"We need to wait and see what is in the Manitoba Hydro International report. That will give us a better idea and will give me a better comfort level at that time as to whether or not the PUB has the information



David Vardy

they require."

The PUB is also concerned information it got from Nalcor is only current to December 2010, but Kennedy said the government will have all the up-to-date costs and estimates and other data when it comes to making the final decision on sanction of the Lower Churchill deal.

Asked whether he's concerned about the perception he and his government will be remembered for rushing a decision if the project is deemed a failure in the future, Kennedy said unlike the Upper Churchill deal of the 1960s, the government is allowing



Ron Penney

debate in the House this time around.

"We have to learn from the mistakes of the past and especially the Upper Churchill," Kennedy said.

"As politicians, we have to look at all the facts in making our decision and while no one certainly wants to be the new Joey Smallwood, also we can't be afraid of making decisions because of that type of issue."

Kennedy said the NDP and Liberals can debate Muskrat Falls during the speech from the throne, debate in question period and during budget debate. While he didn't signal there would be a special debate on the proj-

ect, he said the government is prepared to debate it all night if it has to.

"We feel the best and proper place for this to be debated and to allow for full debate is in the House of Assembly," Kennedy said.

Commenting on the letter written by Vardy and Penney suggesting opponents are afraid to come forward, Kennedy accused Vardy of refusing to represent his side of the argument in a discussion next week with economist Wade Locke at the Harris Centre.

"I find it odd that these individuals are engaged in letter writing and criticism and yet when push comes to shove and he's given the opportunity to get out there, he refuses to do that," said Kennedy, adding he is encouraging the public to attend the discussion.

Both opposition parties blasted Kennedy for refusing to wait for a fully conducted review by the PUB.

"It's quite obvious to me that government does not want an open process around the review of this particular deal," Liberal energy critic Yvonne Jones said. "If they did, they would certainly grant the time that was necessary to do it appropriately."

NDP Leader Lorraine Michael said it was "disturbing" that the PUB won't be given the time it feels it needs to complete a full report. If need be, she said, the debate should be delayed until the summer or the fall.

"I want my full discussion in the House, but I want full information," she said. "It's only government that's saying the full discussion in the House has to happen this spring."

jmcleod@thetelegram.com
bsweet@thetelegram.com