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Muskrat Falls deserves dedicated discussion: Skinner

Former minister would like to see special session in House

Newfoundland and Labrador's most recent former minister of natural resources would like to see a full debate in the House of Assembly on the Muskrat Falls hydroelectric project.



Shawn Skinner

After losing his seat in last October's provincial election Shawn Skinner is just an ordinary citizen these days, but he's still keeping one foot firmly planted in politics. Skinner is a regular political commentator for CBC'S On Point, which is where he first voiced his support for a dedicated debate on the megaproject.

The topic came up during a discussion on whether or not the Public Utilities Board (PUB) has had enough time to fully examine the multi-billion dollar project.

Reached for a followup interview with The Telegram, Skinner reiterated his support for developing Muskrat Falls but added that it is in the province's best interest to have a special debate in the House of Assembly.

"I believe the government has a good project," said Skinner.

"I believe the government has lots of good information why this project should proceed and I would feel confident that if they allowed a special debate in the house ... I think the people would be better informed and would better understand why this project should move forward."

He also said the public has put a lot of faith in the government, and by extension the PUB, to give it the information it needs to make an informed decision, and a fully televised debate in the legislature would go a long way towards accomplishing that goal.

"If the province said, 'Let's have a debate in the House,' and gave it a week, or two weeks ... to allow the opposition time to get their questions out, I know they can answer them all," said Skinner.

"If a special debate were held, people would be informed and the people of Newfoundland and Labrador are smart enough to make the right decision once they have the right information," he added.

The House of Assembly has held special debates in the past, usually on significant issues like the Voisey's Bay nickel mine.

But all indications from Skinner's former colleagues in the Progressive Conservative government are that a special debate will not happen for this \$6.2-billion project.

Instead, the government has indicated the discussion on Muskrat Falls can take place during the regular spring sitting of the House — a time normally consumed by question period and debate on the budget.

Natural Resources Minister Jerome Kennedy reiterated this position during an interview late last week.

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