Harper on our side against Quebec: minister

CBC News, Last Updated: Apr 4, 2011 7:44 PM NT

Newfoundland and Labrador's finance minister recognized Stephen Harper Monday as a key ally in a decades-long struggle with Quebec over hydroelectric power.

"I would like to be friends with the only Prime Minister in fifty years of Confederation that has taken Newfoundland and Labrador's side on a hydro dispute with the province of Quebec," Tom Marshall told the legislature Monday, as the governing Progressive Conservatives came under fire for a political pact with the controversial Conservative leader.

Harper said a re-elected Conservative government would provide financial backing for the Lower Churchill hydroelectric project, which Quebec leaders have derided as insulting, as power would be brought to market without crossing its borders.

Premier Kathy Dunderdale has made no apologies for appearing with Harper and endorsing the man who was the subject of so much enmity in 2008 during the "anything but Conservative" campaign that shut out the federal Tories.

"Mr. Speaker, it was the premier herself who said that Stephen Harper could not be trusted," Liberal Leader Yvonne Jones told the house. "I am not about to sell out the people of Newfoundland and Labrador like you have just sold out the people."

Dunderdale, who was formally sworn in as PC leader during a St. John's convention this weekend, said she has no regrets about anything she said during the ABC campaign.

However, she also said that campaign is in the past.

"You are damned if you do and you are damned if you don't," Dunderdale told the legislature.

"I can offer you today example after example when the leader of the Opposition and the Opposition house leader criticized us because we did not have a relationship with the federal Conservatives."

Outside the legislature, Dunderdale told reporters that there has been a significant change in how Harper has dealt with Newfoundland, particularly with respect to Innu land claims and the Muskrat Falls development.