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Former premier reassured by Muskrat Falls talk

Danny Williams attends minister's speech on megaproject

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— Photo by Colin Maclean/the Telegram

Natural Resources Minister Jerome Kennedy speaks to a crowd of about 100 people during an address to the St. John's Southwest Rotary Club Tuesday. Kennedy promoted the Muskrat Falls megaproject throughout his speech.

Resources Minister Jerome Kennedy was touting the Muskrat Falls project to a group of Rotarians in St. John's Tuesday — and he was doing it under the appraising eyes of his old boss, former premier Danny Williams.

Apparently, Williams heard.

"I felt reassured that I think he has an absolute grasp of this particular file and this particular issue, as his former predecessor in my government, Premier (Kathy) Dunderdale did," Williams told reporters after Kennedy's speech.

The former premier also indicated his approval of the progress on the project to date and said delaying the project would be detrimental for the province in the long run. Williams' comments were aimed at both the request by the Public Utilities Board to extend its deadline for its review of the project,

and at opposition parties who have called for further study of the Muskrat Falls project.

"As a Newfoundlander and Labradorian I'm quite comfortable with the process that's taken place," said Williams.

But there comes a time when a project has been studied to death, he added, and Muskrat Falls is rapidly approaching that point.

"This discussion has been going on a long time. And if you go on too long you're going to miss the window of opportunity," he added. "Let's just do it. Let's get on with it." He also dismissed the counter-arguments of many of the project's detractors as weak and lacking in factual data.

"They seem to be just sort of throwing enough at the issue and hoping some of it sticks. And that's just not fair. It's not fair to the people of the province. They deserve to get the right information," Williams said.

But the former premier wasn't the only person out to hear Kennedy talk about the megaproject. liked what he

The prospect of hearing Kennedy talk about the \$6.2-billion project attracted quite a few new faces to the Rotary meeting. There are usually one or two visitors at each Rotary luncheon, but there were more than 20 Tuesday.

During his 30-minute address, Kennedy used familiar talking points to highlight the controversial megaproject by boiling it down to two questions. Do we need the power? And if the answer to the first question is "yes," then what is the lowest-cost option?

The answers are invariably "yes" and "Muskrat Falls," Kennedy said.

The minister spent his time at the podium reiterating his government's support for the project for various reasons, including long-term economic growth, the environment, the financial security of the province and making sure the lights stay on.

He also outlined why he and the government have come to the conclusion Muskrat Falls is the lowest-cost and most feasible power generation option for the province.

Generally, these are all arguments that have been expressed before.

But Kennedy also took a few pot shots at critics of the project.

"The bottom line is, we need power. We have to do something. Our critics say we haven't considered all the options. But when we explain what we've done, they refuse to accept it," he said.

Kennedy wrapped up his speech by telling the crowd that developing Muskrat Falls is the right decision and not the easy one.

"What we are trying to do is what I assume all politicians try to do. That's do our best. Well, doing our best means making decisions. We could say, 'Forget Muskrat Falls. Too much pressure, too much heat. Leave it for a future government to deal with.' But that is not how Premier Dunderdale and our government operates," he said.

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