



Nfld. & Labrador

Ratepayers won't be on hook for 'tremendous burden' of Muskrat Falls, Ball promises



PC leader Ches Crosbie criticizes lack of specifics in Ball's promise

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Ches Crosbie is questioning the lack of specifics to Ball's plan for the Muskrat Falls debt. (Eddy Kennedy/CBC)

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Newfoundland and Labrador Premier Dwight Ball launched his party's fight to retain a key Liberal district in an upcoming byelection by wading into one of the biggest challenges voters face today, announcing Wednesday that the province will be "separating the ratepayers from the Muskrat Falls debt."

Ball made the statement in St. John's at a campaign launch event for Paul Antle, who is running as the Liberal candidate in the upcoming Windsor Lake byelection.

The premier added that Muskrat Falls is a "tremendous burden," but should be a debt issue, not a ratepayer issue.



Terry Roberts

@TRobertst

. @PremierofNL dropped a bombshell today, saying electricity ratepayers will not carry the burden of Muskrat Falls debt. Here's how he explained that position to reporters. #nlpoli

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"We just want to clarify, there is no way ratepayers in our province could pay or should pay for the burden of Muskrat Falls, so we need to separate this," Ball said.

"The final cost of it will not be known until 2021, 2022, so I just want to add reassurance to ratepayers in this province that they will not bear the burden of Muskrat Falls."



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BIG NEWS: "We are separating our ratepayers from the Muskrat Falls debt completely," Ball announces.

 **Terry Roberts**
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Ball says Muskrat Falls is a debt issue. Not a ratepayer issue.
He also says PUB "will be brought back" to set rates.

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As for how the province will pay the massive bill for the hydroelectric project, Ball didn't have specifics, adding there are a "number of options" on the table, which will include talks with the federal government.

Ball added that the Liberal government would leave "no stone unturned" when looking at options for how to pay for it, adding, "we are not looking at increasing taxes for people in Newfoundland and Labrador."

Ball did say it will be dealt with like "every other debt that we've been left," a swing at the previous Progressive Conservative government.

Newfoundland and Labrador Premier Dwight Ball, at a byelection campaign launch for Liberal candidate Paul Antle, says the Public Utilities Board (PUB) will be involved in setting power rates for the province. (Gary Locke/CBC)

In addition, Ball said the Public Utilities Board (PUB) "will be brought back" to set "consistent, affordable" power rates.

Provincial legislation in 2012 stripped some of the independent authority away from the PUB, after a report that said the PUB didn't have enough information to determine if Muskrat Falls was the best option to satisfy the province's future power demands.





Paul Antle is the Liberal candidate for the Windsor Lake byelection, which will be held on Sept. 20. (Gary Locke/CBC)

"What happens when you kick them out, like the Tories did in 2012, is projects — and burdens — like Muskrat Falls," Ball said.

- [Time to look for other solutions to 'ugly problem' of Hydro prices, says consumer advocate](#)
- [Hydro no longer eyeing 6.5 per cent hike to begin paying for Muskrat Falls](#)

Last week, Crown corporation Nalcor Energy [pulled back on its proposal for a 6.5 per cent rate increase](#) in January 2019 to help pay for the rising costs of the Muskrat Falls hydroelectric project in Labrador.





A recent photo of the Muskrat Falls spillway and intake on the Churchill River, near Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Labrador. (Nalcor Energy)

Originally green-lit at a price tag of \$7.2 billion, the estimated cost of the [project has ballooned to \\$12.7 billion](#). First power won't be delivered to Newfoundland until 2020.

Antle will battle Progressive Conservative Leader Ches Crosbie for the east end St. John's district. No other candidates have so far officially entered the race with the general vote set for Sept. 20.

Given his business interests, Antle said he's been in discussions with the province's ethics commissioner about what to do during the campaign.



Terry Roberts @TRobertst · Aug 22, 2018

Replying to @TRobertst

"I believe in our future because I believe in our people," says Antle,





He also lost out on the Liberal leadership convention in 2013, with now-premier Ball beating him for the top job.

The byelection was called after former finance minister and MHA Cathy Bennett resigned from the House of Assembly.

Crosbie not worried



Liberal candidate Paul Antle and Newfoundland and Labrador Premier Dwight Ball. (Terry Roberts/CBC)

On the campaign trail Wednesday, Crosbie said he was not buying Ball's plan to avoid passing the cost of Muskrat Falls to consumers, chiding the lack of specifics from the premier.



Terry Roberts

@TRobertst

"You have my full support." @ChesCrosbie got a surprise when former @PCPartyNL premier Kathy Dunderdale emerged from this house during some campaigning by Crosbie in Windsor Lake. #nlpoli

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"It's amusing they kept this marvellous announcement locked away in the Liberal vault until this very moment," he said. "I'd like to hear more details from Mr. Ball as to what exactly his plan is."

The PC leader said he doesn't have any doubt that he'll win the Windsor Lake byelection, and that he doesn't believe voters will be convinced by Ball's promise.

"If Mr. Ball had a fund of credibility and trust with the voters then it might be a problem, but when he makes vague announcements promising pie in the sky, I don't think people are much impressed," he said.

Rogers pins blame on both parties

NDP leader Gerry Rogers echoed Crosbie's skepticism.

"We haven't seen any specifics, we haven't seen how he's going to do this, so I'm not holding my breath," she said.

But ahead of the Sept. 20 byelection in Windsor Lake, she urged viewers to look toward the NDP for a different path forward.

"Let's not forget that the Conservatives brought us Muskrat Falls and the Liberals have done nothing to make it any better," said Rogers.

The NDP has yet to announce a candidate for the riding.

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With files from Ryan Cooke, Terry Roberts, Kate McGillvray and Stephanie Tobin