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ACTUALITÉS

Mounties faced fire bomb barrage: officer

CRAIG BABSTOCK
TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

MONCTON – Even for veteran Mounties, what happened on Oct. 17 in Rexton was extremely tense.

Cpl. Yann Audoux was one of the RCMP Emergency Response Team commanders at the scene on Route 134 the day of the incendiary protest.

He said as the morning went on, the level of agitation amongst some of the anti-shale protesters was on the rise. More protesters arrived through a back trail, Molotov cocktails were thrown at police and at least two men were spotted behind a van taking turns holding a rifle.

Audoux testified in Moncton provincial court Thursday during the trial of Aaron Rene Francis, 20, of Eskasoni, and Germain Junior Breaux, 21, of Upper Rexton. The two men are charged with a combined 17 offences.

The officer said one of his colleagues who was closer to the action came on the radio and the tension of the situation was obvious. "I could sense the stress in his voice," said Audoux. "Those members had no cover, they were not concealed."

In all his years as a police officer and an Emergency Response Team member, Audoux said facing down shale gas protesters that day was unlike anything else.

"It's probably the most volatile situation I've ever been involved in," he said.

Jean-Francois Comeau was part of Audoux's team that morning and he said the situation was chaotic. At one point he looked down at his feet and found an unexploded Molotov cocktail.

"That was a very intense and bad moment for everybody there," he testified, adding everyone present, both Mounties and protesters were at risk for bodily harm or death. "There was really high tension and it went from a bad situation to a very bad situation."

While protesters were active in the spring and summer of 2013 in Kent County, this particular protest began Sept. 29 when a vehicle was used to block a compound on Route 134 that contained SWN Resources Canada exploration equipment. A protester camp was set up in the area and police closed the road for public safety reasons.

The RCMP finally moved in the morning of Oct. 17, with three tactical troops, Emergency Response Teams and many regular officers, to enforce an injunction that prohibited the blocking of highways and that compound in particular.

Sgt. Marc Potvin was one of the tactical troop leaders that morning and his group came out of the woods and surprised the protesters at the gate of the compound around 7:30 a.m. He said they didn't want to arrest everyone and just wanted to move them out of there.

At that point, one protester yelled out that police had no idea what the protesters had, and Potvin saw two people run into the woods. Moments later, a man in a black balaclava started lobbing objects at them. "Then the Molotov cocktails came down on us, at our feet," said Potvin.

Francis is standing trial on charges of having intent to do bodily harm by causing an explosive device to explode, placing or throwing at or on a person an explosive substance, possession of explosives while prohibited to do so, committing an offence while having his face masked and possession of a firearm for a dangerous purpose.

Breaux is standing trial on charges of possession of a firearm for a dangerous purpose, obstructing a police officer, five counts of pointing an Enfield rifle at four different RCMP officers and five counts of assaulting five different police officers with a rifle.

Premier on MLA: 'I don't want to prejudge'

ADAM HODNETT
THE TRIBUNE

CAMPBELLTON • Premier David Alward was noncommittal about embattled MLA Greg Davis of Campbellton-Res-tigouche Centre when he visited Davis's home turf Thursday to speak to a luncheon meeting of the Campbellton Regional Chamber of Commerce – an organization which Davis once headed.

When asked by reporters if anything was in place to monitor Davis's expenses in light of recent news that the party bailed him out in 2012 for \$5,125 owed for rent – after using the maximum \$40,000 allotted for

constituency expenses – Alward said, "there's a review that is taking place." "I don't want to prejudge the review. The information will be available in the next little while," he said.

Davis also fell more than six months behind on rent payments this year, a fact revealed after the furniture inside his Campbellton office was seized last month by his landlord and held for a few days until undisclosed arrangements were made to get the furniture returned.

This week it was also revealed that he had failed to pay Campbellton businessman John Van Horne \$5,125 for items and services related to his constituency

office. This sum, Van Horne said was finally paid in 2012 by the local constituency association.

Alward said the process underway is private and independent from parties and the government.

"The right systems, and process – I believe – are in place, but we will allow the review to take place and any recommendations to come forward. As a party, we support and are supporting fully the review that is going on and cooperating fully."

Opposition members have recently introduced a bill for the government to post all constituency allowance expenses online.

"We're supportive, in principle, of a motion, or a change that had come forward," said Alward. "There are some concerns about the specifics of the bill. So we're working on it, but we certainly support anything that can ensure information is as transparent as it possibly can be."

The premier also did not offer any insight into an undisclosed illness Davis alluded to in a media statement announcing he would not seek re-election.

"It's a question for Mr. Davis," Alward said, in French. "It's a question of health, but certainly we hope the best for Greg in future."

Minister backs shale gas rules in face of criticism

ADAM HURAS
LEGISLATURE BUREAU

SAINT JOHN • There has been a "breakdown in communication" between the province's chief medical officer and the Tory government over shale gas rules that aim to protect the health of New Brunswickers, says Energy Minister Craig Leonard.

Chief Medical Officer of Health Dr. Eilish Cleary recently voiced concerns that rules to sufficiently protect New Brunswickers and the environment as the shale gas industry develops are not yet in place.

Cleary stated that while the province's environmental impact assessment aims to mitigate industry's impact, a similar process is not available to look out for the environment or people.

Leonard disagreed with Cleary's evaluation in an editorial board meeting on Thursday.

"The Department of Health does sit on the technical review committee for the environmental impact assessment process," Leonard said. "Dr. Cleary's comments saying that the environmental impact assessment is for industry – the EIA is there to protect communities and protect the environment to make sure that projects that are moving forward are moving forward in a way that will protect the government and the surrounding communities."

Leonard added: "The Department of Health plays a role in that. If they see issues that they feel have to be dealt with before an approval is given they certainly make sure that is



Craig Leonard, minister of energy, speaks at an editorial board meeting Thursday in Saint John.
PHOTO: KATE BRAYDON/TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL

put in place.

"I'm not sure if it's a lack of communication between offices or what, but certainly we are comfortable with the system moving forward."

Cleary declined to comment on Leonard's words on Thursday, maintaining that the questions and concerns she raised publicly after a speech by Maritimes Energy Association CEO Barbara Pike were valid.

"How do we balance the competing demand of the environment, the people, and the economic side of it? Because currently in the system that we have, I have not been able to find the mechanism by which we can do that," Cleary said last week.

She added that the rules in place are seemingly not geared to protecting the environment or

New Brunswickers.

"We do have some processes within government to look at enabling the industry to move forward with some mitigation of pollution through the environmental impact assessment, but the customer is industry, as it should be," she said.

"We don't have similar processes to protect the environment or protect people. The rules for industry really don't address that. I don't think we can do it within the current mechanisms, the legislation probably isn't enough to do it either."

"Certainly the human resources and the fiscal restraint of government at the moment are limiting the ability to address it."

Leonard said Cleary's comments don't truly reflect the protections

government has brought forward.

"The latest comments that Dr. Cleary made at the Maritimes Energy Association meeting, it's one of those things where you look at it and say there is obviously a breakdown in communication here because all of these things are in place," Leonard said.

The energy minister then pledged that further measure will be put in place if the shale gas industry expands.

"If it's going to be this big increase in development then obviously we are going to have to take a look at how we're dealing with some of these measurements and health impacts to make sure we understand what is taking place," Leonard said. "The Department of Health has indicated all along they are fully in support of that."

Alward ranks least popular among provincial leaders in poll

CHRIS MORRIS
LEGISLATURE BUREAU

FREDERICTON • David Alward ranks as one of the most unpopular premiers in Canada, according to a new national poll.

The latest quarterly survey from Angus Reid Global on the job approval ratings of Canadian premiers suggests Alward is tied with Manitoba Premier Greg Selinger for the lowest approval ratings in Canada, each with 28 per cent.

Selinger and Alward would have

fared slightly better in the survey if Alison Redford, the now-former premier of Alberta, was still on the job. The poll suggests Redford would have been the most unpopular premier with an approval rating of just 23 per cent.

Redford resigned from office March 19.

Alward's rating has been 28 per cent for the last two survey results. His highest approval rating was in August 2012, when he scored 47 per cent.

The Angus Reid online survey was conducted among 6,445 randomly

selected Canadian adults between March 3 and 9.

In New Brunswick, the sample size was 247 and the margin of error was plus or minus 6.2 per cent.

Saskatchewan Premier Brad Wall is still the most popular provincial leader in the country, according to the Angus Reid poll.

Wall's rating is unmoved from late last year at 66 per cent.

The survey suggests Nova Scotia Premier Stephen McNeil also is well liked in his province, with an approval rating

of 59 per cent – up two points since December.

Although Alward's personal popularity has not fared well in recent opinion polls, a survey in February from Halifax-based Corporate Research Associates indicated considerable support for the Tory government's latest budget.

The polling firm said 48 per cent of those polled mostly or completely support the Tory government budget that forecasts a deficit of \$391 million in the coming year after a projected deficit of \$564 million for 2013-2014.

Leonard says nature of hydraulic fracking makes royalty structure problematic

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timeline on when that would be rolled out.

"We are looking at that model trying to figure out what the best way to deal with that is," he said.

"The goal is to have some kind of revenue stream that is going to go to the individual landowner and the surrounding communities, but what form that is going to take, we haven't got

down to that level of detail yet."

Leonard underscored the complications shale gas development – and particularly hydraulic fracturing – present to any form of landowner royalty structure.

He said the technology sees industry drill down, but then hydraulically fracture horizontally to cover long stretches of area underground likely running deep underneath several properties, raising the issue of which landowners

receive royalties.

Individual remuneration is also problematic.

"The landowner, if he drives too hard of a bargain, he might actually push the well off of his land and onto somebody else's because they can still tap into the resource," Leonard said.

"The community aspect is difficult as well in terms of where do you draw that line? If a well is in the

boundaries of one jurisdiction, what if it's 100 metres from a boundary of the jurisdiction? Does the other jurisdiction that's neighbouring it have any claim to any of those revenues as well?"

Leonard did say landowners are currently being compensated for allowing shale gas exploration companies onto their property and are likely to receive significantly higher levels of royalties if wells were to be developed.

"Landowners do get compensation through land access," he said. "Before a company can go on somebody's land, they've got to work out a deal with the landowner."

"When the question comes to 'we would like to put a well on your property,' that's going to change that dynamic and you would expect landowners would be negotiating some pretty good deals for themselves for that access."