

Custody legi

JOHN SYRTASH
Special to QMI Agency

Bill C-560 has moved to second reading in Parliament.

Conservative MP Maurice Vellacott's private member's bill aims to amend Canada's Divorce Act to create a rebuttable presumption of equal shared parenting.

If passed, it would mean divorced parents have an equal role in raising their children, unless one parent can prove why this should not be the case. Columnist Barbara Kay recently championed this legislation in the *National Post*, claiming it will cure the problems in the family law system. In high-conflict cases, she describes the family law system as very adversarial, "whereby one parent (usually the mother) 'wins' primary residence for the children, producing injustice, heartbreak and financial ruin on a massive scale."

She also quotes Toronto lawyer Brian Ludmer who claims in many European countries and Australia with equal shared parenting (ESP) legislation, the majority of divorced couples resolve parenting arrangements without turning

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Inconvenient truth

"Don't confuse us with facts." That's what opponents of the oilsands seem to be saying about the latest report on alleged links between oilsands development and cancer among First Nations people in northern Alberta.

Their next step will almost certainly be shooting the messenger, James Talbot, Alberta's chief medical officer of health. Watch for environmental activists and "green" politicians to start claiming Talbot is a puppet of the provincial government or "Big Oil."

On Monday, Talbot released a study of cancer rates in Fort Chipewyan, a little more than 200 km downstream from the oilsands plants.

The report included a look at all cases of cancer in the region between 1992 and 2011. The report found no elevated risk in the area. Whereas a population the size, age and gender of Fort Chip's should have had 79 cancer cases over the 19 years of the study, Fort Chip had 81. Statistically average.

Talbot did find that the occurrence of three types of cancer was slightly higher than it should be — cervical cancer, lung cancer and bile-duct can-



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cer. But, he explains isn't strong evidence of these cancers and mental exposure."

In other words, these three types of pollution from the was not the cause what went only par hinted at, really — was of these cancers has links to lifestyle cho the third one might a

If there are elevated levels of some type of cancer in the area, those are likely the result of lifestyle choices that from the 'sands seep the water or air.

The connection between smoking and lung cancer is well known.

Talbot didn't say that's the reason there were eight



CHRISTINA BLIZZARD

Time to retire Hydro's debt

It's that annoying, pesky line on your hydro bill.

"Debt Retirement Charge."

Of all the e-mails I get, the most frequent and the most frustrated are about the hefty charge the DRC adds to your bill.

Homeowners, especially seniors and others on a fixed income, are angry.

They're feeling it all the more as this brutal winter pushes heating costs to the stratosphere.

Many seniors bought their homes in the 1960s and '70s, when the old Ontario Hydro told them to "Live better electrically."

They heated their homes with hydro, thinking the low rates would continue forever.

Now they're paying soaring prices, soaring taxes — and the infuriating DRC. You pay HST on top of the DRC.

The DRC came about as a result of the "stranded debt," created when the old Ontario Hydro was split up into separate entities by the Mike Harris government.

In 1999, after a succession of bad decisions by governments of all stripes, the giant utility was in the red. The DRC was supposed to pay that down. But now it has been 15 years since the DRC kicked in.

Shouldn't it be paid off by now — given that every hydro ratepayer in the province is dinged a significant amount of money on every hydro bill?

Well, no. It's not paid off.

In fact, the Liberals quietly added \$4 billion to it.

"Back in 2009, there was \$4 billion added by the government that they didn't reveal until after the 2011 budget," says Tory finance critic Vic Fedeli.

The 2009, 2010 and 2011 financial statements show the debt to be low, but after that the Liberal government added \$4 billion to the debt, he says.

"They borrowed against it for non-hydro use, and that's why there's still a debt," Fedeli told me Tuesday.

"They used it as a piggy bank to borrow from.

"The most evil thing about it was that they didn't disclose that until years later and retroactively put it in the annual report," he said.

The DRC is applied at a rate of 0.7 cents per kilowatt hour.

I asked Finance Minister Charles Sousa if hydro ratepayers can expect to see a break in the DRC in the next budget.

"We're making that repayment and we'll outline in the current budget how that's going to proceed," he told me.

"I will refer to the budget when it's released in terms of some of the initiatives that are being brought forward, including price mitigation and initiatives around energy sustainability and the integrity of our energy supply and the investments we are making to support a vibrant industry.

"And we have to be competitive," Sousa said.

Sounds like a whole heapin' helpin' of bafflelegab to me.

Then again, I'm way too cynical these days.

In his 2011 report, then-auditor general Jim McCarter noted that the original amount of debt the DRC was intended to pay off was \$7.8 billion, yet there was still a balance, even though the government had collected \$8.7 billion by March 31, 2011.

McCarter's successor, Bonnie Lysyk, said last year that the amount collected has grown to \$10.6 billion as of 2013 — even though the government claims there's still \$3.9 billion owing.

So, if you have a \$7.8-billion debt and you collect \$10.6 billion to pay it off, shouldn't it be gone by now?

The DRC raises close to \$1 billion a year in annual revenue.

It was initially planned to be paid off by 2012. The Liberals pushed that back to between 2015 and 2018.

It wasn't supposed to be a permanent tax and was supposed to be dropped when the debt was paid off.

I think we've paid that off — big time.

It has to go — now.