

Opposition MPP calls out McGuinty over Debt Retirement Charge

By Dominik Kurek
OAKVILLE BEAVER STAFF

Ontario Progressive Conservatives want to know why residents are still paying the Debt Retirement Charge (DRC) on their hydro bills.

“Ontario families need to know why the McGuinty government will continue to charge them a billion dollars a year plus HST for a debt that should have already been paid, or at least paid off by next year,” said the MPP for Simcoe Grey Jim Wilson during an Oakville press conference Monday outside the transformer station on Cornwall Road and Maple Grove Drive

Wilson is the Progressive Conservative critic for Colleges and Universities, Research and Innovation.

The DRC was introduced in 1998 by the previous PC government to be used to pay down the residual stranded debt of the former Ontario Hydro. The DRC is added to electricity bills at a rate of 0.7 cents per kilowatt-hour. Wilson said Oakville families pay on average about \$67-84 per year in DRCs.

The debt was originally to be paid off by 2012, but the McGuinty government recently announced the debt charge would be extended until as late as 2018.

“According to the Ontario Electricity Financial Corporation, Ontario families have already paid \$7.8 billion during the past eight years and they should be right on schedule



NIKKI WESLEY / OAKVILLE BEAVER

THANK YOU: Ontario PC MPP Jim Wilson staged a press conference in Oakville on Monday afternoon to discuss Ontario's continuing Debt Retirement Charge.

Blame Mike Harris says Flynn

In a response to MPP Jim Wilson's visit to Oakville, the local MPP Kevin Flynn said he was surprised by the PC party's representative discussion over the debt retirement charge.

“I should say that I'm surprised that Jim Wilson has the audacity to visit Oakville and talk about the debt retirement charge when it was the (Mike) Harris government - with (Tim) Hudak and Wilson in it – that slapped this charge on the bills of Oakville families as a result of the Harris-Hudak government's failed restructuring of the electricity sector,”

he wrote in an email.

Flynn added the Liberal government has lowered the debt by \$5.7 billion.

“In contrast, the past Hudak/Harris government increased the debt by more than \$1-billion because of their failed energy policy. To date, \$7.8-billion has been collected and the amount that has not been used to pay down the principal has gone towards paying the interest on debt and covering the unnecessary cost of the Hudak-Harris government's rate freeze when they deregulated power,” Flynn added.

for release of this tax burden by next year,” Wilson said.

“Without explanation they have repeatedly pushed back the debt repayment date at a cost to Ontario families of about \$1 billion a year.”

Furthermore, Wilson added HST is also added to the DRC, which results in the government collecting an additional \$80 million per year in taxes.

He called for a forensic audit of the DRCs and the residual stranded debt to find out what the government is doing with the money and how much longer the charge will be charged to families.

“With each hydro bill, hardworking local families are being asked to send more money to Queen's Park with no explanation as to why the debt remains in place. Could you imagine getting a credit card bill with no balance on it, just an amount to pay each month?” Wilson asked.

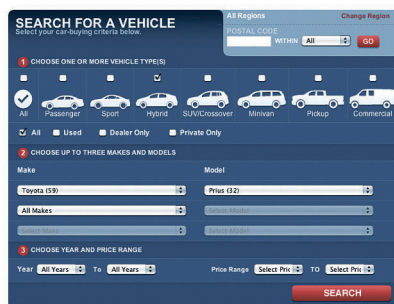
He added the PC caucus brought forward a motion in November that would force the McGuinty government to reveal how much debt remains and how much longer it will take to pay it off. However, he said the Liberals voted against the motion.

“They expect hard working Oakville families to pay this charge every month for six extra years but won't say where this money is going. They try to turn the debt retirement charge into a permanent tax grab.”

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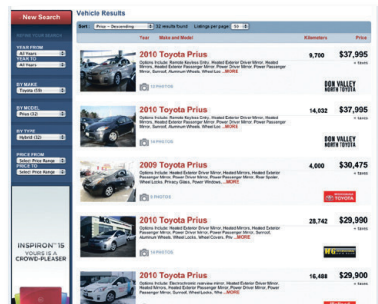
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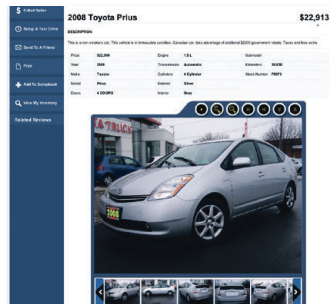
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