

Alberta Doctors' Digest

Delay: The deadliest form of denial

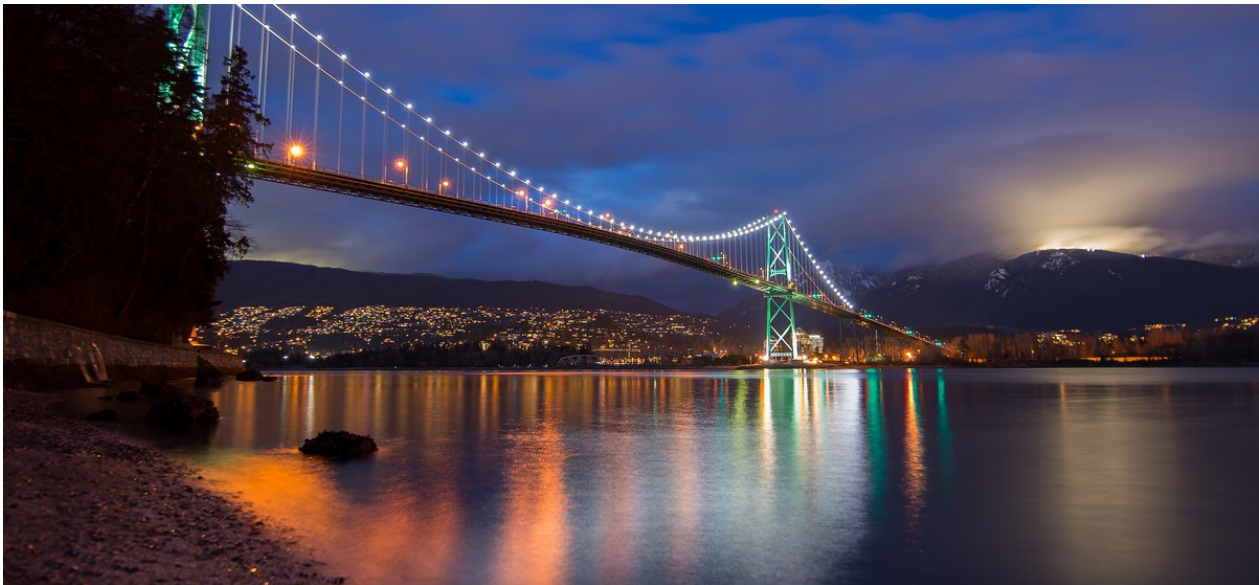
“The theory of negation by delay depends upon establishing a rough idea of what amount of delay will equal negation.” Professor C. Northcote Parkinson, *The Law of Delay*

I've just returned from a short holiday in Nanaimo, Vancouver Island, where over three years ago I bought a townhouse. A smart new oil spill rescue boat bobbles in the harbor. It is washed every week.

I was content with this property in a lovely part of a country I naively thought was Canada but which increasingly appears to be the Democratic Republic of British Columbia. I'm obliged to pay BC non-resident fees on ferries, much higher non-resident property taxes to the fractious Nanaimo City Council and now, to cap it all, I'm labelled a “speculator” by the BC provincial government – a minority body aptly labelled by *National Post's* Conrad Black as a “pantomime-horse of a government” being a shaky alliance of the NDP (a party formerly pro-working folk and good jobs) propped up by three Vancouver Island Green Party pols, a one-issue middle class party:

“We shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be. We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills ... we shall fight with every tool in the toolbox; we shall never surrender ... though we still transport huge amounts of coal and burn imported gasoline – which is OK as long as it's not made from diluted bitumen coming anywhere near where we have chosen to live.”

BC Green Party members have crowned themselves Nature's Revolutionary Guards while the rest of us working stiffs pay for their lifestyle. If you didn't vote Green, then you must be against environmental protection. This angers many of us, who are anxious to protect the environment but who have been dismayed by the zealotry of this tiny group of rookie MLAs stymying the national interest and legitimate expansion of the Trans Mountain pipeline.



I'm uncertain they really see themselves as Canadians, more as British Columbians who, like some Quebecers, are happy to participate in the wealth of Canada but join unwillingly in the Canada of Natural Resources and the need to pay for these good things. (Photo credit: James Wheeler, Pixabay)

The weather for March was mild and sunny, though the atmosphere – given the increasing bitterness of the pipeline war – was sometimes chilly when talking to young people in Nanaimo who are largely in vehement opposition to Trans Mountain. I was seen as an old fart: pro-pipeline, ergo anti-environment.

Vancouver Island is populated by people who are understandably fighting to protect their environment, enjoying as they do, one of the loveliest places in Canada to live. It's also one of the most temperate climates; everyone likes to grow veggies in their gardens. They suffer not the discomfort of the raw winter on the prairies or the chilling cold of eastern Canada – though they do demand equal treatment when it comes to medical services, schools, security and welfare cheques.

I'm uncertain they really see themselves as Canadians, more as British Columbians who, like some Quebecers, are happy to participate in the wealth of Canada but join unwillingly in the Canada of Natural Resources and the need to pay for these good things. There is a tendency toward head-in-sand isolationism. Bowen Island some years ago declared itself a nuclear-free zone and the dictators of the world trembled. Their actions are often NIMBYism cloaked in a garb of social justice or pop climate science.

It was an interesting visit. My son and his wife have bought an expensive shack in Nanaimo. I met some of their young friends and had uncomfortable but enlightening discussions. We played some golf.

Many Alberta doctors have vacation properties in BC. At the beginning of March, the BC Minister of Finance, the Honorable Carole James, announced plans to introduce a “speculator tax” on properties bought not only in Vancouver where a 15% “alien buyer tax” and a 2% “empty homes tax” already exists (i.e., if you own property in the City of Vancouver and do not rent it out for at least six months per year or do not live there as your principal residence for six months per year, you will be liable for an annual tax of 2% of the market value of the property). They also announced plans to introduce a

similar speculator/empty homes tax in Victoria, Nanaimo and other areas such as Kelowna.

There is a tendency in BC towards head-in-sand isolationism. Bowen Island some years ago declared itself a nuclear-free zone and the dictators of the world trembled.

Since then, the plan has morphed to exclude some areas and not others. Whistler and Squamish, places where many Vancouverites have bought vacation properties and where prices are stratospheric, are not included (property bought there was apparently not “speculation”) but regions and cities where many non-BC residents have “speculated” on property are to be taxed.

My son insists these new taxes are not connected to the pipeline issue since the empty home problem in BC has existed for a long time. He may be right, but my suspicion is that the tax grab will be kept for those areas where the “non-BC resident” population – particularly Albertans – is high as a blow-back for the now-abandoned embargo of BC wines. BC of course has never allowed the sale of Alberta wines, spirits or beer without big extra tariffs.

What does the word “speculator” mean economically? Well, it’s what everyone does in the investing world – only fools keep their money in a bank account – but “speculator” does have unpleasant connotations of underhand skullduggery in retirement planning or buying vacation properties. No doubt this is unintentional.

We chatted in the White Sails Brewery Pub on Nanaimo’s Comox Street. “Why do you have a problem with the expansion of the Kinder-Morgan pipeline?” I asked a young woman, a BC government bureaucrat living in Victoria. “Because it only benefits Alberta, not us, and we’re the ones who clean up the mess when there’s a spill ... and it’s causing climate change,” she said.

“But royalties benefit the whole of Canada,” I said. “Well-paying jobs for working folk in Canada are in large part dependent on natural resources. The chances of an oil spill are small, and these days the response to a spill is well organized. Canada’s contribution to CO₂ emissions is tiny compared to other countries.”

But Ronald Reagan once commented: “If you’re explaining, you’re losing.”

I unwisely continued, this time to her boyfriend: “Many of your so-called activists are paid from foreign money. The Canadian economy is dependent on exporting its natural resources. I doubt that Russia, China, Venezuela, Nigeria or the USA give a shit about climate change despite what they say. We’re a tiny player in the climate game, and your Green Party is demanding an outsized price from our country which no other oil producers pay.”

I detected a flicker of doubt in my young friend’s face so I pressed on uneasily:

“We were in Hong Kong in February. Between the airport and Kowloon on the airport express train, we saw scores of oil tankers docked in a multitude of bays, cranes loading and unloading – I gave up counting after 70 tankers. Travelling on the Horseshoe Bay to Nanaimo ferry, I counted six tankers off the Port of Vancouver.”

“If there’s got to be a pipeline, we think it should go east. Why aren’t you fighting for that?” he said.

He had a point, but that proposal has not gone through the insane Parkinsonian Maze of Delay set up by the federal government with their Bill C-69, creating the boondoggle “Impact Assessment Agency of Canada” which demands reporting of up- and down-stream carbon emissions, health effects, and effects on Indigenous communities for any new pipelines. Manufacturing industries like Bombardier using oil energy will not have to do this. Imported oil does not have to do this. In other words, until there is a change in government thinking in this country and a resolve to take difficult decisions in the national interest, there will be no pipelines built (or any other national endeavor except perhaps pot consumption) and Canadian GDP growth will shrink this year and next.

Their actions are often NIMBYism cloaked in a garb of social justice or pop climate science.

Of course, investment in the country will decline as is already happening. Why not just say it instead of sneakily invoking Parkinson’s Second Law and the expense of this new blather shop? Peter Loughheed was correct: the rest of Canada – rather as The Little Red Hen discovered when she asks for help baking bread – has little interest in supporting hard times in Alberta, but they sure will take the money.

“We don’t know why you can’t just focus on exporting conventional oil and leave the tar sands in place. We’ll just have to follow the lead of protesters of the Dakota Access pipeline.”

I found this particularly annoying – this coming from a recent immigrant from Britain, escaping a jobless future there, who has quaffed the cola of Manacled Martyr May, and the UVIC comfortably tenured, Andrew Warrior Weaver, puffed up with certainty and sudden power (“We will make Vancouver the greenest city on the planet. We will never allow diluted bitumen to be transported here”) and invoking anti-Americanism (“Why are we bowing to the artificial deadline of a Texas company?”) and ingenuously to boot (“We need cooler heads to prevail” – his presumably). I have, however, since warmed to Mr. W. – he is against this nasty “speculator tax” – no doubt it will hit house prices in Victoria.

The legality of the K-M pipeline expansion seems solid but with little help from a hypocritical federal government desperately trying to tiptoe between the puddles (or even from Her Majesty’s Loyal Opposition), there are fierce fights ahead to get this pipeline laid. Premier Notley is doing as good a job as anyone can, but my guess is that Alberta may have to make a financial or political investment in getting the pipeline built. And a clear timeline countdown for cutting the oil flow to BC will have to be set in motion to get this lot to come to their senses. Even then, they will be chaining themselves to their kayaks and picnic tables – prepare for daily photo ops of Greens flouting the law and being carried into vans by smiling policemen.

After all, when your vision is planetary and you’re saving the planet from the shores of Vancouver Island, you are obviously above the law and the mere national interest.

Banner photo credit: Elgin Akyurt, Pixabay.com