

Canada

Share parenting after divorce: MPs



— CP

Anne Cools, Roger Gallaway speak to media.

OTTAWA — Shared parenting should be the legal cornerstone of the Divorce Act under changes to be proposed by a controversial parliamentary committee, the Ottawa Citizen reported yesterday.

In a final report expected to be completed early this week, the joint Senate-Commons Committee on Child Custody and Access will recommend that the federal law be amended to recognize the principle that both parents are equal with respect to children after separation and divorce, the Citizen reported.

Shared parenting would eliminate the existing "primary care principle" where one parent can be awarded sole custody of a child. In all but extraordinary cases, it would mean that both parents have the legal right to access.

It would not, however, automatically mean a 50-50 arrangement.

The all-party committee is expected to recommend that judges who rule in sep-

aration and divorce cases do so from the principle that it is a child's right to develop a nurturing relationship with both parents — and the right of both parents to have regular and predictable access to their children.

Any committee recommendations to amend the 30-year-old Divorce Act will have to be passed by the Commons and Senate before they become law.

The committee was due to present its report to Parliament, and Justice Minister Anne McLellan at the end of this month but have been granted a delay of about two weeks.

The committee, co-chaired by Liberal MP Roger Gallaway and Liberal Senator Landon Pearson, has been dubbed the "Politically Incorrect Committee" because of the number of pro-father submissions it has heard. Women's

advocates from across the country have complained that some members of the committee treated them badly when they testified and appeared to be biased.

Gallaway, and fellow committee member Senator Anne Cools, a champion of fathers' rights, called a news conference Friday to criticize Hedy Fry, secretary of state for status of women, for allowing her department's Web site to carry links to feminist groups attempting to discredit the committee. One Web site, they said, is encouraging people to write letters to the government denouncing the committee.



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Fry denies she had interfered in the committee's work. The department's Web site has always had links to a variety of women's groups as a resource for readers, she said in an interview with Canadian Press.

— Canadian Press