

Stronger child-care supports would be the best Mother's Day gift ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Mother's Day is coming. You should give your mom a nice gift. Most likely, she's taking (or has taken) a big hit for "Team Saskatchewan."

Kids are our future leaders, workers and citizens — everyone needs and benefits from them. Yet moms still shoulder a greater share of the costs of having kids. There are the obvious costs to moms: pregnancy's toll on the body, the sleepless nights, the endless mental stresses of parenting — and the chronic fear of screwing up your kids.

But there is also an economic cost. While most women will say that being a mom is personally rewarding, financially, it isn't.

Back in the early 1990s, the Supreme Court of Canada's decision in *Symes vs. Canada* recognized conclusive evidence "that women bear a disproportionate share of the child-care burden in Canada ... whether or not women work outside the home." Twenty-five years later, it's still true.

In 2009, a report by the Ministry of Advanced Education, Employment and Labour, titled *Unpaid Work by Women* stated that 19% of Saskatchewan women performed more than 30 hours of unpaid child care per week. For men it was 9%.

Data from 2016 showed that while wage rates for Saskatchewan women are 83.9% of men's, their annual incomes are only 67.5% of men's. The Saskatchewan Status of Women report titled *Personal Income for Saskatchewan* stated that the "clear implication" of this is that the income gap isn't just due to the fact that women have lower wage rates. It is also due to the fact that women are more likely to leave paid work than men and are more likely to take part-time employment than men.

The bottom line is this: women take home less money than men. And child-care demands are a big reason why. Moms tend to drop out of the paid work force when child care is too expensive or unavailable. They tend to opt for jobs with "family friendly" hours over jobs with better pay.

In fact, according to Statistics Canada, Saskatchewan has one of the highest gender employment gaps in Canada (8.2%) despite its high employment rate. But this isn't surprising because we also have Canada's most acute daycare shortage. Only about 13% of Saskatchewan children age 0-5 years have access to licensed care (*Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada 2014*, Childcare Resource and Research Unit).

The 2016 census says we have 215,685 kids under age 14. We have only 15,057 licensed spaces in child-care centres. This is bad news for Saskatchewan moms because child care is essential to women's economic and employment equality.

I must give some credit to the current government. Over the last 10 years, they've created more than 6,500 spaces. It is a significant move in the right direction. But Saskatchewan still has a LOT of work to do.

Daycare didn't get cut in the 2017 budget; but its conjoined twin — education — took a beating. That has repercussions for child care, especially those programs located in schools, now that school divisions are looking for cost savings.

Also, there is a shortage of qualified child-care workers. And with 889 additional child-care spaces opening this fall, daycares don't know how they'll find enough staff. I don't see this situation ending well.

And even with the additional spaces, we still don't have nearly enough. This means we can't afford to lose a single one of our existing spaces. We need to promote the viability of these spaces. Ending the crippling property taxes paid by non-profit daycares across the province would be a good start.

100% of the population benefits when kids receive quality child care. Every dollar invested yields huge returns when the next generation of kids has maximized their earliest developmental years.

If you are still looking for a gift idea for your mom, your support for stronger child care in this province is one of the best gifts you could give.

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