

Child care in 'crisis': Gerrard ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Jon Gerrard says Manitoba is in a "crisis" for child-care availability and pledged to push for a system that wipes out the deficit of space.

The Liberal River Heights MLA, who is in a three-person race to take leadership of the provincial party, said if he is the successful candidate next month he will establish a task force to examine a system that has more than 16,000 children waiting for care in Manitoba.

Gerrard, who will find out if his party elects him leader at an Oct. 21 contest with Burrows MLA Cindy Lamoureux and Dougald Lamont, said he would appoint that task force within the first two months of being elected leader.

"The task force report will provide us with a plan, which we would then implement should we have a Liberal government in 2020 and that plan would be for a system for universal care and early childhood learning," Gerrard said.

Gerrard said 17 years of NDP rule put the province in deficit, and he charged that the current Progressive Conservative government has merely added to it, saying they "haven't been aggressive enough".

"They've announced a few child-care spaces here and there, but they're not sufficient," Gerrard said. "Under the NDP, they didn't recognize the extent of the growing demand, they didn't really tackle the whole problem, they tinkered with it, and now we need to solve this deficit. It's actually a crisis right now."

Gerrard cited a 2016 Probe Research poll that found 41% of parents delayed returning to work because of lacking child care, while 31% say they'd turned down a job because of it.

"We need to do this to unblock the economic growth in the province and make sure that these people who want to work can be working," Gerrard said. "It will help parents, it will help the children with their development."

"We need to have enough spaces, we need to be able to reduce wait times to less than three months, we need to look at the making sure that those who are in the system are getting fair wages and we need to make sure that it really is a system."

"It's not going to be easy but it starts with having a plan and the determination to put it through."

-reprinted from Winnipeg Sun

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