

B.C. Greens push reforms to NDP childcare promises ^[1]

B.C.'s Green leader is dismissing the voter pressure growing on the NDP government to fulfill its \$10-a-day childcare plan, saying promises made in the election are now inconsequential.

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EXCERPTS

VICTORIA - B.C.'s Green leader is dismissing the voter pressure growing on the NDP government to fulfill its \$10-a-day childcare plan, saying promises made by New Democrats in the election are now inconsequential.

Andrew Weaver said he is pleased that the NDP didn't include its marquee election promise of \$10-a-day childcare in the government's first budget update on Monday, because the Greens don't support the idea as is, and it isn't part of the power-sharing agreement between the two parties that gives the NDP the votes required to govern.

"What the NDP promised in their election campaign is not really relevant to the situation today," Weaver told reporters at the legislature on Tuesday. "Because we also promised things in our election campaign, the Liberals did as well. What's important is we find the shared values that we can actually build upon, and that's precisely what we've done.

"Both the B.C. NDP and B.C. Greens support universal childcare, we both support some of the details, and we're very close, but I would argue that broad stakeholders need to be consulted in that."

Finance Minister Carole James said her government will consult with childcare experts, advocates, educators and the Green party this fall to alter the proposed \$10-a-day plan and turn it into the best policy possible. Without Green support, the NDP doesn't have enough votes to pass legislation.

"People know this is the reality of a minority government," said James, who insisted she didn't want to "pre-judge" the consultations by predicting what kind of childcare plan might emerge from them.

"The childcare advocates know that as well. They know that \$10-a-day childcare continues to be our commitment, so whether it happens year one, whether it happens later on, whether we're able to move on it in the first year or second year ... that's the reality of a minority government. There's give and take and there's discussion. We're not always going to agree."

The Greens ran in the May election campaign on a universal childcare promise that would offer 25 free hours per week for three- and four-year-old children, free daycare for working parents with kids under three years old, and a \$500 monthly credit for a stay-at-home parent. The childcare would be a taxable benefit for people with incomes of more than \$80,000. The proposal was costed at \$4.239 billion phased in over four years.

The NDP promised \$10-a-day, full-time childcare, \$7-a-day part-time, and free childcare for low-income families, to be phased in over 10 years. The cost was estimated at \$1.5 billion a year.

Both plans are actually compatible and could be merged together, said Paul Kershaw, a professor at the University of B.C.'s School of Population and Public Health. Both provide a free option to low-income earners, for example.

"I don't see any major risks for the plan" by allowing more consultation, he said. "I see the smaller part of a coalition saying I want you to be even more detailed."

Sharon Gregson, spokesperson for the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of B.C.'s \$10-a-day campaign, said she is supportive of removing the \$10-a-day branding if it would help the Greens support the idea.

"I don't mind if we don't see the branding, as long as we see good public policy on childcare, and that policy I think the Greens and NDP agree on because it is in the agreement," said Gregson. "I think there is a way to meet the Green party needs for access and meet the objectives of the \$10-a-day plan."

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