

BC Greens won't vote against NDP plans for rent, daycare ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The BC Green Party is not prepared to vote against the NDP government on a rental subsidy and \$10-a-day daycare plan, even though Green Leader Andrew Weaver has flatly declared that the NDP's vision for both election platform planks won't happen.

"We're not in a political brinksmanship world here," Green MLA Sonia Furstenuau said in an interview on Wednesday, rejecting the possibility of an anti-NDP vote by the Greens, who have committed to voting with the NDP on confidence measures.

Pressed on whether she was answering Yes or No on bringing down the government on these issues, Ms. Furstenuau said: "No. We're in a working relationship where, ideally, we can work out disagreements in a collaborative and co-operative way."

The position removes some of the teeth from Mr. Weaver's biting criticism of the NDP policies on rent and daycare. On Tuesday, he declared the NDP will not pass the measures as proposed. He called the election commitments "irrelevant right now" because the NDP did not win the May election.

The NDP formed a minority government after signing a governing agreement with the Greens. B.C. voters had returned 43 Liberal MLAs, 41 NDP and three Greens. It is the first NDP government in B.C. in 16 years.

On child care, the agreement said the parties agree to "invest in childcare and early childhood education to improve quality, expand spaces, increase affordability and ensure childcare is accessible for all families, with a focus on early childhood education."

On Monday, the NDP introduced a budget update that had no details or funding for either the child-care or rental-subsidy program with Finance Minister Carole James saying both programs need further development, including talks with the Greens.

Mr. Weaver said the NDP plan to provide \$400 a year to help B.C. renters with the cost of their housing is a waste of money, partly because the amount is too small to make much of a difference.

And while supportive of the idea of more affordable and accessible daycare, Mr. Weaver has been skeptical about the NDP's touting of a \$10-per-day program, calling for a more nuanced policy.

During the spring election campaign, the NDP ran on a platform that called for \$10-a-day child care, with part-time care for \$7 a day. No fees are to be charged for families with annual incomes below \$40,000 a year under the plan advanced during the campaign.

In their election platform, the Greens included a commitment to free daycare for working parents with children under 3. It also included up to 25 hours of free early childhood education a week for three- and four-year-olds. Ms. Furstenuau noted that free child care would be means tested and seen as a taxable benefit in households earning more than \$80,000 per year.

On Wednesday, the NDP acknowledged differences with the Greens on child care, but said it is committed to reaching a consensus.

"The Greens have different ideas about how to get there, but we share the same goals," Katrina Chen, the minister of state for child care, said in a statement.

"We're already consulting on our implementation plan, getting ready for the February budget. We know we're not going to agree on everything with the Greens, but we have a solid working relationship and our end goal is the same: making life better for people. Our agreement is working well and producing results."

Ms. Chen's cabinet mandate letter from Premier John Horgan calls on her to work with all levels of government, child-care providers and private and not-for-profit sectors to implement a universal child-care plan that provides affordable, accessible and high-quality care and early learning to every child whose family wants or needs it. She is also asked to accelerate the creation of new child-care spaces in communities across the province.

Ms. Furstenuau said talks on daycare, as with many issues, have been under way since the government was sworn in this summer. The Greens, she said, want affordable, accessible high-quality child care that includes components of early childhood education.

She said the NDP and Greens agree on the importance of early child-care education, and the urgency to see the best possible agreement,

but will need more time to finalize a plan ahead of a full budget next February.

"I don't think there's going to be any significant disagreement in terms of what we're trying to achieve in terms of details," she said.
"Hammering out the details is not, I don't see, going to be an impediment to seeing this legislation come forward."

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