

# Niki Ashton's twins came to work with her at 11 days old, and she says it's time for a change <sup>[1]</sup>

maternity and parental leave, gender, workforce, equity, social policies and programs, government

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## AVAILABILITY

Read/watch/listen online <sup>[2]</sup>

## EXCERPTS

Niki Ashton's twins attended their first public event at 11 days old.

Arriving on Halloween, just after the NDP leadership race wrapped up, Ashton's babies were almost immediately — and necessarily — thrust into the political life chosen by their mother. Like all federal MPs with kids, Ashton has no access to maternity leave, so she was back to work within a few weeks.

Three months later, she says she's tired and leaning heavily on her family and friends, but everyone seems to be adapting.

"(The twins) hit the road in the constituency with me. They've come to office hours," Ashton told The West Block's Vassy Kapelos as the two enjoyed a meal together at a Greek restaurant in Ottawa.

Ashton's situation, and the pregnancy of cabinet minister Karina Gould, have revived the discussion around expanding, or at least formalizing, parental leave on Parliament Hill.

The daycare on Parliament Hill still doesn't take children under 18 months. And because MPs don't pay into employment insurance, they must normally be back on the job within 21 days after they (or their partner) give birth. After that they'll be docked pay, although sometimes extra time away can be worked out with help from party whips.

Ashton says she doesn't think any new policies necessarily have to mirror the options afforded to the rest of Canadians (12 or 18 months off work, in most cases), but some regulated time off work would be helpful — as would better childcare options for Hill infants.

"Parliament and the system around it was primarily designed by old, white men ... so the structures that exist certainly fit into that frame."

Parliament needs "to be prepared to make adjustments" in the modern era, Ashton noted, not just for parents, but for other members of Canadian society including people with disabilities and Indigenous Canadians.

## Harassment 'rampant'

Ashton, who was first elected in her 20s, also addressed the recent spate of sexual harassment and assault allegations on Parliament Hill, which has touched every major party including the NDP.

"I think we're living in a very historic time," she said, referencing the #MeToo movement and similar campaigns.

In terms of her future, Ashton said she has no regrets about her recent run for the NDP leadership but isn't keen to repeat it in the coming years. She's also currently completing her PhD in peace and conflict studies, with a focus on millennial feminism.

If she were ever to leave Parliament Hill, she said, her interests would likely remain the same.

"There are other things that I see the possibility of doing down the line, but it's all connected."

[Interview with Niki Ashton, available to view online]

-reprinted from Global News

**Related link:**

**Region:** Canada <sup>[3]</sup>

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[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/18/02/niki-ashton%E2%80%99s-twins-came-work-her-11-days-old-and-she-says-it%E2%80%99s-time> [2] <https://globalnews.ca/news/4016042/niki-ashton-twins-ndp-work-11-days-old/> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7864> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/maternity-and-parental-leave> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/gender> [6] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/workforce> [7] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/equity> [8] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/social-policies-and-programs> [9] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/8941>