

# NDP promises affordable child care, ending privatization in health care <sup>[1]</sup>

It's been 13 years since the NDP held a seat in the New Brunswick Legislature

**Author:** CBC News

**Source:** CBC News

**Format:** Article

**Publication Date:** 18 Sep 2018

## AVAILABILITY

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

## EXCERPTS

After more than a decade, the NDP is hoping to take back a seat in the New Brunswick Legislature in next week's election.

It's been 13 years since the NDP has had a seat in the legislature ever since Elizabeth Weir — who was elected four times between 1991 and 2003 — retired from politics and left her position as head of the NDP in New Brunswick.

Now NDP Leader Jennifer McKenzie, who's running in Weir's old riding of Saint John Harbour, is planning to turn that around by defeating Liberal Gerry Lowe, a Saint John city councillor, PC candidate Barry Ogden, a retired teacher, Green Party candidate Wayne Dryer and Margot Brideau, who's running for the People's Alliance.

"It's really important that we have a seat this time and a voice this time and something that we can build on across the province," said McKenzie.

She was announced as the party's new leader in August 2017, after the resignation of former NDP Leader Dominic Cardy, who has since joined the PC party.

In the last election, when Cardy was leader, the NDP garnered 13 per cent of the popular vote, the highest in the party's history.

The latest polls suggest support has slipped to 5.6 per cent or less.

But McKenzie contends she's been receiving good reception from people while canvassing through her riding.

"I don't know where they're doing their polling and who they're calling," she said. "When we go to the door and talk to people and tell them who we are and what we stand for and what we're going to do should we be government, we get a very, very strong positive reaction to our platform.

"People are almost relieved that there's somebody actually listening to them and recognizing the problems they face on a daily basis ... feeding their families, paying their bills."

## Child care for parents

A key plank in McKenzie's platform calls for the creation of 24,000 child-care spaces before and after school.

Those child-care spaces would be placed in empty classrooms in every public school where there is parental demand. They would be run by the school board and staffed by people already working in the school.

"An early childhood educator might work from six in the morning until noon for example, and then another one would take over from noon until 6 p.m.," she said.

"So the children are in an environment where they have a lot of the things they need, like the library, the gym and the playground. But they're also with people that they already trust and know from the school day, and they have the types of administration that knows how to look after small children in the elementary school setting."

Of those spaces, 4,000 of them would be preschool spaces, where there has been an identified shortage by government.

[Video clip available to view online]

McKenzie said the new system would coexist with the current child-care system, but meet the demand that's still out there

She said the program is modelled after the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, which she served as chair of for two terms.

McKenzie said the program was paid for by the parents. Meanwhile, subsidies would move with the children who qualified for subsidies.

"In our case, we started out with a \$15 a day child-care program and we heard back that was too much for families, so we've modified it to \$10 a day, which would be subsidized by about 30 per cent by the taxpayer," she said.

### **Pay equity**

If elected, McKenzie said she would impose pay equity immediately into the private sector by starting with the home care industry, which is "predominantly women."

"They're doing a lot of very intense, complex work and we would make sure they got immediate attention from the government."

She said home care employees work long hours and haven't received a lot of "respect from their employer."

[Audio clip available to stream online: Information Morning, Moncton: NB Votes- Jennifer McKenzie]

"The employer is the government, they're the ones holding the purse strings," she said. "By default they're the ones setting the standards for the work that these women and men are doing."

She understands pay equity is not a quick process, particularly in the private sector, but said it's important to start somewhere and that the process is handled with care.

"You would have to insist the private industries start right away," she said.

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