

Quebec election: PQ vows to 'eliminate' daycare waiting list by 2022 ^[1]

The Parti Québécois promises to open up an additional 26,800 spots in subsidized daycares across the province during its first mandate.

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EXCERPTS

REPENTIGNY — When it came time to get the math right on one of his key promises, Jean-François Lisée said he just “got lucky.”

Five days ago, the Parti Québécois leader promised to create an additional 17,000 spots in the province’s subsidized daycare system within its first mandate. The idea was to wipe out the waiting lists preventing families from access to affordable childcare.

But after a comprehensive review of the numbers, researchers at the party realized they’d actually need to create 21,000 new spots — in addition to the 5,800 sports the outgoing Liberals have already promised to create over the next four years — to eliminate the waiting list.

There’s just one problem. While their initial figure jumped by 23.5 per cent, the amount the PQ budgeted to pay for this promise didn’t go up at all. Not by one cent.

The pledge would cost \$470 million a year — the same amount as when the party announced it would only create 17,000 new spots.

“We got lucky,” said Lisée, during a campaign stop in Lavaltrie, Tuesday. “Because we’re not in government — we don’t have the official numbers — we can’t make our calculations with surgical precision.

“Our researchers knew we were within a few thousand spots of the right number ... so we gave ourselves some room to manoeuvre in the budget.”

In its proposed budget, released last week, the PQ was the only party to use the auditor general’s forecasts on economic growth and government expenses. Lisée has used this to accuse his opponents of using “Harry Potter magic” to make their numbers work.

But the daycare forecast certainly calls the party’s methodology into question. Though he avoided the specifics of how he costed his daycare plan, Lisée insists the numbers will work.

“There’s no promise we can’t make within the budgetary numbers we put forward,” Lisée said. “We were prudent in our design.”

The promise of expanding Quebec’s subsidized daycare from serving 95,000 to roughly 120,000 children won’t be an easy one. It took successive PQ and Liberal governments 11 years to add that many spots.

Lisée says his government could do it in under four.

“We’re absolutely confident it can happen,” he said. “It’s easier now because we were starting from nothing in 1997. We’re working with a network that exists, that has expertise and that’s able to expand.”

Lisée had previously committed to structuring daycare fees to \$8.05 a day for a family’s first child, \$4 for its second and free for the third. Daycare services would also be free for households earning less than \$34,000 a year.

Families pay between \$8.05 to \$19.35 per day, depending on their income, with the current model. The PQ and Coalition Avenir Québec have dubbed this the “family tax” and both have vowed to eliminate it.

On child care, the CAQ has promised to create universal kindergarten for 50,000 four-year-olds across the province. CAQ Leader François Legault has been criticized for pricing this project at \$311 million.

When confronted by Liberal Leader Philippe Couillard at Monday’s English language debate, Legault stood by his party’s estimates.

“You’re a doctor. I’m a chartered accountant,” he told Couillard. “I think I know the numbers better than you.”

The Liberal leader hit back hard.

“If you were my accountant, I would fire you.”

Lisée didn't let up on the CAQ leader at Tuesday's announcement.

"It just isn't credible," he said, of the CAQ's kindergarten promise. "There is no known universe where it would be possible to add 5,000 new classrooms to Quebec's elementary schools. Quebec's schools are bursting at the seams.

"A CAQ government would wreak havoc on childcare."

It was a PQ government that created the network of subsidized daycare centres in 1997. This service has since become a fact of daily life in Quebec.

"It's a great asset that we've built together over the past 20 years," said Lisée. "When you cross the border into Ontario or New York, it costs \$50 a day for daycare. And here it's \$8 and less.

"The PQ has done so much to make the place in Quebec that's done the most for families."

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