

Address by the Prime Minister in reply to the Speech from the Throne ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

Text of the speech ^[2]

Excerpts from the speech:

Mr. Speaker, during the campaign we spoke to Canadians of our plan to create a nationwide program of early learning and child care &em; a high-quality system, open and available to all, affordable and geared to development.

This represents a major initiative. It is going to take some time. But it is worth the effort and it is worth the investment because of the potential benefits &em; to our economy, yes, but most importantly to the lives and the future of our youngest Canadians.

Let me say: One of the accomplishments of the Liberal government of which I am most proud is the introduction in 1997 of the Canada Child Tax Benefit. That too was a government program that started small. But look how it has grown. Look how it has made a difference in the lives of families and children. By 2007, the government's annual contribution through the credit will be more than \$10-billion &em; money that directly helps the children who need it most.

Our plan for early learning and child care will follow that pattern. Once established, it will grow, helping more families, teaching more children.

Because the program will be focused on early learning and development, it will help children be ready to learn when they start school. It will give them a tangible head start and set them on the path to lifelong achievement.

Because the program will be open to all, it will level the playing field for children who are disadvantaged by birth or background.

Because the program will be affordable and high-quality, parents who choose to participate more fully in the paid work force will be able to do so with the comfort and security of knowing their children are in a nurturing, stimulating environment.

We are dedicated to working with our provincial and territorial partners to make this program a reality. We are dedicated because we believe that a strong, Canada-wide program of early learning and care for our children is the single best investment we can make in their future and in ours.

It is my belief that like those who were in this place at the creation of Medicare, and who decades later look back with such pride at that defining moment in Canadian social policy, so too will members of this House recall the forging of this important social achievement.

Tags: affordability ^[3]

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child development ^[5]

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federalism ^[7]

federal programs ^[8]

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