

Requiem for \$25/day childcare ^[1]

Author: Appel, Jeremy

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EXCERPTS

Let's face it. Twenty-five-dollar-a-day childcare is dead in the water.

Sure, as Minister of Children's Services and recent Medicine Hat News contributor Rebecca Schulz was quick to remind everyone, the three-year contracts with select daycares have simply come to an end.

"The terms have not changed," she said in statement.

The 22 daycares that were part of the first round will expire in June, which Schulz emphasized is a (slight) extension, while the 100 centres chosen in the second round, including four in the Hat, will expire in March 2021.

But the government has shown no indication it wants to build on the buddings of universal childcare. Quite the contrary.

The indisputable fact is the government made a decision not to renew the contracts.

As has become an established pattern for the UCP government, they're laying blame on Justin Trudeau's Liberals.

The feds provided funding for provincial childcare programs, the province argues, so they must wait for a new funding formula.

However, they haven't offered any indication of what they're looking for the feds to provide.

And the UCP has made no secret of its opposition to this program.

Since the pilot was implemented, Cypress-Medicine Hat MLA Drew Barnes has opposed the program's universality, equating it with "subsidizing millionaires' daycares."

The same could be said of any universal program, such as health care, which is precisely the point.

It's a way of delegitimizing the public sector on the march to economic apartheid, where we have pricey private services for the privileged and well-connected, and an under-funded public sector for the the rest.

Of course, the UCP had no problem subsidizing the wealthy when they kicked off their tenure in government with giving corporations a minimum \$4.5-billion giveaway by cutting the already-low corporate tax rate to 11 from 12%.

(As Progress Alberta's Duncan Kinney reported, just five major oil companies have saved \$4.277 billion as a result of the cut, suggesting a much higher figure than we've been led to believe.)

Unlike universal programs like childcare, which provide for everyone regardless of income, the benefits of corporate tax cuts go directly to those well-heeled enough to own a corporation.

And subsidized childcare is good for economic growth.

According to the Conference Board of Canada, every \$1 spent on childcare results in a \$6 boost to the economy in the long-term by inviting more young parents, especially mothers, into the workforce.

Schulz labelled the pilot project a "Quebec-style childcare program" on Twitter.

Dog whistles to anti-Francophone sentiment aside, the minister misses the mark.

Quebec's daycare began at \$5 a day, far more ambitious than the previous government's experiment with \$25 a day.

However, Quebec's fee is now on a sliding scale, ranging from \$8.05 for those who make less than \$51,340 to \$21.95 for those who make more than \$165,000.

But, unlike Alberta's experiment, it doesn't only apply to not-for-profit daycares.

The NDP erred by taking a piecemeal approach to establishing a universal program, which would have been far more difficult for their

successors to dismantle.

The UCP is taking a “shock and awe” approach to their policy goals, to borrow a favourite phrase of Premier Jason Kenney and President George W. Bush, as evidenced by their almost immediate corporate tax cut that is soon to become an annual tradition.

Had the NDP taken this approach to childcare by aiming for a fully-subsidized, truly-universal daycare system by the end of their term, it would have been much harder for the UCP to chip away at what was arguably the NDP’s signature achievement.

But this is about far more than the NDP legacy.

Working people with young children will suffer as a result of the project’s expiration. And wealthy folks in the same circumstance won’t.

A more ambitious effort on the part of the previous government would have softened this blow.

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