

Child care, housing top of mind for parents ahead of budget ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

A full work schedule and raising three children doesn't leave Allison Snow much time to pay attention to politics, but she'll watch closely next week when the B.C. NDP presents its budget in Victoria.

She's aware that the province's projected surplus shrank from \$274 million at the beginning of the fiscal year to \$148 million in late November, when Finance Minister Carole James gave her most recent fiscal update.

Snow — who lives in Burnaby with her eight-year-old daughter and two sons, aged 12 and 20 — says even if money is tight for the government, parents should still get some kind of break on child care and rental housing.

"Maybe they'll look at a bit of a discount for working parents," she said. "It would be nice to feel like you're getting ahead when you work so hard."

In Tuesday's speech from the throne, Lt.- Gov. Jane Austin said the New Democrats are working toward creating more child-care spaces in a universal system but acknowledged the government still has much work to do.

Universal childcare

There's a short window during Katie Barthel's lunch break when she's able to sneak away from work to discuss the upcoming budget.

Barthel — who lives in South Surrey with her husband and two daughters, aged four and eight, and sits on the board of directors for the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of B.C. — says a \$10 per day child-care system would be a major help to families like hers where both parents work full time.

"It would help us balance our lifestyle and be able to do more things as a family, save for our children's education or retirement," she said.

"It could also help us pay for the increasingly difficult housing market in B.C."

Barthel says her neighbourhood has seen explosive population growth since her children were born, so it's been a challenge for her friends and neighbours to find child-care spaces.

The B.C. government says it is working with schools to create more spaces, but Adrienne Montani with the advocacy group, First Call, says many low income families still can't afford child care.

"Those who are lucky enough to get a spot are often stretching way beyond their budget or they're not going back to work," she said.

"That's both single families and parents in couple families."

Montani is also calling for more investments in housing and would like to see transit made more affordable for people with low incomes.

Opposition criticism

In a statement, Premier John Horgan says his government has funded more than 10,000 new child-care spaces in two years, and there will be more to come this year.

Horgan also points to the elimination of MSP premiums and the creation of 23,000 affordable homes as significant achievements.

Liberal Leader Andrew Wilkinson, however, says life is still too expensive for many British Columbians.

"Vancouver has the second least affordable housing market in the world, drivers are paying more for car insurance than the rest of Canada, and our forestry industry is in total shambles," he said.

"But the NDP are pretending that everything is just fine."

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