

To follow in Freeland's footsteps child care must be a national priority^[1]

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EXCERPTS

This week, upon accepting her historic appointment to become the minister of finance, Chrystia Freeland encouraged women across Canada to “keep going” and continue to break glass ceilings of their own.

It will take more than hope and hard work for Canadian women to truly follow in Freeland's footsteps — we need to get serious about child care as a national priority.

Canadian policy-makers must expand their thinking around the funding and oversight required to bring safe, affordable, and accessible child care for all. There is no equitable recovery plan that doesn't include game-changing short and long-term child care proposals.

Parents, political leaders of all parties, activists, policy experts, and business leaders are finally speaking in unison about child care as a national crisis requiring a national response.

We've yet to successfully follow through on tackling child care with our collective power. Prime Minister Paul Martin came close with a funded national child care program that was signed onto by the provinces but that arrived at the very end of 14 years of Liberal governance.

Kathleen Wynne had an ambitious child care agenda in her 2018 budget but was defeated in the election later that year. The federal Liberals need to commit meaningfully to universal child care now and not at the very end of their mandate.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further complicated the informal intergenerational family care networks that once hid the faults in our publicly funded systems. Families have been left to struggle on an individual basis, and help is needed.

Landing safe and affordable child care shouldn't feel like winning the lottery. Wait lists for child care spots shouldn't be thousands of names long and require parents to register for child care the moment a doctor confirms they are expecting. While this is an issue that touches all parents, the gendered impacts cannot be ignored.

As Freeland is briefed on the competing economic interests across sectors, and considers the disproportionate impact on women, I hope she steers us toward unprecedented child care solutions. Her uniquely strong relationships with provincial leaders could help in co-ordinating the effort across jurisdictional lines.

So far the language Freeland is choosing demonstrates an understanding of the problem. She has made the values guiding her leadership known and spoken of the importance of a green and inclusive recovery. The language of our leaders matters, as does the delivery of good governance.

A budget is a values statement, and one that determines what our society will look like for years to come. Moving forward, child care must be a core pillar of our recovery planning.

In order to find and construct the necessary immediate space and long-term infrastructure, ensure those working in child care are appropriately protected through COVID-19 and compensated moving forward, and deliver streamlined and dependable service offerings across the country, urgent action is needed.

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When the speech from the throne is delivered a month from today, I will be listening closely for a clear statement placing child care as the central national priority it should have always been.

The trajectory of a generation of women's lives and careers — and in turn, our country's economic future — depends on it.

Region: Canada [3]

Tags: gender [4]

economic recovery [5]

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