

Has the time finally come for a federal daycare program?^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Canada's federal government will deliver a much-anticipated throne speech next week. If rumour and speculation have it right, the priorities will be child care and health spending, the latter being a no-brainer given the pandemic.

Nonetheless, expect the loudest voices to focus their criticism on child care, coming from various corners of the citizenry.

The wealthy — a.k.a. selfish twits — will ask why their taxes are going up to care for other people's children. Can't they afford a nanny?

Middle-class arch-conservatives will ask why so many women want to work rather than staying home (where they belong) with their children.

The marginalized will breathe a sigh of relief that both parents can now eke out a living earning minimum wage. This will be before they discover the likely cost per child for daycare will be more than they can afford. Their only hope will be a willing grandparent.

Right now, one family's daycare in downtown Calgary costs more than \$1,900 per month for their toddler. In the same licensed daycare, the monthly cost for an infant is \$2,100. Should the couple welcome a second child, the daycare will grant them a 15 per cent reduction in fees. (And we wonder why working women can be reluctant to have more than one or two children?)

Out of the downtown core, the costs are less, but the chances of scoring a spot are reduced. One young mother applied for a suburban daycare space the day she found out she was pregnant. No such luck. At least she doesn't live in downtown Toronto, which has the most expensive daycare in the country, followed by its surrounding suburbs.

If the throne speech addresses the issue of increasingly expensive daycare with some form of federal program, don't expect much thanks to ensue.

The most stentorian voices of objection to easing the load borne by mothers — and increasingly by modern fathers — will come from the childless who want to know why they are expected to make allowances for parents who get all the breaks from employers and government.

They are already complaining.

This is nothing new. It is analogous to the arguments working women of my age made when feminism stopped being an insult and started to make changes in our offices. It happened when "women's libbers" ceased to be thrown sarcastically in our direction. Did we fare better in the workplace with demands for equal pay for work of equal value? Duh. No.

What it did was make it possible for men to be more — feminine is the right word, but inappropriate because of its un-masculine context — flexible. The advances of feminism made it possible for our male colleagues to leave work early to attend a daughter's soccer game; for men to stay home with a sick child.

We joked in the ladies' room that feminism did more for men than it did for women. Of course, eventually, everything got better for women, even as men became nurses and secretaries.

And while it may not appear that more affordable child care and more concern for the burden of employed parents will eventually bring benefits to the childless, history says it will. Just don't expect it immediately.

This has not stopped the kvetching. A headline in the Sunday New York Times was succinct: Time Off for Parenting Angers Childless in the Tech Industry. Tension between co-workers with children and those without erupted at companies such as Facebook and Twitter and the rancour became vile enough to shut down message boards. In Canada, a study done by York University "found that employees without children feel less welcome to attend to non-work aspects of their lives than colleagues with children."

I'm sure an exhausted mother or father, who has been up all night with a sick child, may not appreciate this statement, especially when "non-work aspects" for them translates into "non-work at the office; more work at home."

But advocating for more affordable child care, promoting the idea of on-site daycare in office towers, and arguing for greater flexibility for

working parents, even if you are childless, is a win-win situation for one reason: Ask yourself who will take care of you in your old age when you have no children. It will fall on other people's children and the better those children are cared for when they are young and impressionable, making them more compassionate and caring, the better it will be for all of us.

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