

# Kenney slams door on own fingers by dismissing federal child-care plan <sup>[1]</sup>

Kenney wants money without strings attached, but that won't happen says columnist Graham Thomson

**Author:** Thomson, Graham

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## EXCERPTS

This column is an opinion from Graham Thomson, an award-winning journalist who has covered Alberta politics for more than 30 years.

For those disheartened by the relentlessly combative state of politics in Alberta, I give you last Wednesday night in the legislative assembly.

In just 30 minutes, members of the UCP and NDP joined forces to pass a law giving all workers in the province three hours of paid leave when getting a COVID-19 vaccine.

"I am glad that the legislature has come together to unanimously pass this critical law in a single day," said a jubilant NDP Leader Rachel Notley.

For those who think that perhaps now Alberta's politicians can indeed provide leadership and work together during a pandemic, I give you UCP MLA Angela Pitt's tweet on Tuesday undermining the vaccination effort.

"Get your vaccine or not and let others make this choice for themselves too," said Pitt, whose recent COVID-related comments have subverted public health measures and compromised her neutrality as deputy Speaker of the assembly. "Do your research and do what's right for you."

I'm not sure what "research" Pitt wants people to do that could possibly top the pro-vaccine advice provided by health experts who have spent a career doing, you know, research.

But I suppose Pitt does come by her libertarian, ideological response honestly.

Elected as a Wildrose MLA in 2015, she succumbed to the siren call of Jason Kenney's United Conservative Party that itself is founded on libertarian, ideological responses to many uncomfortable realities including climate change, carbon taxes and a federal Liberal government.

As premier, Kenney has embraced the need for widespread vaccinations to combat COVID-19 but he's not so keen to cuddle up with the notion of more action on global warming, a retail price on carbon, and a prime minister named Trudeau.

## Program too 'cookie-cutter' for Alberta, Kenney says

Because of the pandemic, Kenney has been thrust into an awkward partnership with Trudeau who has provided billions of dollars in aid to Alberta. But Kenney's default setting remains stuck on antagonism.

When the federal government released its budget this week that included the promise of a joint federal-provincial \$10-a-day child-care program to help boost the economy by getting more women into the workforce, Kenney was dismissive even before waiting for more details to roll out.

"Our first read of the federal policy announced [Monday] is that it is only for a kind of cookie-cutter, nine-to-five, urban, government and union-run institutional daycare options," said Kenney, who tends to use antagonistic adjectival pileups when describing ideas he doesn't like.

The federal program would see Ottawa spend \$30 billion over five years with interested provinces chipping in an equal amount.

Kenney doesn't appear interested.

He thinks the federal program would ignore too many Albertans, including shift workers and stay-at-home parents. He'd be happy to take the federal money but with no strings attached.

That's not going to happen.

"Provinces that agree to step up in real ways on child care will move forward on agreements," said Trudeau this week on the Edmonton-based podcast, Real Talk Ryan Jespersen.

"Those who aren't interested, well, there's nothing we can do to force them to do it, but they won't be getting the resources that will come through a bilateral deal to move forward on child care."

Kenney is once again a prisoner of his own ideological myopia, one focused on his political base that's anti-Trudeau, anti-Liberal, and anti-government-involvement. It's the same blinkered vision that had him pandering too often the past year to libertarian anti-maskers and rural voters who rejected COVID-related restrictions.

You have to wonder how Kenney's child-care stance will play to parents in the cities, to those who wouldn't mind paying \$10-a-day for quality "cookie-cutter, nine-to-five, urban" child care instead of the \$60-a-day they're paying now.

A recent poll by Janet Brown Opinion Research for the CBC indicates that "those most likely to give Kenney a low score" include women (59 per cent), middle-income earners with an annual household income between \$60,000 and \$120,000 (59 per cent) and residents of Calgary or Edmonton (56 per cent).

You'd think Kenney might want to win over, or at least stop irritating, middle-class working mothers in the major cities.

And you'd think he should realize he's increasingly out of step on issues.

Canada, under the federal Liberals, is moving in a direction that includes, among other things: a steadily increasing carbon tax; less reliance on fossil fuels; more electric vehicles; green retrofits; more ambitious climate targets as outlined by Trudeau's announcement on Thursday; and child care.

Even the federal Conservatives under Erin O'Toole are embracing a price on carbon.

Kenney wants Alberta to head in a different direction, one that's more heavily dependent on fossil fuels and less able to accept change.

It's a strategy that helped him win over voters in the 2019 election. But according to recent polls, including Brown's, it's not one that's helping him win over Albertans in 2021.

**Region:** Alberta <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** federal budget <sup>[4]</sup>

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