

Accessible childcare in New Brunswick will depend on Higgs making use of federal funds ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The ink was not yet dry on the 725-page federal budget last Monday when Premier Blaine Higgs came out dismissing it as “purely an election budget.” Among other things, Higgs maintained that the new \$10-a-day childcare program, which received the lion’s share of new federal investments to the tune of \$30 billion over five years, was a measure made only for Canada’s metropolises.

Perhaps New Brunswick families would like to have a word with the premier.

While childcare spaces in New Brunswick may not be as expensive as in Toronto or Vancouver, they are far from cheap.

According to a 2020 study by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives ^[3], the median cost of a full-time childcare space for an infant is \$835 per month in Fredericton, \$856 in Moncton, and \$868 in Saint John – that’s about \$40 per day. This is enough money to make a parent think twice about entering, or returning to, the workforce – especially at \$11.75 per hour.

As more than 20,000 Canadian women quit their job since the beginning of the pandemic, an incentive to return to work such as affordable childcare could make a huge difference in the choices they will make once the sanitary crisis is over.

Higgs also may not have considered the impact of affordable childcare spaces on a critical issue for the province: the declining birth rate.

New Brunswick has what one could call a “baby shortage.” A provincial birth rate of 1.5 children per woman is a far cry from the 2.1 needed to keep the province’s population stable.

Quebec’s experience with subsidized childcare spaces has already shown that this type of policy is essentially “self-financing,” with the dollars invested by the government coming back in the form of tax revenue from the additional income mothers earn returning to the workforce (or going from part-time to full-time work). But more importantly for demographic purposes, it also has a significant positive impact on the fertility rate. In this context, federal funding of childcare spaces at \$10 per day could be seen not as a mere election bauble, but as an important policy for economic recovery and growth.

Premier Higgs might have also noticed the funding earmarked for official languages. One of the premier’s favourite issues, French immersion, will receive no less than \$180 million over three years. There is also \$82 million for minority-language school infrastructure and \$121 million for post-secondary education. Some of this money will certainly be invested in the province’s schools, including at Université de Moncton, which has been struggling to make ends meet for the past few years.

In other words, we can concede to Higgs that this budget has, in some respects, the appearance of an election platform (we could expect no less from a minority government in Ottawa, after all), but it also contains several measures that could really benefit New Brunswickers, if only the New Brunswick government was willing.

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Region: New Brunswick ^[4]

Tags: federal budget ^[5]

national child care system ^[6]

investment ^[7]

economic recovery ^[8]

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