

Kenney government hastily cobbles together 'working parents' advisory panel' to seek ways to undermine federal child care proposal ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

On April 19, Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland announced the Trudeau Government plans to spend \$30 billion on a national child care plan with a target of reducing parents' costs to \$10 a day per child in five years.

On April 22, Alberta Children's Services Minister Rebecca Schulz announced that the Kenney Government had cobbled together something called the "Supporting Alberta Working Parents Advisory Group" to advise "on how best to leverage federal funds to suit the unique needs of Alberta parents and child care operators."

Coincidence? Not likely.

Two days before the provincial news release was published to an almost complete lack of interest by mainstream media, Premier Jason Kenney addressed a question on the topic from a reporter at the daily COVID-19 briefing by hinting that if the federal proposal didn't meet what he called "the demands or expectations of Albertans," the province would refuse the federal funds for child care.

So it's reasonable to assume the hastily created eight-member committee is intended to provide and justify the excuses Mr. Kenney will need to keep Alberta out of what is sure to be an enormously popular national program, given the crippling cost of child care to families nowadays.

Of course, it's important to remember that the federal child care program is a proposal than a budget item, in effect an early election promise by the Trudeau Government. Alas, federal Liberals have a bad record of promising child care programs before elections and not delivering them afterward. Still, a certain amount of healthy skepticism about broken promises notwithstanding, this appears to be a serious proposal by the new finance minister.

Meantime, we know from past performance and recent comments, that Mr. Kenney will do whatever he can to scuttle it – not just in Alberta but nationally. From his perspective, just keeping Alberta out and depriving the province's parents of access to \$10-a-day childcare would definitely be only the second-best outcome.

This is the guy, after all, whose first actions in office as premier involved scuttling the NDP's \$25-per-day child care pilot program – so \$10-a-day child care is bound to be even more threatening to the 1950s-focused Alberta premier and his social conservative political base than the NDP's effort.

The key talking point in the UCP's coming War on Child Care has been the complaint, in the premier's words, that the federal program takes a "cookie-cutter approach" (that is, presumably, has consistent care and safety standards) and doesn't include the commercial outfits that have driven costs into the stratosphere.

But as political blogger Susan Wright noted on the weekend, since Ottawa has released no details of how the program will operate, Mr. Kenney is just making it up when he claims the program will have a cookie-cutter approach. In fact he has no idea.

UCP talking heads are also making an effort to encourage a sense of grievance among parents whose "choices" don't include "institutional" child care – stay-at-home home schoolers and the like who want to dip into the federal cash just like they dip into provincial money that should go to public education.

Mr. Kenney slipped and made it clear where he's really going with this when he started reeling off divisive ideological dog whistles at his April 20 news conference about "nine-to-five, urban, government- and union-run institutional daycare." Every one of them, including the use of "daycare," intended to drive a wedge between his base and the huge numbers of ordinary Canadians who would benefit from the program.

But Mr. Kenney's real red line is probably Ottawa's intention not to use federal money to subsidize private, for-profit, child care operations

- the kinds of outfits that can charge parents more than \$20,000 a year for child care in some major Canadian cities.

That would likely explain why Ms. Schulz and the premier ensured the panel included the chair of the Alberta Association of Child Care Operators, which opposed the NDP's \$25-a-day program.

A 2019 study by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives showed the median monthly fee for toddler care in 2018 was \$1,030 in Calgary, \$875 in Edmonton. Median fees for infant care were higher - \$1,100 in Calgary and \$975 in Edmonton. Costs have continued to rise since then.

When the federal program reaches its fifth year, if all promises are kept, it could reduce that Calgary cost to about \$2,800 a year for care of an infant, an annual saving of more than \$10,000. And it would result in decent pay for child care workers - and higher tax revenues from their earnings.

So we can all see why Mr. Kenney would hate that!

Ms. Wright also suggested that Mr. Kenney's creation of the working parents' advisory group suggests he also has no idea what Alberta parents think. It's more likely he knows perfectly well. Who wouldn't be delighted at the prospect of saving \$10,400 a year?

Plus, the economic benefits to Canada and Alberta of the proposal would be enormous.

But Mr. Kenney, it would seem, isn't interested in the benefits of anything that doesn't flow through a pipeline. Especially if it might do anything to challenge his apparent view that the 1950s were the last time God was in Heaven and all was right with the world.

Time to scotch Alberta's hopscotch scourge?

Speaking of child care, Alberta's little children will no longer be able to scrawl hopscotch ladders and the like on the province's sidewalks - at least in the vicinity of a Conservative MLA's office.

After all, it might be mistaken for political protest - and that is apparently only tolerated in Jason Kenney's Alberta if the protesters are opposed to COVID masks and vaccinations.

So when protesters began chalking their messages on the sidewalks in front of Education Minister Adriana LaGrange's office in Red Deer, they were soon being threatened with a criminal offence! Well, it figures the education minister wouldn't like chalk.

"! CAUTION Do not chalk sidewalk!" read the sign in the window of the minister's office. "Removing chalk with a pressure washer causes damages to the property from water seepage. Section 430 of the CRIMINAL CODE. This is construed as MISCHIEF. Thanks for your understanding."

With that, the Internet exploded with hilarity. Economist Andrew Leach, channelling Premier Kenney's comments about enforcing COVID-19 rules, observed, "You can't enforce your way out of chalk. People won't comply. You're simply going to have more people deciding to chalk because you try to enforce it. It's really that simple."

Expect the next few days to prove him right.

Region: Alberta ^[3]

Tags: federal budget ^[4]

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