

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

