

Editorial: Ontario should sign on to Ottawa's \$10-a-day child care plan ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

This week Manitoba signed on to the proposed new national child-care program designed to expand access and bring down average parent fees to just \$10 a day.

It's the seventh of the provinces and territories to take up its share of the federal government's offer of \$30 billion over five years to create the affordable, accessible child-care system Canada has long needed — and it's a particularly important signatory.

Manitoba is one of the self-styled conservative "resistance" provinces that, along with Alberta, Saskatchewan and Ontario, has responded in the past to national policies coming from Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's Liberal government in hyperpartisan ways.

Yet Manitoba's minister of families, Rochelle Squires, called this deal good for children, parents, child-care providers and the economy.

Indeed it is.

"We need a stronger child care system to support and encourage women to join the workforce and contribute their knowledge, skills and talent," said Squires. "We needed this before COVID and COVID has made this even more essential."

We can't put it any better than that.

So here's the question: What is Ontario waiting for?

Alberta and Saskatchewan, too.

Under the national child-care program families in Manitoba stand to save \$3,900 annually per child in fees. In Ontario, which has the most expensive child care in the country, families would save far more — over \$10,000 annually for infants, according to one analysis.

Premier Doug Ford should be making a child-care deal for Ontario a priority. It's what the province's families and the economy needs.

British Columbia was the first to sign and Manitoba is the latest. In between, Nova Scotia, P.E.I., Newfoundland and Labrador, Yukon and Quebec managed to get deals done. Yet from Ontario there's been only silence.

Quebec signed a deal for \$6 billion. As the biggest province, Ontario stands to get more for this public service that, as Squires rightly points out, was needed before the pandemic and is now even more essential to economic recovery and growth.

We certainly hope Ford isn't holding out on families so Ontario can be used by Conservative Leader Erin O'Toole in the upcoming federal election.

Families who can't find affordable child care, not to mention employers struggling to find workers, deserve better than that from the premier.

Parents have watched elections in this country, both federal and provincial, undermine nascent child-care programs. No one wants to see that again.

When Ford's PC government came to power in 2018 it killed the Wynne Liberals' plan to provide free licensed care for preschool children in Ontario.

When Stephen Harper's Conservatives came to power in 2006 they killed a national child-care program proposed by Paul Martin's Liberal government — even though all provinces had signed on.

So it's very concerning to hear O'Toole talk about wanting to kill the Trudeau program and replace it with more "flexible" options. In other words, not an actual child-care system at all.

It's like saying we'll fund public education by giving parents money to hire tutors, rather than having schools, teachers and standards.

That's what Harper did when he replaced a federal-provincial plan with \$100 cheques for parents. And it's what Ford did with his child-care tax credit. Cheques and tax credits do nothing to reduce the cost of regulated child care or expand quality spaces.

When Yukon signed a deal on child care with Ottawa, Premier Sandy Silver said it will make lives more affordable for families and chart the path to economic recovery.

When B.C. signed, Premier John Horgan said he was answering the call for affordable child care, from not only parents but business councils and chambers of commerce.

Other provinces are seeing the benefit of \$10-a-day child care. It's time the Ford government joined them.

Region: Ontario ^[3]

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