

Ontario open to child care deal with federal Liberals, with some flexibility: Lecce ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

TORONTO -- Ontario's education minister says his government is open to striking a deal on affordable child care with the federal Liberals if it accounts for what he described as the province's "unique" circumstances.

Stephen Lecce told a conference on Monday that Ontario's Progressive Conservatives were in discussions about a potential child care plan "into the last hours" before the federal election was called on Sunday.

The federal Liberals have promised to spend \$30 billion over the next five years to cut child care costs to an average of \$10 a day across the country.

They had committed to bilateral agreements on that pledge with eight provinces and two territories before Parliament was dissolved.

But Ontario -- Canada's largest province -- remained a noteworthy holdout, along with Alberta.

Lecce said Monday that he wants a child-care agreement to reflect the specific characteristics of Ontario, including the fact that a large percentage of Canadian kids requiring child care live in the province.

He said he'd also want Ontario's existing full-day kindergarten program, which incorporates early learning elements, reflected in any final deal.

"We're very committed to a good deal for Ontario, but it must respond to the unique advantages of this province," Lecce said when asked whether Ontario would strike an agreement on child care with the federal Liberals.

"What I can confirm to you is we are open and actively interested in a program that achieves the imperative of affordability and accessibility, while also ensuring an element of flexibility."

He added that Ontario would work on more affordable child care with whatever federal government is elected in September.

The federal Conservatives have said that if elected, they would scrap agreements inked with provinces in favour of a refundable tax credit.

The party says their proposed credit would cover up to 75 per cent of child care costs for lower-income families.

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