

Fate of \$6B Quebec child-care deal questioned during first election debate ^[1]

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Source: Q107

Format: Article

Publication Date: 3 Sep 2021

AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

EXCERPTS

Canadian federal party leaders squared off in the first debate of this campaign cycle in Quebec on Thursday. The French-language debate featured Liberal Party Leader Justin Trudeau, Conservative Party Leader Erin O'Toole, NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh and Bloc Québécois Leader Yves-François Blanchet, sparring over issues like COVID-19 vaccination status, health care and more. Global's Mike Le Couteur reports.

The question of what would happen to \$6 billion in child-care funding promised to Quebec if the Liberal government loses power sparked a lively exchange during the first televised leaders' debate on Thursday.

The Liberals, Conservatives and New Democratic Party are all pitching competing child-care visions in this election campaign, with an eye to bringing down costs for families.

The issue is unique in Quebec compared to the rest of the country because for decades the province has offered a subsidized daycare system.

Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau has touted Quebec's model, which costs \$8.50 a day for families able to get a spot, as an example the rest of Canada should follow. His government introduced a national daycare program in its April budget to cut fees down to an average of \$10 a day within five years.

Quebec's system is not without its issues, however, as last month there were 50,000 names on a waiting list to secure a space. The province has experienced the recent closure of many family daycares and there are concerns there aren't enough people around to do the job.

Conservative Leader Erin O'Toole was pressed during the French-language debate hosted by TVA to specify the fate of the deal Trudeau announced alongside Quebec Premier Francois Legault before the election was called.

"The system here in Quebec is excellent and we will co-ordinate with Mr. Legault's government," O'Toole said. "But we also have another plan for Canadian families."

O'Toole's plan is to create a new refundable tax credit that could pay eligible families up to \$6,000, which he says would be of particular help to low-income parents in Quebec.

Bloc Quebecois Leader Yves-François Blanchet pushed the Conservative leader on whether he would give Quebec its promised \$6 billion, questioning what O'Toole meant when he said he would "co-ordinate" with Legault.

"We'll have an approach of partnership and co-ordinate the effective system here in Quebec," O'Toole said, adding his approach would make sure all families benefit "immediately."

Experts say while the Conservative tax credit could have some immediate impacts, it doesn't address the shortage of spaces.

As for Trudeau's national daycare plan, expert analysis suggests it wouldn't provide any savings to parents in Quebec whose children are already in the provincial system.

With the election at its midway point, Trudeau is leaning heavily on the Liberal child-care program and attacking the Conservatives for wishing to shred the eight deals Ottawa has signed with the provinces. It has also signed two deals with territories.

The Liberal plan is to provide child care centres with direct subsidies. Its deals with provinces amount to around \$12.6 billion to fund nearly 144,000 spaces.

Trudeau said giving Quebec \$6 billion would create 37,000 child-care spaces.

NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh, whose party has long promised to nationalize child care, said he agrees with Trudeau's approach but that the Liberals shouldn't be rewarded for doing something they promised 30 years ago.

O'Toole also criticized Trudeau for six years of inaction on the file.

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