

Face to Face 2021: Erin O'Toole met 4 undecided voters. Here's what happened ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The Conservative child-care plan will help the poorest Canadians, leaving middle income families across the country with less support than those in the lowest tax bracket, Conservative Leader Erin O'Toole says.

Asked which income bracket would get the most under the Conservative child-care plan, O'Toole said: "It's very low. It would be in the \$30,000 range."

O'Toole made the remarks during the first instalment of The National Presents: Face to Face with the Federal Party Leaders, in which four undecided voters get five minutes to ask one of four federal party leaders about an issue close to their hearts.

The Conservative leader took the first of his questions from Jason Hawkins of Toronto. Both Hawkins and his wife are school teachers with newborn twins.

Facing a looming child-care costs of \$3,200 a month, Hawkins said he is not sure if both parents can return to work, and he asked O'Toole whom his plan is designed to help.

"It would be the folks that are in the lowest income tax bracket, which I don't think, in your case as a teacher, would be you, Jason," O'Toole said. "I'm just being honest with you. What we are doing is trying to help folks there; [with] seventy 75 per cent of the cost."

If O'Toole is elected prime minister, he is committed to scrapping the Liberals' child-care plan, which is designed to cut the cost of child care in half immediately and work toward having \$10-a-day child care nationally within five years.

Eight provinces and territories have already signed cost-sharing agreements on child care with the Trudeau government.

O'Toole's plan would be to offer parents a tax credit that would max out for low-income families at \$6,000 a year, \$500 a month. Those payments would be spread out over the year to help parents keep up with bills rather than having to claim the full amount back at tax time.

Asked how a tax credit would help to create much needed child-care spaces, O'Toole said the money his policy would inject into the child-care system would prompt the creation of those spaces.

"It sounds like the Conservative plan's not really targeted toward me or people like me," Hawkins said at the close of his five minutes.

Climate: O'Toole on having the lowest emissions-reduction target

On the subject of climate change, voter Grace Peng of Edmonton asked O'Toole to explain how he will be able to manage members of his caucus who do not support the party's policy on climate change.

She also wanted to know how he would be able to satisfy people in his party who, at the party's policy convention in March, voted against adding green-friendly statements to the its policy book — including a line stating that the party believes "climate change is real" and is "willing to act."

"Using that as an example of perhaps a more delicate issue within the party. How will you kind of deal with that as prime minister once it's no longer a matter of campaigning, but the Conservatives are actually to become the governing party?"

O'Toole said that it is his intention to work with the provinces to address key issues, such as climate, admitting that his party has ground to make up on the issue.

"I've been very honest as a leader — there's some areas in the last couple of elections we haven't met the expectations of Canadians, climate change being one, reconciliation, perhaps being another," O'Toole said.

When Canada first signed the Paris Agreement, it committed to cutting emissions of greenhouse gas to 30 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030. Earlier this year, the Liberals raised Canada's target to between 40 and 45 per cent.

O'Toole was pressed by CBC chief political correspondent Rosemary Barton on why his climate plan will revert to the earlier 30 per cent target and not remain as ambitious as the Liberal plan.

The Conservative leader explained that he is not going to try to out-target his opponents just to get elected but was proposing a plan that he felt his government could hit without damaging the economy.

"What we have to do is make sure we deliver," he said.

O'Toole on fighting discrimination

Taylor Lakhryst, a transgender woman from Winnipeg, brought up the issue of discrimination against people in her community, asking O'Toole how he would improve on the reality that she and people like her face daily.

"I'm very proud to say I was chosen to lead our party as someone with a clear record, being pro-choice and being an ally to the LGBTQ community. And I want to make sure all Canadians know, as prime minister, I'll fight for their interests," O'Toole said.

Lakhryst responded that while O'Toole may share her belief that something has to be done to fight discrimination and acts of hatred against the trans community, there are people in his party who do not feel that way.

"You also don't speak for everybody in your party, and that's a conflict of interest, a significant one, as a matter of fact," she said.

O'Toole explained that when he won the leadership contest for his party, he was clear that he "wanted the Conservative Party to represent more Canadians, regardless of what community, including the LGBTQ community, and I'll want you to hold me to account for that," he said.

Barton pressed O'Toole on why, if discrimination is an issue he wants to tackle and improve for Canadians, he does not list it as one of the priorities in the campaign platform: Canada's Recovery Plan.

"Canada's Recovery Plan is largely based on getting people back to work, working on shoring up our health system," O'Toole said, "but that doesn't mean we don't want to be part of fighting back against intolerance, which I've called sort of shadow pandemic within COVID 19."

O'Toole on maintaining commitments to Afghans

Arsalan Ghaemi, a 22-year-old from Vancouver who is originally from Iran, said he has friends in Afghanistan and is concerned about their safety. He said that Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau has promised to continue to help all the remaining Afghans who helped Canadian troops fight against the Taliban and that he would bring in 40,000 eligible Afghan refugees, up from the 20,000 originally promised.

"I'm wondering if you would maintain that commitment and whether you would expand on that commitment to make sure those to whom we've made promises, and those who are vulnerable in that country, get the help that they deserve from a country like Canada," Ghaemi asked.

O'Toole responded simply that "yes" he would maintain the commitment. When pressed on it by Barton, he said he would "absolutely" maintain the effort to help those left behind.

Region: Canada ^[3]

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