

O'Toole's plan to axe daycare deals under fire in French election debate^[1]

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Source: Global News

Format: Article

Publication Date: 8 Sep 2021

AVAILABILITY

[Access article](#) ^[2]

EXCERPTS

Conservative Leader Erin O'Toole's plan to slash \$27 billion in funding for child care deals with the provinces shows he plans to "scrap it all" if elected, argued his chief political opponent in the French-language election debate Wednesday night.

Just two hours before the hotly-anticipated French debate began, O'Toole released the costing of his platform which showed he plans to cut child care funding by billions over five years.

Conservative officials told The Canadian Press that while he would honour the first year of a deal with the provinces to lower child care costs, he would transition the program to a tax credit after that one-year period and axe plans to reach \$10 per day spaces.

"There's going to be a transition," O'Toole confirmed during the debate.

The Liberals signed deals with B.C., Nova Scotia, Yukon, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Quebec just prior to the election aimed at increasing the number of subsidized child care spaces available for parents, and lowering costs.

Billed as a national early learning and child care program, the initiative is heavily modelled on the program in place in Quebec for years, in which the provincial government subsidizes child care spaces.

Because Quebec already has a program, the province's deal would see it get \$6 billion to offset the cost and create more spaces amid the high demand for spots.

But O'Toole's planned cuts to the program quickly prompted questions over whether he would still give that full amount to Quebec, given the province continues to subsidize its daycare program.

Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau argued when the topic came up during the debate that O'Toole would axe the \$6 billion for Quebec and that his plan to implement a tax credit program shows he doesn't understand the province.

"He says he'd rather have a tax credit for the most vulnerable families in Quebec — those families don't pay for daycare already in Quebec. It's subsidized. So he doesn't understand," Trudeau said.

"Quebec families have been waiting months and even years for more spaces and he says no, we're going to have a tax credit," he continued.

"Mr. O'Toole will scrap it all."

The COVID-19 pandemic has been dubbed a "she-cession" by economists and policymakers because of the disproportional impact economic shutdowns have had on women, in particular mothers.

Closures of daycare facilities and schools forced many women out of the workforce as they struggled to find care for elders or children in order to be able to work.

The Liberals proposed the daycare program specifically as a response to the impact the pandemic has had on women, billing it as an economic requirement to allow women to come back to work.

Green Party Leader Annamie Paul said the reason programs like affordable child care don't already exist is because for so long there have been so few women in federal politics, and not enough voices advocating for change.

"I do believe that the lack of women at the very highest levels of politics absolutely has an impact on what's prioritized," Paul told reporters following the debate.

But NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh argued that if Trudeau was serious about getting child care deals into place, he would be working with the provinces to get them done.

"If he really want to do this, why did he start an election?" Singh pressed.

Trudeau went from a majority to a minority government in 2019.

But despite his government surviving the pandemic so far, he opted to call an early election while the country is in the midst of the fourth wave of COVID-19 in a decision that has been widely criticized by political opponents.

Polling by Ipsos exclusively for Global News suggests voters are getting stuck between the Liberals and the NDP, potentially creating a path for Conservatives to gain power.

The election takes place on Sept. 20.

Region: Canada ^[3]

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