

CP fact check: Debate claims on child care, emissions and TMX under scrutiny ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

OTTAWA -- The Truth Test is a project of The Canadian Press that examines the accuracy of statements made by politicians. Each claim is researched and analyzed to provide Canadians with facts instead of spin.

The leaders of five federal political parties shared a stage at the Canadian Museum of History in Gatineau, Que., on Wednesday night for the first of the two official televised leaders' debates.

The Canadian Press examined statements by three of the party leaders who took part in the French-language debate to put them into context and add the details Canadians need to better understand the claims.

Erin O'Toole, Conservative Party of Canada

"We will help all Quebec families immediately and we will help low-income families with an amount of 75 per cent."

One of the key elements of O'Toole's platform is a plan to eventually shelve the Liberals' \$10-a-day daycare deals with provinces and replace them with a refundable tax credit covering up to 75 per cent of the first \$8,000 in childcare costs paid. The amount claimed goes down with income, with families in the highest income levels being able to claim 26 per cent.

During Wednesday's debate O'Toole was pushed repeatedly about his child-care plan, especially the expectation that he would cancel \$6 billion in federal transfers for child care funding over five years agreed to in a deal Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau signed with Quebec Premier Francois Legault 10 days before the election was called.

O'Toole has been evasive on whether he'd honour those funding arrangements, but the Conservatives finally acknowledged Wednesday, when they released a costing of the party's campaign platform, that a Conservative government would only fund them for the first year.

O'Toole argued that his child-care plan will help families faster than Trudeau's, which intends to cut child-care fees in half by the end of 2022, and to an average of \$10 a day within five years.

But O'Toole said during Wednesday's debate that his plan would "help all Quebec families immediately." Is that true?

The child-care plans have been analyzed by multiple people and the verdict on O'Toole's plan has been that it will provide some relief, particularly to lower-income families, though it won't do anything to create new spaces.

Quebec is also one of the few provinces with its own refundable child-care tax credit, which is very similar to the one O'Toole is proposing. It however only applies to parents who don't have one of Quebec's subsidized child-care spots, which costs families just \$8.50 per day.

O'Toole has not suggested his plan would be limited like that, and if it is not, then families in Quebec who currently can't claim a tax credit would benefit immediately.

David Macdonald, a senior economist at the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, said in his analysis of the two competing child-care visions that it's improbable that parents who do already receive the Quebec tax credit would keep getting it alongside a federal, almost identical credit.

"The Conservative platform implies its refund would be over and above these provincial refunds, but that is almost certainly impossible to achieve," Macdonald said.

It would mean that a family would ultimately be able to claim 150 per cent of what it paid for child care, so "if they paid \$8,000 for child care, they'd get back \$12,000 in refunds."

If Quebec adjusts or scraps its tax credit, the federal plan O'Toole is proposing might not benefit thousands of families in Quebec much, if at all. Nor would it help Quebec families who haven't been able to find a subsidized spot.

Justin Trudeau, Liberal Party of Canada

"It will be the needed slope decided by the experts that we are currently talking to. It has been a few years now that emissions are capped, and they will no longer go up."

Trudeau is pushing his climate plan as the only one climate scientists and economists agree is both realistic and ambitious. It includes a promise to start regulating the emissions from oil and gas production, starting in 2025, and lowering them until they hit net zero by 2050. That would mean that any emissions still produced would be captured and stored by nature or technology.

Trudeau was asked during the debate how quickly emissions would be forced downward, and he claimed that there has already been a cap in place for a number of years.

Environment groups have been heavily critical of the Trudeau government for not capping oil production and even allowing it to expand. They have said the platform promise that would begin to cap emissions is a big step forward because they believe it can only happen if Canada doesn't just stop expanding oil and gas production, but also begins to contract it.

So why does Trudeau say there is already a cap in place?

When asked about the claim during the post-debate press conference, Trudeau said the emissions from the oil and gas sector over the "past few years" have been about 190 million tonnes annually.

According to Canada's own greenhouse gas inventory reports, the oil and gas sector as a whole, including natural gas production, the oilsands, and conventional oil production, produced 191.4 million tonnes of emissions in 2019 and 191.2 million tonnes in 2018, which is sort of on par with the 189.9 million tonnes produced in 2015.

But in 2016 and 2017, the first two full years Trudeau was in office they produced 180.8 million tonnes and 182.7 million tonnes, respectively.

Looking at the oilsands alone, the emissions have increased 15 per cent over the time Trudeau has been in office. The number of barrels pumping out each day increased almost 14 per cent.

There has not been any cap in place, limiting production or emissions at the national level.

Jagmeet Singh, New Democratic Party of Canada

"I have always been against this project. I was against buying the pipeline. I said Mr. Trudeau made a mistake. I have always been against the project."

The Trans Mountain pipeline is an area of contention for the second election in a row, following the Liberals decision in 2018 to buy the existing pipeline and build the controversial expansion itself. That purchase came about when political opposition left former owner Kinder Morgan with cold feet about proceeding, and the Liberals attempted to prove they could manage both the climate and Canada's critical oil and gas sector at the same time.

The pipeline runs from the Edmonton area to a shipping terminal in Burnaby, B.C. Kinder Morgan Canada owned the original pipeline and applied in 2013 to build a second, almost parallel pipeline that would triple the total capacity.

In 2017, Singh's platform for the NDP leadership campaign included an energy plan that opposed the expansion, often called TMX. His opposition to it even soured a relationship with former Alberta NDP Premier Rachel Notley.

In the 2019 election, the NDP reacted to the Liberals' climate platform with a press release that contained just four words: "You. Bought. A. Pipeline."

But by the end of that election, Singh was hedging slightly when it came to how he would address TMX if he won the election, saying about a week before that vote that deciding what to do with it was a "complicated question."

That has also been his position throughout this campaign, including during and after Wednesday's debate, when he claimed in one breath that he has always been against the pipeline, and in the next said he doesn't know what he'll do with it yet.

"When we will be in power we will analyze the situation and make a good decision for Canadians," he said.

About one-third of the expansion has now been completed, at a cost of about \$8.4 billion, with current plans aiming to complete it by the end of next year.

Region: Canada ^[3]

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