

The Liberals won the election. What will be the toughest promises for them to keep? ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau led his party to a victory on Monday after voters responded to his snap election call with another minority mandate in the House of Commons.

But now that the party's promises to Canadians have paved the way for it to once again form government, it's time for the Liberals to actually try to keep them.

Global News took a look at their platform and identified which pledges will be the hardest for Trudeau's government to deliver on.

Jordan's Principle

The Liberals have promised to fully implement Jordan's Principle – a rule that pledges to provide First Nations children with the services they need, when they need them, rather than first taking the time to sort out which level of government is responsible for the cost.

However, the implementation of Jordan's Principle has been a thorny issue in recent years, with both the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) and the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society (Caring Society) taking the government to court over what they say has been a failure to implement the principle.

This ongoing litigation erodes trust between Indigenous people and the government, according to Cindy Blackstock, who runs the Caring Society – an organization that aims to ensure First Nations children and their families “have culturally based and equitable opportunities to grow up safely at home, be healthy, get a good education and be proud of who they are.”

“The prime minister got up in the House of Commons and said he is not litigating against Indigenous kids. A week later we were in federal court and they were litigating against Indigenous kids,” Blackstock said in a previous interview with Global News.

“When the government says, ‘Well, you need to trust us, Indigenous people don’t trust us.’ Well, that’s why.”

When it comes to both the Liberal promise to fully implement Jordan's Principle and their platform pledge to “continue to reform child and family services in Indigenous communities,” Blackstock said she's concerned about whether the action will match the words.

But because the prime minister has previously said the government is already fully implementing Jordan's Principle, Blackstock is concerned that the government and advocacy groups have different definitions of what a full implementation entails – and that could be a hurdle to real change.

“It sounds good – if they do it,” said Blackstock. “And it's always been the ‘if they do it’ where there's been serious problems.”

Online hate

The Liberals have promised that within their first 100 days of being re-elected, they'd introduce legislation “to combat serious forms of harmful online content.”

That includes “hate speech, terrorist content, content that incites violence, child sexual abuse material and the non-consensual distribution of intimate images,” the party's platform said. It would also hold social media platforms and online services accountable for the content they host – all while recognizing “the importance of freedom of expression for all Canadians.”

Because this legislation brushes up against a charter-affirmed right, the Liberals could find themselves in a sticky situation as they endeavour to actually implement the law – at least if past legislation is any indication.

The Liberals gave Canadians a peek behind the curtain of what this law could look like in July, when they laid out their proposal for a new Digital Safety Commission.

The proposal specifically targeted major platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and Pornhub under a new legal category that deems them “online communications service providers” and under the authority of a new Digital Safety Commission.

The Liberals said they'd place a new obligation on those providers to remove five categories of hateful content and review complaints within 24 hours. The new regulator would also get a last-ditch power to apply for court orders to have telecommunications companies block access to platforms that persistently refuse to remove child sexual exploitation or terrorist content.

The five categories of harmful content covered under the proposed new powers will draw on offences already defined under the Criminal Code: hate speech, child sexual exploitation content, non-consensual sharing of intimate images, incitement to violence and terrorist content.

The definition of "hatred" they would use specifically excluded content that "discredits, humiliates, hurts or offends."

Still, the bill raised some red flags for the Canadian Civil Liberties Association (CCLA).

"The hate speech bill that was introduced prior to and died with the calling of the federal election, gives rise to the same concerns that frequently come up with this type of legislation: how do we clearly define what amounts to hate speech so that it is not too subjective to provide a coherent legal standard?" Cara Faith Zwibel, the director of the Fundamental Freedoms Program with the CCLA, wrote in an emailed statement.

"If a new government wants to address the problem of hatred, it will have to sort out how to do so without unreasonably limiting free expression."

The Canadian Constitution Foundation, a non-profit that defend the constitutional rights and freedoms of Canadians, spoke out against the proposed legislation from the Liberals in July. They said the law would "impact the ability of Canadians to engage in debate on subjects that are unsettled."

"This government, and the Heritage Minister in particular, have proven again and again that they are anti-free expression and anti-technology," the statement read.

"Giving government and unelected tribunal bureaucrats even greater control over Canadian's expression will erode our fundamental rights."

That means their bid to implement this law could land the Liberals a ticket to a charter challenge — creating a hurdle for the implementation of any such legislation.

Child-care plan

The Liberals have promised child care that would only cost \$10 per day. Assuming you're currently paying — or expect to soon pay — non-subsidized fees, \$10-a-day child care could save you tens of thousands of dollars per year.

In Toronto, parents of infants would save nearly \$20,000 a year on average, according to an analysis by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA). In Iqaluit, families would see average savings of more than \$14,000 a year on infant daycare fees. In big cities in B.C. and Alberta, you're looking at an average of \$10,000 in cost reductions.

However, there's a delicate dance between the provinces and the federal government that would have to be successful for the plan to see the light of day. So far, eight of them have signed up: Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Quebec, British Columbia, Nova Scotia, Yukon, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador.

But the Liberals would have to get the rest of the provinces on board to have the system up and running by 2026 or earlier, as promised, and cut child-care fees in half by 2022.

Even if those negotiations go smoothly, there's another big question mark hovering over the potential efficacy of the plan: whether parents would actually be able to find lower-cost child-care spots for their kids.

Before the pandemic, only around 28 per cent of working families had a child in licensed child care, Kerry McCuaig, a fellow at the Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development at the University of Toronto, previously told Global News.

These days, child-care capacity has been reduced by between 25 and 35 per cent in major cities like Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Toronto and Montreal, she estimated. That's because some child-care centres have closed amid prolonged shutdowns, and the sector has also seen an exodus of staff.

The Liberals have pledged to add 250,000 new high-quality child-care spaces. But some experts say their plan still isn't guaranteed to meaningfully improve the problem of child-care availability.

Whether parents will actually gain access to affordable child care hinges on significant increases in the number of child-care spots to accommodate an expected increase in demand for cheaper daycare and preschool care.

Without additional resources, a reduction in fees would likely lead to ballooning wait-lists for families, David Macdonald, senior economist at the CCPA, previously told Global News.

All these hurdles create a canvas for the affordable child-care promise to potentially slip through the Liberals' fingers.

Climate goals

In the Liberal platform, the party pledges to achieve a 40 to 45 per cent reduction in emissions by 2030, compared to 2005 levels. However, there's one big, dark cloud hanging over Trudeau's credibility when it comes to keeping this commitment: his party's track record.

During the election campaign, NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh accused Trudeau of having the worst record of all G7 countries when it comes to emissions.

That allegation is backed up by a recent report from the Centre for Policy Alternatives, which showed Canada's emissions increased by 3.3 per cent during this period, while the United States emissions grew by less than one per cent, and the other five G7 nations decreased emissions.

Since Trudeau was first elected in 2015, Canada's greenhouse gas emissions have risen every year, according to government statistics. These include emissions from exported fossil fuels, which went up by about 15 per cent between 2016 and 2019.

In 2015, Trudeau also promised to protect 17 per cent of Canada's land and freshwater by the end of 2020. That same year he vowed to eliminate boil water advisories in Indigenous communities by March 2021. And in 2020 he said he'd ban single-use plastics.

So far, he's accomplished none of these objectives — but with a new mandate, climate experts will be watching to see if he can keep his promises this time around.

"Canada has a history of broken climate promises. This is because of a failure of governance, not because of over-ambitious targets," Caroline Brouillette, domestic policy manager at the Climate Action Network, wrote in an emailed statement to Global News.

"To bend Canada's emissions curve, the key question facing the next government is whether they'll seriously tackle the two sectors accounting for the largest share of our emissions: oil and gas and transport."

Still, at least one expert held out some hope for Trudeau's climate plan.

"Trudeau's is Canada's first federal government ever that has implemented policies at stringencies (specific carbon tax increases, regulatory levels) that independent experts, including me, estimate should achieve his targets," said Mark Jaccard, an International Panel on Climate Change author of multiple reports and distinguished professor at Simon Fraser University.

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