

Affordable child-care agreement on the horizon, Higgs says ^[1]

New Brunswick one of three provinces that had not signed on to national program at time of election call

Author: Poitras, Jacques

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EXCERPTS

Premier Blaine Higgs says he's confident his Progressive Conservative government will soon be able to sign on to the federal Liberals' national child-care program.

In the wake of the Liberal victory in Monday's election, Higgs says he won't be rushed but believes a deal is possible.

"We took the time and we will continue to take the time," he said on CBC Radio's Shift New Brunswick. "I'm confident we'll find a path forward."

New Brunswick is one of three provinces that had not signed on to the program before the federal election was called. The other two are Ontario and Alberta.

Under the program, Ottawa would subsidize lower child-care costs, cutting fees in half next year and lowering it further to \$10 a day by 2026. The program would also create 250,000 new "high-quality" daycare spaces.

A Liberal campaign document estimated that the median annual cost of child care for a Fredericton family is \$10,020 and the party's program would reduce that by \$7,416.

In 2019, Higgs dropped his opposition to carbon taxes after the federal Liberals won re-election, including with victories in six of 10 New Brunswick ridings.

The Liberals again won the popular vote Monday and again elected six MPs in New Brunswick.

Higgs said his hesitation to sign a child care deal wasn't aimed at depriving the Liberals of a political win before the campaign or about hoping for a Conservative victory.

He said it was driven by concern about what the federal program would mean for privately run daycares in the province.

"I don't want to see a public daycare system that eliminates all these private daycares," he said.

Those daycares allowed many parents to keep working despite COVID-19, and they deserve to be protected and supported as government moves into the child care sector in a larger way.

"Let's not just forget about those people who got us through the pandemic ... and say, 'Now there's a new system the federal government wants to impose.' That wouldn't be fair," he said.

In August the Higgs government extended an existing child care funding agreement with Ottawa signed under the previous Liberal provincial government.

At the time, the federal government called it a first step toward a broader agreement that would include the \$10-per-day cost.

Region: New Brunswick ^[3]

Tags: federal election 2021 ^[4]

bilateral agreement ^[5]

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