

Editorial: Ontario and Ottawa need to stop posturing and make a deal on child care ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Before the federal election on Sept. 20 it was at least understandable, from a purely political point of view, that the Ford government might drag its heels on reaching a deal with Ottawa for \$10-a-day child care.

After all, the Progressive Conservatives at Queen's Park didn't want to undermine their federal cousins as Erin O'Toole campaigned across the country against the Liberals' signature national child-care plan.

But that was then, and this is now. Voters had their say on Sept. 20. A clear majority — both nationally and in Ontario — backed parties that favour a national plan. O'Toole made the case for going with a system of refundable tax credits instead, and he lost the argument.

Yet here we are, getting on to two months after the election, and the Ford government is still dragging its heels.

Even Jason Kenney in Alberta, for heaven's sake, can reach a deal with Ottawa on this vital issue — even as he and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau claw each other in public over energy and other matters.

The Trudeau government has now been able to reach agreement with eight provinces run by New Democrats, by Liberals and by assorted types of conservatives, as well as one territory (Yukon). All have their own particular circumstances, but all saw the federal offer to bring down the price of child care as good policy and good politics.

That leaves Ontario hanging out there as the big no-show at what ought to be a national party to celebrate a remarkable achievement: putting in place a cross-country program for decent, affordable child care. After literally decades of debate and disappointment, it looks like it's actually becoming a reality.

At this point, Toronto Mayor John Tory pretty much has it right. Ontario and Ottawa should stop sending letters and emails to each other and get down to business. They should get in a room and resolve not to come out until they've got a deal they can live with.

Premier Doug Ford insists he wants a deal. But he says he won't sign a bad one just for the sake of reaching an agreement.

Fair enough, and on the face of it the premier does have some understandable concerns. Ottawa is signing five-year arrangements with the provinces to fund half the cost of lowering the price of child care.

Obviously no province wants to be stuck at the end of that period paying the whole freight if a future federal government tries to duck its responsibilities. Ottawa says it will bring in legislation to guarantee future longer-term financing, and that should reassure Queen's Park. It's also true that lower-cost child care will almost certainly prove so popular that no future federal government will risk the wrath of voters by backing out.

At the same time, Ontario seems to be throwing a curve ball into its negotiations with Ottawa by insisting it should somehow be compensated for the \$3.6 billion the province spends annually on its full-day kindergarten program for four- and five-year-olds.

That was never the point of the Trudeau government's \$30-billion plan to subsidize the cost of child care and bring it down to an average of \$10 a day by 2026. It's not meant to pay for other provincial programs, but to create new spaces and lower fees for parents of young children.

Ford needs to understand that the federal plan will benefit Ontarians at least as much, and in many cases more, than people in the rest of the country. Parents in the GTA, especially, face crippling costs for child care and they stand to be big losers if the province is left out.

If for no other reason than his own political survival, Ford needs to make a deal. So stop the posturing, and work it out.

Region: Ontario ^[3]

Tags: bilateral agreement ^[4]

\$10 a day ^[5]

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