

New Year's advice for PM Trudeau ^[1]

Thoughts on how to match the affordable day-care success from Geoffrey Stevens

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Rt. Hon. Justin Trudeau

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My Dear Prime Minister,

I dare say you have been waiting in anxious anticipation for my New Year's letter with its annual dump of gratuitous advice to assist you to make the perfect world you have created up there in Ottawa a tad more perfect in 2022.

First, however, I hope you will accept my congratulations – seriously – for one hugely important thing you did in 2021. That was the creation of a nation-wide affordable day care program. It will do more to assist women to achieve their economic potential than anything Ottawa has done since Conservative Flora MacDonald introduced the landmark Employment Equity Act back in 1985. That act guaranteed women the same job opportunities as men in the public service and federally regulated businesses – and equal pay for their work.

Universal affordable day care will remove the obstacle that blocks so many parents, overwhelmingly mothers, from the work force. In many cities, quality care costs more, per child, than rent or a mortgage. By reducing the average fee to \$10 per day by 2026, an estimated 240,000 women will be able to take jobs and build careers (and pay taxes).

It should have happened years ago, Sir. You'll recall that Paul Martin got started on a universal plan, only to have Stephen Harper cancel it. But you have done it! The only province yet to sign on is Ontario.

So, if you will permit me, Prime Minister, I will begin with my 2022 advice with this: Don't worry about Ontario. Doug Ford will cave!

He's all huff and puff these days. He's got an election in June. He can't afford to be questioned, day after day, by opposition politicians and reporters asking, as they will: Can you explain again, Mr. Premier, why you think it is okay to expect Ontario families to pay the highest day care fees in Canada while the income taxes they pay are helping to subsidize day care everywhere except in Ontario?

Or: Mr. Ford, you know parents in places like Edmonton, Winnipeg, Vancouver, Whitehorse and Halifax will be paying roughly \$200 a month for a child in day care. How many working parents in Toronto do you suppose love you, or private enterprise, enough to want to keep paying an average of \$1,578 a month, as they do now, by re-electing your Conservative government? Or in Mississauga (\$1,284/month)?

Trust me, Mr. Trudeau, Doug Ford is a pussycat. Two days of campaign questioning like this and he will be at your knee, begging to sign on.

Affordable day care was a game changer in 2021.

If you will indulge me, Sir, here is a constructive suggestion for 2022. Try for another game changer, for your government and the country. Settle on one issue, something that just about every Canadian can agree needs to be done. I suggest you guarantee – in public – that every single Indigenous community in the country, no matter how remote, will have a reliable supply of safe, clean water for drinking and other necessary purposes by the end of 2022.

It will be expensive, but we can't afford not to do it. You are the prime minister. You can make it happen.

I'm afraid my bucket is still filled with gratuitous advice. Never fear, Prime Minister, I will write again. You can count on me.

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