

Ontario Education Minister discussed childcare with a religious lobby group that likened public childcare to 'misogyny' ^[1]

Stephen Lecce discussed childcare with one of Canada's most prominent social conservative organizations

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EXCERPTS

Ontario's Education Minister posted a photo of himself discussing the need for "flexible childcare" with a right-wing religious lobby group that likens public childcare to "misogyny," — claiming it is "coercing women into the workforce."

Ontario is the only province that hasn't yet negotiated a plan for \$10 childcare with the federal government. According to the Prime Minister, no plan has been submitted.

Yet on December 14, Stephen Lecce, Doug Ford's Education Minister, posted a photo of himself chatting with representatives of Cardus, a "faith-based think tank" that opposes public childcare and claims traditional marriage comes with "health benefits."

According to Lecce, he met with Cardus to "discuss the imperative of advancing a flexible child care agreement that supports all families, respects parents' choices, and delivers long-term affordability."

Pictured in the photo appears to be Cardus program director, Andrea Mrozek, who writes regularly for the think tank's publication, Convivium.

The same day Lecce posted the photo, Mrozek penned an op-ed titled "Take your time, Ontario. The rest of Canada is already singing the child-care blues," which argues:

"For Ontario, it will be particularly important to ensure all families benefit, including those who do not want licensed, not-for-profit centres. There are ways to ensure this happens, which include broadening the definition of child care to include anyone caring for a child, particularly parents, regardless of professional designation."

Ontario Coalition For Better Childcare Policy Coordinator Carolyn Ferns said Cardus has a long history of opposing child care.

"Cardus has long had really socially conservative views," Ferns told PressProgress. "So, it is really troubling that that's who our Minister of Education is talking to."

As PressProgress noted previously, an earlier Cardus report — "The Daycare Lobby's Misogyny" — argued public investments in childcare are a means of "coercing Canadian mothers into the workforce" to serve a "dystopian fantasy."

Elsewhere, Cardus has argued on its website:

- Traditional marriage helps people's "recovery from illness";
- "Abortion is the destruction of a developing human being, and a civilized society would not permit it";
- "Sexual revolutionaries" are creating a culture of "unstable families and social disarray";
- "Divorce is correlated with lower graduation rates, higher rates of drug use and higher rates of early sexual initiation for children";
- "The time has come for the government of Canada to use its coercive powers to legislate that a couple being married must be one man and one woman";
- On "sexual openness": "Canadian women have lived through enough broken relationships and casual hook-ups to see that today's sexual openness isn't all its cracked up to be";
- On anti-vaxxers: "They are sterling critical thinkers who unreservedly reserve the human prerogative to question, to challenge, to voice non-compliance with what infringes their physical, emotional and spiritual integrity"

Asked about its position on childcare, a spokesperson for Cardus told PressProgress:

“Cardus maintains that child care is the care of a child, no matter who provides that care. Families have diverse care needs and rely on a variety of forms of care to meet those needs. Public policy best serves families when it offers flexibility and is equitable for all families, regardless of the type of care they use.

“Cardus talks about ‘choice’ but it’s not really about choice” Ferns said. “It’s about a very socially conservative view of the role of women and the family. It’s really contrary to what we’ve been working towards for years.”

Ferns said it’s unsettling that Cardus met with a top cabinet member while so many of Ontario’s families are struggling to access childcare.

“The need for childcare in Ontario is huge. We have the highest fees in the country, the waitlists are huge and the pandemic has meant we’re facing a workforce crisis. Childcare facilities are having to close rooms and limit enrolment,” Ferns said. “Our provincial government has underinvested in childcare for years and, with pitifully low wages, people just cannot take it anymore.”

Ontario’s Ministry of Education did not respond to requests for comment.

Region: Ontario ^[3]

Tags: federal agreement ^[4]

choice ^[5]

ideology ^[6]

governments ^[7]

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