

Jean Charest raises child-care stakes in Conservative leadership race ^[1]

A Conservative government led by Jean Charest would expand parental leave to two years and allow pregnant women to access the federal child care benefit.

Author: Levitz, Stephanie

Source: The Star

Format: Article

Publication Date: 12 Apr 2022

AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

EXCERPTS

A Conservative government led by Jean Charest would expand parental leave to two years and allow pregnant women to access the federal child care benefit.

The Conservative leadership candidate is also promising to help parents cover the cost of daycare for children not enrolled in one of the programs for which fees are now dropping thanks to the Liberals' national daycare program.

Charest has committed to keeping the Liberals' program in place, but on Tuesday is set to stress that more must be done for parents who can't take advantage of those subsidized spaces.

"Provinces across the country, led by all political stripes, have agreed that child care is an essential service for families, not a partisan issue," says a news release obtained by the Star announcing Charest's "flexible family friendly policies."

"Yet daycare spaces are increasingly hard to come by and centres are not always the best option for every family. Parents on shift-work schedules or working multiple jobs need more than standard business hours for their child's care."

Charest's promises come after several days on the attack against the leadership race's presumed front-runner, Pierre Poilievre. Charest has blasted Poilievre for his support of the so-called "Freedom Convoy" movement and his stance on cryptocurrency, calling them evidence Poilievre is unfit to lead the country.

In return, Poilievre has criticized Charest's political history, including his time as the Liberal premier of Quebec.

It was in Quebec that Charest saw the economic impact of subsidized daycare. Six years before he became premier, Quebec adopted subsidized daycare and as that program grew, so did women's participation in the workforce. It now outpaces the national average.

That was noticeable even before the pandemic, but the economic damage done by COVID-19 has seen renewed focus placed on getting more women working.

Women were more likely to lose their jobs during the pandemic, or shift or change hours to accommodate children who were not in care or at school.

That issue, coupled with the rising cost of daycare spaces, has seen the Liberals stress their national plan is about more than just a social program.

"Affordable, high-quality child care will grow our economy, allow more women to enter the workforce, and help give every Canadian child the best start in life," last week's federal budget said.

Charest was among those congratulating the federal government and Ontario's Progressive Conservative government last month when they signed a daycare deal.

"Congrats to Premier @fordnation for getting a child care agreement that works for Ontarians. Accessible and affordable child care is a win for all Canadian families," Charest wrote on Twitter.

His support also marks a departure for the Tories.

The Liberals' current national plan is a rehash of one they nearly had off the ground in 2006 when they were defeated by Stephen Harper's Conservatives, who strongly disagreed that a national plan was required.

Harper ripped up that deal in favour of giving all families up to \$1,200 a year for every child under the age of six so parents could pay for daycare.

When the Liberals were elected in 2015, they kept that benefit program, but modified it to include income testing, among other changes.

But the Liberals also resumed work on a national daycare program and campaigned heavily in last year's election on the progress they'd made securing deals, raising questions about whether the next Conservative government would honour them.

Former Conservative leader Erin O'Toole had said he would honour the first year of those deals, but then scrap them.

He in turn promised a Conservative government would introduce a version of the same tax credit Charest is now proposing, allowing lower-income families to get 75 per cent of their child care costs back from the government.

Charest, however, would limit that credit to families with children who aren't in subsidized daycare spots.

If he becomes Conservative leader, Charest said he'll also allow families to begin accessing the child care benefit during pregnancy, as a means to start saving for the cost of raising a child.

Women can already access maternity leave benefits prior to giving birth.

Charest would also eliminate federal income tax on the federal portion of Employment Insurance benefits during parental leave, and eliminate the clawback of EI on up to \$20,000 of income earned while on parental leave.

While there's an economic and social argument that can be made for Conservatives seeking to help bring down the cost of child care, there's also a political imperative.

One recent poll on the Tory leadership race suggests Charest's support among female voters under the age of 55 lags that for Poilievre.

Research has suggested that the Tories finally formed a majority government in 2011 because they'd closed the political gender gap, but it has opened up again significantly in the elections since.

Region: Canada ^[3]

Tags: parental and maternity leave ^[4]

child care benefit ^[5]

Source URL (modified on 13 Apr 2022): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/22/04/jean-charest-raises-child-care-stakes-conservative-leadership-race>

Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/22/04/jean-charest-raises-child-care-stakes-conservative-leadership-race> [2]

<https://www.thestar.com/politics/federal/2022/04/12/jean-charest-raises-child-care-stakes-in-conservative-leadership-race.html> [3]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7864> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/8955> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/9164>