

What's in it for me?: Why 'solid child-care support' is a priority for this entrepreneur ^[1]

TVO.org speaks with Ontarians from across the province about the challenges they're facing — and what they want the next government to do about them

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EXCERPTS

Asad Nadeem, 36, manages multiple gas stations in Sudbury.

As told to Nick Dunne.

I'm from Lahore, Pakistan, but my family and I came to Toronto in 2002, and I moved from Toronto to Sudbury in 2009. Our family got a business opportunity in Sudbury that was within our price range but still relatively close to Toronto. I have a wife and a six-year-old son.

We've doubled the number of our sites over the past 12 years. Business is growing, Sudbury is a growing community that certainly has been moving in a positive direction the past 10 years. A lot of the new immigrants are opening businesses. There are job opportunities coming up that were not there 15 years ago.

I am trying to understand where the parties stand right now — it's a difficult choice to make. I feel differently as a business owner than I feel as an immigrant, and it's very sad that I have to make that distinction. I think the city and the province are slow to respond to change. Projects like the old Health Sciences building. It's been a disaster for so many years: Why aren't we able to get a new one? Same thing with the Kingsway Entertainment District. There's so much bureaucracy that holds things up. Same thing with businesses — over-regulation. The speed of processes needs to improve immensely.

But, at the end of the day, I'm going to look at what is going to affect everyone around me, people like me, and the community. As a businessman, I like fiscal responsibility — there has to be fiscal responsibility. But when you talk about fiscal responsibility, that doesn't mean we need to cut funding to programs like health care or child care. Those are really important programs for communities to grow, and money needs to be spent there.

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We need to be more focused with where we are being socially responsible. The money has to be spent properly, not wasted. We need huge improvements in our education systems. We need child care. As a parent, I have to register my child in six different programs and pay out of pocket for them. Those are the type of things where I would like to see money spent. Same thing with health care. Same thing with the police system. Why are we not taking some of that money and spending it on community-outreach programs and mental-health counsellors that work with the police to bring peace?

Ultimately, as a businessman, I work with a lot of people with kids. Child care is one of the biggest reasons people walk away from jobs. They don't get the right opportunities, because they don't have affordable child care available to them. Where the minimum wage is today, it's almost not worth it for somebody to even try to work. You can say yes to part-time work, but kids are inconsistent. A kid who's fine today, who doesn't need their mother or father today, may need them tomorrow. We need to have that flexibility, to have that solid child-care support available. That's going to come from non-private sources. If you make that a for-profit business, it's not going to work out. The math just doesn't add up.

Region: Ontario ^[3]

Tags: child care ^[4]

affordable child care ^[5]

government funding ^[6]

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