

Moms expecting Tory child care announcement wind up as photo props [CA] ^[1]

Author: Bailey, Sue

Source: Canadian Press

Format: Article

Publication Date: 10 Sep 2008

AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS

An Ottawa children's shop owner says she feels duped after she and several other moms expecting a major announcement on child care wound up as props in a Tory campaign photo.

Krista Thompson says she was contacted by an organizer in Conservative MP Royal Galipeau's office who was seeking a place where moms and tots congregate.

Thompson, a 37-year-old mother of three, co-owns Boomerang Kids which sells children's products and offers free exercise and social gatherings each weekday morning.

The Conservatives told her they were looking for a place where Intergovernmental Affairs Minister Rona Ambrose could reveal new daycare details, says Thompson.

The shop owner saw it as a good chance for marketing exposure and offered moms a 20-per-cent discount on store items, along with free T-shirts, to attend.

"But we're not partisan," Thompson said Wednesday. "The truth of the matter is we agreed to do it because they said they were making a big announcement about child care. And what became evident by the end of the day was there was no announcement.

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Galipeau's campaign manager, Wendy Noble Woodcock, could not immediately explain what happened.

"I was told there would be a child funding announcement so that's what I told them because that's what I was told," she said in an interview.

In fact, Ambrose broke no such electoral ground. She instead went over the old Conservative child-care plan of \$1,200 a year (before taxes) for each child under age six, along with \$250 million a year to help provinces create daycare spaces.

The Tories have also cut taxes and offered other benefits to sweeten a policy that offers about \$400 million less a year than the Liberal plan for national child care that the Conservatives scrapped in 2006.

Liberal Leader Stephane Dion has promised in this election to add \$350 to the \$1,200 yearly allowance - low-income families would also receive another \$1,225 a year - and create more spaces.

Ambrose says the Conservatives have created 60,000 new child-care spaces when in fact the provinces have announced plans for those spots. It isn't clear how many have actually opened.

She made the comments after pushing a stroller during a brief walk with the assembled mothers as Tory supporters snapped pictures and waved Galipeau campaign signs.

Olga Milliken, 35, said she was lucky to find a child-care space for her daughter Katya, 13 months.

Milliken will return to her research in two months to complete a doctorate in health economics.

"It's very difficult to find a space, extremely difficult - almost impossible. And obviously I think the government can do a lot to help mothers because it's a very difficult choice for the mother to decide when to start working. And sometimes it's not a choice.

"I think helping with daycare spaces is much more important than giving money."

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- reprinted from the Canadian Press

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