

# Liberals to promise more daycare funding: Sources [CA]<sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

The Liberals will try to tap into voter concerns about affordable, safe child care early in the coming election campaign, sources say.

Leader Stéphane Dion will promise more child-care spaces while maintaining \$1,200-a-year payments introduced by the Conservatives, said a source familiar with the party's draft platform.

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The source, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the Liberals are counting on child care as a sleeper issue that will set them apart from the Tories.

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The former Liberal government had struck deals with the provinces for a \$5-billion national daycare program to increase spaces and overhaul Canada's dismal international standing when it comes to early learning.

Conservatives scrapped those plans when they took power in 2006 in favour of tax cuts, increased family benefits and scaled-back funding for new spaces. Such moves were hailed by the Canadian Taxpayers Federation and parents who say it's more equal and efficient to give cash directly to families.

The government says provinces "have announced plans" for more than 60,000 new spaces since 2007, but did not provide an updated provincial breakdown.

The minister responsible, Monte Solberg, declined to be interviewed on the topic just hours before it was announced that he will not run in the campaign expected to start Sunday.

Parents who get the taxable \$100-a-month cheques for each child under age six have so far received benefits worth almost \$5 billion since July 2006.

The Conservatives also pledged during the last election campaign to create up to 125,000 spaces over five years. But in government, they had to shift gears when employers soundly rejected tax credits to set up business-based daycare.

Solberg pointed out last spring that \$1.1 billion a year now flows to the provinces from Ottawa for child care &em; including \$250 million to spur space creation. That's about \$400 million less than what the Liberals planned.

Today, parents in many cities face waiting lists of more than two years for regulated spaces, says Jody Dallaire of the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada.

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Dallaire says there's no easy way to track how many of the 60,000 planned new spaces cited by the government have actually opened. Statistics must be painstakingly collected from each province and territory.

One of the few researchers doing such work reported last spring that the number of new regulated spaces dropped by thousands after the Conservatives took the helm.

Martha Friendly, executive director of Toronto's Childcare Resource and Research Unit, said 26,600 spaces opened across Canada in 2006 &em; down from 32,600 in each of the previous two years and a steep drop from almost 51,000 a year between 2001 and 2004.

Those numbers are despite intense demand for high-quality, reliable programs, said the child-care research veteran of 30 years.

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- reprinted from the Canadian Press

**Region:** Canada <sup>[2]</sup>

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