

Daycare dilemma: 'Alberta Advantage' does not include toddlers and working moms [CA-AB] ^[1]

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Source: Edmonton Sun

Format: Article

Publication Date: 29 Aug 2008

AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS

Mother-of-three Kim Bradley-Jackson has some advice for the Alberta government about how to spend some of its whopping \$8.5-billion surplus -- cut daycare costs for harried working parents.

To get her point across, the 35-year-old Calgary resident is thinking of dropping her kids off at Premier Ed Stelmach's spacious office when she returns to work in a month.

"I am going back to work after six months on maternity leave and am unable to find affordable child care for my kids," she e-mailed the premier on Wednesday. "I am writing to you ... in hopes that you will be available to watch my three children in your office starting Oct. 1," she wrote.

"There are no breaks or subsidies in place for working moms like me," she said in her e-mail, explaining that although she'll be earning \$60,000 a year in her new job, she'll be paying almost \$3,000 a month for child care -- a hefty portion of her take-home pay.

"I am better off to stay home and collect the \$1,708 from EI for the next six months," Bradley-Jackson wrote Stelmach. "Now where's the 'Alberta Advantage' in that?"

Daycare spaces are so hard to find that Bradley-Jackson and her husband have to split up their kids. Their three-year-old son will be at her new employer's on-site daycare, but they have to put their six-month-old twin daughters in a day home.

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To be fair, the Alberta government has poured millions of dollars into child-care programs, including significant wage top-ups for underpaid daycare staff, money for 14,000 new child-care spaces and scholarships for students enrolled in early childhood programs.

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Alberta is going through a baby boom, but try to find a daycare spot. "There are waiting lists of 100-deep or better," says Tim Baier, executive director of the Alberta Child Care Network Association. "We have this massive influx of workers," he adds. "They need a place to put their children while they're working."

But child care is expensive and the perennial debate is over who pays for it, notes Baier. "I don't believe that you're going to have a quick fix. We can do the best we can to plug the holes."

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- reprinted from the Edmonton Sun

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