

Politicians hold key to children's futures [CA-ON] ^[1]

Toronto Star

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Source: Toronto Star

Format: Article

Publication Date: 21 Jan 2008

AVAILABILITY

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Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky said: "The degree of civilization in a society can be judged by entering its prisons."

I suggest that the degree of civilization in a society can also be judged by the effectiveness its child-care programs.

If so, Canada is failing as a civilization.

I remember stepping out of my house on Sept. 12, 2001, looking up at a silent sky thinking, "The world will never be the same."

And it hasn't. The Conservatives have committed \$9 billion to Afghanistan, \$2 billion to child care. What's wrong with this picture? The Taliban have no plans to invade Etobicoke.

There is an important child-care related bill coming before Parliament. Bill C-303 would be the first step in a much needed national daycare program.

As NDP MP Denise Savoie, who moved the bill, says, "it moves us one step closer to building the foundation for a truly national, non-profit, affordable and high-quality child care program."

This type of program would allow single parents to get back into the workforce and help protect you from big box corporate daycare.

A large Australian child-care provider is attempting to bring its business model to Canada.

The company, ABC, has already approached for-profit daycare centres in Ontario, Alberta and B.C., through its subsidiary 123 Busy Beaver Learning Centres, and inquired about buying them out.

This could allow providers like ABC to charge anything the market would bear, for cookie-cutter, no-accountability daycare.

With less competition in the child-care marketplace or political will from the feds, your child's education could be compromised at the most crucial time of his or her life, from 4 months to 6 years old.

Past federal governments have refused to consider child care to be a form of real education and that is the problem. If they did, it would be part of the universal public educational system.

It's not because it's too expensive & the money is available. Governments just choose to spend it elsewhere, or not at all. The preferred political line is, "We have a budget surplus" or "We're committed to Afghanistan."

As Jane Mercer of the Toronto Coalition for Better Child Care told me, "Canada has made a choice to stand still on the issue of publicly funded child care while Quebec and the rest of the world moved ahead. The longer we wait, the greater the gap and the harder it will be to catch up."

The Ontario government knows that in Quebec, 50 per cent of children are in child care, with parents paying only \$7 a day, because the provincial government bit the bullet and made the commitment.

In Toronto, only 25 per cent of children whose parents work outside the home are enrolled in child care and the average cost is approximately \$30 a day. Often it's \$45 to \$75 per day.

There is growing pressure on the prime minister and provincial premiers, with the exception of Charest, to acknowledge that we can be a just society only when we take care of our most vulnerable citizens & our children.

"There are 13,000 parents on a waiting list who are subsidy-approved," says Toronto Councillor Janet Davis, who is the chair of the Children Services Committee. "In the past 10 years we have actually lost 1,800 spaces. We need capital funding to build new spaces, operating dollars for subsidies and additional investment to ensure service quality."

This means paying those who take care of our kids more than \$30,000 a year.

You can use your influence to support Bill C-303 by going to buildchildcare.ca.

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- reprinted from the Toronto Star

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Ontario ^[3]

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<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7864> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7856> [4]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/funding> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/legislation-and-regulation>