

Boons, boondoggles seen in P.C. baby bonus pitch [CA-NL] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

A campaign pledge to pay Newfoundland and Labrador parents to have babies will address — but won't solve — the province's dropping population, an economist says.

Newfoundland and Labrador's PCs are pledging to give parents \$1,000 for each child born or adopted. Newfoundland and Labrador's PCs are pledging to give parents \$1,000 for each child born or adopted.

Progressive Conservative leader Danny Williams this week announced a \$1,000 payment will be made for every baby born or adopted in the province.

The program won't overcome the low fertility rate, said Doug May, a Memorial University professor who specializes in the labour market and demographics.

A similar bonus program worked in Quebec during in the 1990s, he said, but not until the government raised the benefits for a third child to \$8,000.

A more influential factor in parents' decision-making may be the kind of child care and early education the province offers, he added.

"There's some initial evidence to show that, in fact, if the governments stay out of the bedroom of their citizens but in fact get into early childhood learning, get into day-care ... that has a somewhat larger impact on the fertility rate," May said.

"If [parents] know that they can go back to work ... and know that those children can be taken care of, then that is the thing that really makes a difference."

...

New Democratic leader Lorraine Michael describes the offer as short-sighted.

She said more lower-income families may be tempted to have children than more affluent couples.

"We don't have enough child-care spaces," she said. "Where are the services going to be for those low-income people if they start having more children?"

Liberal leader Gerry Reid said money allocated for the program could be better spent on a tax break for families.

The governing Progressive Conservatives said they are prepared to spend \$4.5 million on the program. That would work out to 4,500 babies — slightly more than the 4,368 lives births that Statistics Canada recorded in a 12-month period ending in June 2006.

- reprinted from CBC News Online

Region: Newfoundland ^[2]

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