

Put child care back on agenda [CA] ^[1]

Editorial

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EXCERPTS

Since Stephen Harper was elected prime minister, the issue of a national child-care program has virtually disappeared from public debate. In one of his first acts, Harper unilaterally killed a child-care deal signed by the previous Liberal government, which would have given the provinces \$5 billion over five years to create 100,000 new regulated child-care spaces.

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And with that action, Harper effectively killed all debate on a national day-care program. Even the provincial premiers won't touch the issue, as evidenced by their failure to mention it in a nine-page, single-spaced communiqué detailing their annual conference held two weeks ago.

Fortunately, this silence may be about to change, following the recent release of a new report on daycare by the C.D. Howe Institute and a major essay by Roy Romanow, former premier of Saskatchewan and an Economic Justice Fellow at the Atkinson Charitable Foundation.

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The [C.D. Howe] report acknowledged that child-care programs reap huge benefits for children from low-income and single-parent families. The most important measurable benefit was improved school performance.

Other studies have shown that all children benefit from a good early start in life. Leading researchers have established strong empirical links between an emphasis on early childhood development and success in later life.

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In his essay, *Child Care and the Future of Canada*, Romanow argues convincingly that "to strengthen our common commitment to early learning and child care is to advance our individual and collective well-being and, in turn, the building of a better Canada." Good early learning is key to improving the determinants of well-being, he says, noting a healthy, educated population plays a critical role in bolstering a competitive economy.

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As Romanow says, Canadians are proud of their universal, high quality health-care system that is available to everyone, regardless of income or where they live. The same could be true of a high-quality early learning and child-care system. We must ensure that young families have the supports they need so the next generation grows up healthy, strong and well-educated. The future of Canada depends on it.

That's why we must reopen the debate on a national child-care program.

- reprinted from the Toronto Star

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