

# Premiers rebuff child-care advocates [CA]<sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

See text below.

## EXCERPTS

Conspicuously absent from the communiqué issued last week by the premiers following their annual conference was any mention of child care.

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Making this oversight all the more curious is that the premiers have good reason to complain about Ottawa's handling of the child-care issue. And complaining about Ottawa is what they do best.

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Not wanting the issue to die, national and provincial child-care organizations, women's and social justice groups, and unions formed a coalition called Code Blue for Child Care.

Prior to the annual premiers' conference, Morna Ballantyne, executive co-ordinator of Code Blue, wrote Newfoundland's Danny Williams, the host premier, to ask for an opportunity to make a presentation to the meeting. She was turned down flat.

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The activists then asked the premiers to come out and accept the petition, but they were rebuffed even by the ones who might be presumed to be most sympathetic, such as Manitoba's Gary Doer and Saskatchewan's Lorne Calvert (both New Democrats) and Ontario's Dalton McGuinty. They all pleaded that they were pressed for time.

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What is the explanation for the premiers' reluctance to engage on this issue?

The premiers used the dead horse argument. "Let's be honest," said Calvert's spokesperson. "Harper is not going to change his mind on this."

But the same could be said of other items in the communiqué, such as concern about the dollar or the appointment process for the Senate and Supreme Court.

Another possible explanation is that the premiers, having already publicly split on equalization, did not want to expose their divisions on yet another issue.

In this respect, it should be recalled that not all the provinces signed onto the child-care deals last year with enthusiasm.

Indeed, half of the provinces have Conservative governments (although, unlike the one in Ottawa, they preface their name with the modifier "progressive"), and their premiers campaigned for Harper.

Then there is a third possible explanation: the premiers' preoccupation now is with lobbying Ottawa for more money with no strings attached — through either equalization payments or, in the case of Ontario, per capita grants. A simultaneous push for restoration of funding with strings attached to child care might be counterproductive.

Whether the provinces would spend any no-strings-attached funding on child care is another question. They all have competing priorities — from post-secondary education to infrastructure.

Better for the premiers, then, to put the child-care issue behind them. But not better for the cause of public debate.

- reprinted from the Toronto Star

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

Ontario<sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** advocacy<sup>[4]</sup>

federalism<sup>[5]</sup>

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