

The growing child care divide [CA]^[1]

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Source: Globe and Mail

Format: Article

Publication Date: 12 Jun 2006

AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS

Dale Tremblay and Derek Evans are Calgary energy executives, and they agree on a lot of things -- including the view that a shortage of skilled workers is threatening Canadian economic prosperity.

But ask them about federal child care policies, and these two oil guys line up on opposite ends of a gaping chasm of values.

Mr. Tremblay, president and chief operating officer of Saxon Energy Services Inc., believes the debate about daycare funding largely misses the point. What's needed, he says, are tax deductions that allow one parent in a family to stay home full-time with the children.

But Mr. Evans, the CEO of Focus Energy Trust, believes access to universal daycare is an economic enabler that helps women fulfill their right to a better standard of living.

Welcome to the diverse, interesting Corner Office of 2006, as reflected in the C-Suite quarterly survey of 150 chief executive officers, presidents, chief financial officers and senior vice-presidents that was undertaken last month for Report on Business and ROB-TV.

The survey, conducted by the Gandalf Group, indicates that Canada's business leaders share a fair degree of consensus on the overall thrust of economic policy, but their views on social policy are all over the map. The senior executive cadre seems just as divided as the general population.

Almost two-thirds of business leaders see a link between child care and productivity, and a resounding majority see quality child care as an important factor in hiring and retaining people.

But 75 per cent say their companies are unlikely to take up the budget's corporate tax credit of up to \$10,000 for new child care spaces.

In many cases, they do not see it as a priority or they believe their company is too small. (The survey did not poll executives on the budget provision to provide a universal child care benefit to families.) If Mr. Tremblay and Mr. Evans are any indication, the problem is also the sheer breadth of opinion.

Both see strong links between child care and a productive work force, and both are critical of the budget's child care provisions -- but from opposing points of view.

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Yet Terry Wong, president of Vancouver-based Citizen's Bank of Canada, is convinced that any measure that supports families with children is a good thing. And he refrains from being harshly critical of the government's economic moves so early in their term.

The solution to child care challenges will not come from one item in the budget, he says, but from a lot of people pitching in.

"Don't expect the budget to do it all."

...

The majority feel access to good daycare is important to hiring and keeping people, but most are skeptical about the impact of Ottawa's plan to use employer tax credits to create care spaces.

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Q: Do you think child care policy is a factor in economic productivity?

Yes 64%

No: 33%

Don't know/ refused: 3%

Q: As of today, how well would you say the childcare needs of your employees are met?

Poorly met: 5%

Very well met: 13%

Don't know: 11%
Slightly well met: 20%
Somewhat well met: 51%

Q: Is child care policy a factor? Yes. Why?

45% - Allows more people to contribute to the economy
24% - Increases productivity
10% - Allows more women in the workforce
8% - With two parents working someone has to care for children
4% - Promotes better child care
1% - More workers need child care now

Q: is child care policy a factor? no. why not?

30% - I don't see a connection
22% - It should not be a government priority
16% - Choice should be left to families
8% - Parents should take responsibility
8% - Should be left to private sector

- reprinted from the Globe and Mail

Region: Canada ^[2]

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