

Provinces, feds squabble over child-care funding [CA] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Human Resources Minister Diane Finley dug in Monday against provincial efforts to persuade the Harper government to abandon its plan for creating child-care spaces in favour of transferring money directly to the provinces.

Finley told reporters at the end of a meeting with her provincial and territorial counterparts the government is sticking to its plan to use tax credits and grants to encourage businesses and community groups to create new spaces.

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"I'm disappointed, very disappointed," Mary Anne Chambers, Ontario's minister of children and youth services," told reporters after Finley had left the room.

"Today was a frustrating day," added Deb Higgins, the minster of learning in Saskatchewan.

Chambers said there was a solid front of provincial and territorial ministers behind a plan to redirect to the provinces the \$250 million a year that the government has earmarked for tax breaks and grants, beginning next April 1. The government says it will create 125,000 spaces over five years.

Chambers said past experience with such tax breaks in Ontario, for example, shows businesses are not interested in getting into the child-care business.

Finley disagreed, and said she had received indications of interest from corporate groups and businesses. She said she could not, however, provide the names off the top of her head.

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Higgins, Chambers and Manitoba minister Chris Melnick said the provinces and territories not only have the jurisdictional responsibility to deliver child care, but they also have built up an expertise in the area over the years.

They said a major gap in the Harper plan is that it provides no money for on-going operating costs once a child-care space has been created.

Finley insisted the federal government is committed to finding ways to make its program work, and that there would be more consultations.

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- reprinted from the Ottawa Citizen

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