

Diane Finley's childcare mission [CA] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

We don't envy Diane Finley, the federal Human Resources Minister, as she meets this week with her provincial and territorial counterparts.

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Ms. Finley faces an uphill battle. Not only must she relieve provincial politicians of money -- never a pleasant task -- she must do so with the entire blinkered childcare establishment arrayed against her.

Until the new Conservative government came on the scene, almost no influential player in the child-care debate seems to have considered private solutions: It was government daycare or no care as far as federal and provincial ministers, and child care advocates were concerned. It is this entrenched mentality -- and not just revenue flows -- that Ms. Finley must change.

In addition to paying parents \$1,200 per young child per year to spend on whatever form of care they wish, the Conservatives are planning to offer \$250-million annually in tax incentives and grants to companies and community groups that open new daycare spaces. It is a promising approach. Yet in advance of this week's summit, Mary Anne Chambers, Ontario's Minister of Children and Youth Services, pronounced the Conservative plan dead before it had even been delivered.

"You can open spaces," Ms. Chambers said in an interview with CanWest News Services, "but if you can't help to support these spaces on an ongoing basis, they won't happen." In other words, without constant government involvement, there will never be enough child care available.

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What we have here is a clash of visions. The Conservatives seek to give individuals the right to make key decisions in their lives and those of their families. Meanwhile, Liberals, provincial politicians and most so-called child care experts believe such decisions can be made wisely only by, well, them. They cannot imagine any child-care program succeeding if they are not enthroned at its decision-making, fund-distributing pinnacle.

Big government solutions had their chance. Since the former Liberal government first mused about a national day care strategy more than a decade ago, and promised more than half a million new daycare spaces, less than 125,000 new, state-approved spaces have materialized. That's one-quarter of what was planned. It's hard to see how the Tories' new private-based initiative could be any less successful.

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- reprinted from the National Post

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