

Social Development minister's riding hurt by child-care program cut [CA-ON] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Social Development Minister Diane Finley wouldn't have to look very far to see the child-care spaces she insists the former Liberal government didn't create through its national child-care program.

They're right in her own backyard.

In her rural Ontario riding of Haldimand-Norfolk, 100 child-care spots have been opened as a result of the Liberal agreement signed with the provinces last year - a deal that was swiftly cut short by the Conservatives when they gained power.

Another 60 spaces are slated to open next year before the previous funding promise runs dry.

Yet last month, Finley argued those spaces didn't exist.

"Mr. Speaker, the honourable member across the floor seems to think that we are taking away spaces when in fact these spaces were never created by the previous government," she said during question period in the Commons.

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Municipal leaders in the predominantly rural area that Finley represents are bemoaning the fact that they've had to scrap some of their child-care expansion plans because her government did away with the program, which was originally set to run for five years.

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What has been lost are plans to open child-care centres that are attached to area schools. These "hubs" would also provide parents with additional services such as hearing tests, pre-natal classes and other programs geared towards early childhood well being.

One project in particular that has been shelved would have served aboriginal families in Hagersville, Ont., near the site of a bitter native land dispute in Caledonia.

In Finley's riding, only four per cent of children ages 0 to 4 have access to licensed child-care spaces.

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- reprinted from the Canadian Press

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