

The perils of the politics of child care [CA] ^[1]

CBC Reality Check

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EXCERPTS

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To avoid a broadly federally sanctioned child-care program, the Harper government has promised that for every child under the age of six, families will be given \$1,200 a year to spend as the parents see fit. Although the program is called child care, it is not. The \$100-a-month cheque is a natural successor to the family allowance program & the old baby bonus & that was cancelled by the last Conservative government.

The monthly cheque is not child care, which suggests a structured system of early learning to prepare children for the demands of formal education. That \$100 may buy some neighbourhood babysitting, but Monica Lysack of the Child Care Advocacy Association will tell you that child care can cost anywhere between \$500 and \$1,200 a month.

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Because it was hardly underway, the new Conservative government has served notice that the Liberal program is ending.

The abrupt end of federal funding has meant that the provinces must scramble to re-examine their plans. Ontario, for example, has cancelled plans for 11,000 child-care spaces. Saskatchewan has dropped its plan for a universal preschool program.

But of course the government's child-care plans do not end there. As Flaherty was apparently eager to tell the country, there was also the \$250 million for a five-year plan to create new child-care spaces: "We will work with governments, businesses and community organizations to develop a plan that works, a plan that actually creates spaces."

Those who knew what was coming in Flaherty's speech were probably watching closely to see whether the finance minister registered even a flicker of uncertainty as he read his bold plan. The point is that Flaherty was in the Mike Harris government in Ontario that created a similarly bold plan to finance child-care spaces. As he knows, the plan was a fizzle. The spaces just did not get created.

University of Toronto economist Gordon Cleveland says the problem is that doing child care properly is expensive. Small business cannot afford to undertake the responsibility and large businesses are not really interested. If you are in the business of making widgets, child-care administration is not really your core business.

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Monica Lysack points to a certain irony in the federal government's promotion of child-care space creation.

For all Flaherty's enthusiasm, the federal government provides no child care for the children of its thousands of employees. "If they think it's such a great idea, why don't they lead by example?"

- reprinted from CBC Online

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