

Harper distorting child-care debate [CA] ^[1]

Editorial

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EXCERPTS

The battle over the future shape of child care in Canada is heating up, now that Prime Minister Stephen Harper has taken the offensive. Confirming Tuesday that his promised \$1,200 grant to parents for every child under the age of 6 would be delivered in next month's budget, Harper threw down the gauntlet and dared the opposition to defeat his fledgling minority government over the controversial measure.

That's fair politics, as are his efforts to enlist socially conservative groups to help sell his plan. What is not fair, though, is Harper's portrayal of those who believe the money would be better spent creating badly needed child-care spaces across the country as pie-in-the-sky academics and researchers and special interest groups.

Mothers who choose to work or who must do so to pay the bills are no more a special interest for wanting to know their children are being well looked after, stimulated and nurtured than are mothers who stay home.

Leading researchers have long established strong empirical links between an emphasis on early childhood development and success later in life.

...

With the budget just weeks away, supporters of child-care centres must throw themselves and their dedication to their children into the battle to persuade Canadians that access to quality child care is not a frill, but a right of working women and, more significantly, their children.

...

Most importantly, the issue is not about stay-at-home versus working mothers. It is about children and the care they receive regardless of whether their mothers work in the home, in a factory, a store or an office.

Do we, as a society, not have an obligation and a vested interest in ensuring the children who do not spend the days with their mothers get the kind of care that will help them become well-adjusted, creative, productive adults?

...

It is time for a vigorous debate about the needs of children — the one group overlooked in Harper's plan. Advocates of a national child-care program need to go on the offensive and tell Canadians why so many children will end up worse off with Harper's \$1,200 "gift."

- reprinted from the Toronto Star

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