

Few signs of child-care compromise as Conservatives set government course [CA] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

There wasn't exactly a child-care olive branch in Tuesday's throne speech as the Conservatives signalled they're ready to scrap the \$5-billion Liberal plan.

"We've said we're going forward with \$1,200 a year," Social Development Minister Diane Finley said outside the Commons.

"That's exactly what we're going to do. There is no compromise on that."

The speech that set the new government's course underscored the Tory election promise of providing parents \$1,200 a year for each child under age six.

The creation of new spaces will also be encouraged "through co-operation with the provinces and territories, employers and non-profit agencies," says the brief speech read by Gov. Gen. Michaëlle Jean as the new Parliament opened.

Conservatives have said they'll offer \$250 million in tax credits for businesses and non-profit groups that cover the full cost of creating new spaces.

The Tories say the measure could produce 125,000 more spots. But critics point out that similar efforts by provincial governments failed to motivate corporations.

Child-care advocates and opposition MPs had hoped for greater hints of compromise.

"It wasn't very encouraging at all," said Monica Lysack, executive director of the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada.

"Multi-year funding is what we're looking for."

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The NDP, Liberals and Bloc Quebecois have all blasted Conservative child-care plans.

The Liberals promised \$5 billion over five years to build the fiscal foundation of a national child care network.

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Harper faces a looming showdown with premiers who say he should honour those commitments.

Bloc Leader Gilles Duceppe has said Harper's avowed commitment to fix the fiscal imbalance between Ottawa and the provinces will ring hollow if he denies child-care funding to Quebec worth more than \$800 million.

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Child-care advocates say stressed-out parents will be denied spaces that have already been promised.

Other parents, such as Sara Landriault of the Fund the Child Movement, want Ottawa to offer more help for stay-at-home parents. She argues that the Liberal program goes too far while the Conservative plan is too stingy.

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