

In a quandary over child care [CA] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Call it the trickle-down, the ripple or even the gusher effect -- no matter how you couch your terms, the fact is that the change in government at the federal level is creating puddles at the municipal level.

The day-care issue is one in which that change is making a particularly noticeable puddle, as municipal officials try to figure out what to do in light of Prime Minister's Stephen Harper's determination to kill off the previous Liberal government's national child-care plan. Instead, Harper plans to provide families with \$1,200 per year in tax credits for each child under six years old.

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The 2,400 new spaces originally planned for the city using federal and provincial funds would have increased the percentage of children accommodated to 11 per cent from 8 per cent. It's no surprise, though, that members of the city's social services committee will advise council to proceed only with the 524 spaces already created or under way. There's no doubt that for Hamilton city councillors, this is a particularly difficult issue, given the city has the highest poverty level in the province.

The child-care issue is the clearest delineation of the ideological differences between the Liberals and the Conservatives at a time when it is increasingly difficult to see differences. Harper's Conservatives maintain child care is an individual responsibility, a personal choice. The Liberals envision a national child-care infrastructure.

Which approach do most Canadians prefer? It's certainly not clear by the outcome of January's federal election. It would be difficult indeed to argue that Harper forming a minority government is evidence Canadians are backing away from a national child-care infrastructure.

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The Liberal opposition is pushing Harper hard on this issue -- understandably given the Liberals vision, albeit a belated one, for child care in Canada. But with no new leader until December, it's unlikely the Liberals will turn their push into a shove out of office after next month's throne speech. The NDP and the Bloc Quebecois are also looking for compromise from Harper. We'll have to wait and see how this PM handles pressure.

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- reprinted from the Hamilton Spectator

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