

Liberals, NDP unite on child-care [CA] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Opposition parties are moving to form a united front before the battle for national child care lands in the House of Commons next month.

Liberals and New Democrats say pushing the Conservatives to compromise on their pledge to scrap the \$5-billion program will be a priority when Parliament resumes April 3.

The Bloc Quebecois has also repeatedly called on Prime Minister Stephen Harper to honour related agreements.

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"We owe it to the families in Canada who voted for us to work together," said NDP social development critic Olivia Chow as New Democrats met Thursday to plot strategy.

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Liberal social development critic Carolyn Bennett agrees.

"I think on this file we're going to really try," she said Thursday in an interview. "I think we should be able to find some approach that we can all agree on.

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Conservatives have offered little hint of compromise beyond vague signals from Harper that he's willing to discuss "transition periods" to help provinces adjust.

His social development minister, Diane Finley, recently doused hopes that funding could be extended, saying that the March 31, 2007, deadline is firm.

"They're obviously pretty committed to getting the \$1,200 out the door," Bennett said. But Conservatives need opposition support to achieve that or anything else in a very divided Parliament, she added.

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Still, opposition MPs have hedged when asked if they'd be willing to topple the Tories over child care or any other issue.

Bloc Leader Gilles Duceppe doesn't like to discuss parliamentary strategy. But he says 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.

As debate heats up in Ottawa, child-care advocates continue to demonstrate on behalf of stressed-out parents trying to juggle the demands of work and family.

Seventy per cent of women with children under age six are in the work force, but there are regulated spaces for just 20 per cent of those kids.

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- reprinted from the Canadian Press

Region: Canada ^[2]

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