

Premiers talk tough over cuts [CA] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The premiers of Quebec, Ontario and Manitoba yesterday were talking tough about the fight to save their billion-dollar child-care agreements signed with the previous government despite formal notification of the Conservatives' plan to scrap them.

"I always respect the positions taken by my colleagues but in Ontario we do not intend to drop this issue," Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty said.

"From our point of view, we signed an agreement with the government of Canada and we intend to put pressure on Prime Minister Stephen Harper that he respect this agreement."

"Quebec signed a letter which brings us to 2010," added Premier Jean Charest. "If the agreement is scrapped, it will according to the letter that we received, we will lose \$800 million. That's a lot of money.

"We are going to have this discussion. We're going to raise the issue."

"He (Harper) has a promise," said Manitoba Premier Gary Doer. "We have programs. There have been commitments. How do we manage this disagreement?"

They were reacting to a political bomb lobbed into the middle of the premier's post-secondary education talkfest yesterday in the form of a letter from the Conservative Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, Diane Finley.

The letter informs the premiers of the Conservatives' intention to scrap the Liberals'

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"Please accept this letter as the government of Canada's formal written notice of intent to terminate, as of March 31, 2007, the Moving Forward on Early Learning and Child Care Funding agreement between the government of Canada and the government of Ontario in according with section 9 thereof," Finley writes in a letter to Ontario's Minister of Children and Youth Services Mary Anne Chambers.

The letter says the Conservatives' move will be initiated July 1, 2006, as planned. The only concession is that Ottawa will allow a one-year transition period during which it will fund the existing agreements.

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Emerging from dinner, Doer and Charest indicated though the encounter with Harper was cordial and the parties presented their various positions, nothing was resolved.

- reprinted from the Montreal Gazette

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