

McGuinty keeps up child-care pressure [CA-ON] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Prime Minister Stephen Harper has assured Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty that no province - not even Quebec - will be given special treatment as the Conservatives wind down the Liberal child-care program.

McGuinty, who called Harper yesterday and spoke with him for 15 minutes, said the Prime Minister pledged that Ontario would not be given the short end of the stick.

"On the matter of child care, I raised what I've heard regarding some of the news emanating from Quebec," the premier told reporters.

A spokesman for Harper this week said the Prime Minister had offered to negotiate a transition period with Quebec, regarding child-care policies. Quebec has its own daycare network which it pays for on its own.

"He told me that the days of one-off deals are over and that whatever the outcome of this ongoing debate with respect to the future of child-care and the former government's program, all provinces will be treated the same," McGuinty said.

A significant movement is building among provincial governments, federal opposition parties and child-care advocates to rail against Harper's election promise to simply cancel the federal-provincial agreements comprising the former Liberal government's fledgling national child-care system.

Yesterday, the federal NDP revealed its plans to introduce a child-care bill that, if passed into law, would prevent the federal government from walking away from those agreements.

The former Liberal government signed a deal with each province to give them start-up money - a total of \$1.2 billion every year for the next four years - to create spaces and hire staff to build provincial child-care programs that are affordable and available to all families.

That federal money, for example, meant as many as 96 new child-care centres in Toronto and some subsidized child care for about 4,700 children in the city's poorest neighbourhoods.

That would be lost by March 31, 2007, when Harper has promised to cancel the deals, which he can do without approval of Parliament because they are simply political agreements.

McGuinty said he urged Harper to reconsider the move.

If the NDP's legislation passes, Harper would likely have to go through Parliament before doing away with national child care. Though the Liberals and the Bloc Québécois share the NDP's goal of national child care, it's still unclear if they would vote for the NDP child care bill in the Commons.

- reprinted from the Toronto Star

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