

Daycare debate [CA] ^[1]

Transcript of Mike Duffy Live

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EXCERPTS

MIKE DUFFY: What happens to the child care plan now? To tell us all about that we're joined in Toronto by Mary-Anne Chambers who's the Ontario Minister of Children and Youth Services, and in Vancouver by Heather Northrup who's a former vice chair of the BC provincial Child Care Council. So, minister, let me begin with you. When you look at what Mr. Harper is proposing, what do you think that it means for Ontario, Canada's largest province?

MARY-ANNE CHAMBERS (Ontario Children and Youth Services Minister): Mike, what it means is that we would not be able to respond to what parents have asked us to do for their kids. Parents have told us that what's really important to them is the permission of safe, regulated high-quality developmental day care opportunities, and child care opportunities I should say. Opportunities for early learning so that kids are really ready to be successful when they get to grade one. Parents have also told us that they need help in balancing the demands that they deal with every day in, you know, the demands of work and the demands of raising their families.

DUFFY: Now, when you say that you won't be able to meet that, does it mean that you'll only be partially able to meet it, or how serious is the financial crunch that you're facing?

CHAMBERS: Mike we signed, the Ontario government signed a five-year agreement with the federal government, the government of Canada. And in the first three years of that five years, and I refer to the three years because we plan with municipalities, and the municipalities are very much partners in this deal. We plan on a three-year cycle, and for the first three years the plans were to have 25,000 new child care spaces for the people in Ontario. Every dollar of that \$1.9 billion from Ontario is going straight to child care.

DUFFY: And that's not coming now, or what is your understanding? I gather there will be some kind of negotiation on a compromise proposal?

CHAMBERS: Well I haven't heard that from Ontario. I have heard that the statements the Prime Minister has made publicly in terms of his interest in abandoning that agreement, which is really quite troubling to us in Ontario.

DUFFY: Now, I want to get Heather Northrup in this in just one second, but Minister I also understand the Premiers have had a conference call to discuss this among other things?

CHAMBERS: The Premier of Ontario, Premier McGuinty is very committed to delivering on this plan for federal funding to support parents in Ontario. And this was, this is part of a program called best start in Ontario where we're really committed to ensuring that kids have the very best opportunities in life.

DUFFY: Heather Northrup, you saw what came out of Ottawa, and the next thing I know you are submitting your resignation. Why? [*
Note: resignation is from BC Provincial Child Care Council, 'advisory body' to government]

HEATHER NORTHRUP (Child Care Advocate): Well at the end of the day, to the extent that other Premiers were echoing their concerns that Prime Minister Harper had now put this on the table, and they were very forcefully arguing their case that Ottawa should honour the agreements that were made, the fact that British Columbia was not voicing the same opinion was quite concerning to me. Couple that with Senator Lowell Murray's comments that he was aware of two unnamed provinces who were willing to walk away from the agreements, I was profoundly concerned. And so at the end of the day, I was a parent voice on British Columbia's provincial child care council. The \$633 million that British Columbia was going to receive out of those agreements was going to be critical to reducing the significant wait lists in British Columbia and helping in reducing the fees so that child care is more accessible to those families who need it. I don't know if you know in Vancouver there are a number of very good child care centres and the waiting list for those centres in Vancouver are 1,500 kids.

DUFFY: Sixteen hundred?

NORTHRUP: Fifteen hundred. Yeah.

DUFFY: Fifteen hundred who can't get spaces. Now, you were angry that Gordon Campbell, a provincial Liberal Premier, was not more

negative, or not more aggressive in going after the federal government on this issue. Are you suspicious that BC may be one of those provinces that Conservative Senator Lowell Murray, Progressive Conservative, he hasn't yet joined this new caucus, that Progressive Conservative Senator Lowell Murray was referring to? Do you think that there is a secret plan for BC to get out of this altogether?

NORTHRUP: Well I have no idea whether there's a secret plan or not. I think at the end of the day Prime Minister Harper has put all of the provincial Premiers, and quite frankly all of Canada's kids in a very, very difficult position. There are a lot of kids who are relying on those monies. There are a lot of families who received increased subsidies in British Columbia, and now all of those dollars are in jeopardy. So to that extent...

DUFFY: What about the \$1,200 per child. The government has already signaled they want that to come in by the 1st of July. Do you sense that when the cash starts to flow that will ameliorate some of the public concern?

NORTHRUP: Well I don't think so. I think the \$1,200 is an acknowledgment that for Canadian families raising young children it's an expensive proposition. However \$1,200 to families is not going to create child care spaces, nor is it going to make child care more affordable.

DUFFY: Now the government here says that oh we're going to also develop a quarter of a million child care spaces as well. Maybe to get minister Chambers in here, is Ontario interested in cooperating with the federal government on that part of their plan?

CHAMBERS: Mike, we have a five year agreement. We worked hard to acquire that five year agreement, and we just believe it should be honoured. And the five-year agreement respects and reflects the concerns raised by parents like the parents Heather has represented, parents here in Ontario. In Ontario we are looking at stats that suggest 70 percent of parents with kids under the age of six require child care, and with the number of regulated spaces that we already have in the system, plus the 25,000 increased plan for the next three years under this agreement, we would still only be meeting about 20 percent of that demand.

- reprinted from CTV News

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