

All agree day care a priority [CA-ON]^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Alison DeMuy had the perfect prop in her arms when she rose to ask a question last night at an all-candidates' debate in Waterloo - her five-month-old daughter Elise.

The major topic of the debate organized by the Child Care Action Network of Waterloo Region was day care.

Elise will need day care when she's 12 months old and DeMuy has to return to work. But although DeMuy started calling around last month, she hasn't found any way to get her daughter into day care at that time.

Elise won't be able to get a space until she's 18 to 24 months old, and DeMuy doesn't know what she's going to do in the meantime.

"I was told I should have gotten on the list when I found out I was pregnant," she said later in an interview. "One day care worker told me I should have got on when I was planning to become pregnant."

"I want to make sure every child that needs to go to day care, early learning, is able to go the same way they're able to go to public school and high school," said Liberal incumbent Andrew Telegdi.

The Liberals have earmarked \$5 billion over the next five years to go to a national early learning and child care program. The party has also promised to make child care spaces eligible for funding under infrastructure funds.

Conservative candidate Ajmer Mandur spoke of his party's plan to provide a taxable \$100 a month to families with children under six. The plan will provide families with choice, he said.

"I have three children, so I've been there," he said, explaining his wife chose to leave her job as a bank manager to stay at home for awhile and raise their children.

Now their youngest child is six and his wife is back at work. But the Conservative Party wants to help families who choose to provide child care at home, or who need child care outside "institutional" nine-to-five hours, Mandur said.

New Democratic candidate Edwin Laryea said three previous governments have announced child care programs but spaces are still in short supply.

The NDP wants to create 200,000 child care spaces over four years and advocates non-profit, licenced day care. Each promised space would cost an average of \$9,000.

Green Party candidate Pauline Richards said her party supports innovative, grass-roots solutions that will create child-care spaces "much quicker" than the other parties' promises.

For example, the Green Party advocates giving companies tax incentives to create on-site day care, and working with parents who have come up with innovative solutions such as co-operative day care in small groups, Richards said.

DeMuy, who likes her job and wants to go back to work, said she wasn't impressed with the Conservatives' plan.

"Twelve hundred dollars a year just isn't going to cut it," she said. "What we need are more spaces. That's what's going to make a difference in my life."

Sarah Bianchi, 19, and Anastasia Rac, 22, both early childhood education students at Conestoga College, said one of their major concerns was wages for early childhood workers.

"You don't want to make just \$7 an hour or \$9 an hour when you want to have kids," said Rac.

The candidates agreed wages for child care workers were a concern, with Laryea pledging the NDP would fight for a \$10 an hour minimum wage.

"My niece is a day care worker and it's a scandal what she gets paid," said Telegdi, saying early childhood workers should be paid like

teachers. "They're serving society -- let's treat them like human beings."

- reprinted from the Record

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