

Child-care programs at risk? [CA-MB] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Manitoba child-care providers fear their industry will face wage rollbacks, job losses, program cuts and cost increases if an agreement with the federal government is shelved after the election.

"There is a huge amount at stake," said Pat Wege, executive director of the Manitoba Child Care Association.

If the child care agreement between the governing Liberals and the province is scrapped by a Conservative government, Wege believes families could face increased fees of between \$1.33 and \$5 a day per child as day-care centres scramble to make up the lost funds.

Last February, the Liberals set aside \$5 billion to fund a national child-care program. Manitoba signed on to receive \$176 million of that money over five years.

But with the prospect of a Conservative government, the future of the child care agreement is uncertain.

Conservative Leader Stephen Harper has said he will only commit to honouring the first year of the funding agreements.

Instead, the Tories promised to provide parents with kids under six a yearly, taxable benefit of \$1,200 per child to cover child care expenses.

Wege said said the loss of the federal funding agreement would likely mean parents receiving the Tory child benefit will simply have to use their new-found cash to cover fee increases that day-care centres will have to impose to cover the shortfall.

Conservative candidate Steven Fletcher defended his party's plan, saying that it reaches out to more people.

Fletcher said people who live in remote areas where there is no government-run day care will benefit as will shift workers whose day care needs fall outside normal working hours.

He added that the Conservatives plan to spend \$250 million to add 25,000 more child-care spaces.

Don Giesbrecht, executive director of the Assiniboine Children's Centre, has already received funding through the bilateral agreement that he's used to improve wages by 3.5 per cent and add 25 new spaces to his facility. A capital project to add even more spaces is in the works. But, without the funding that would have made its way to Manitoba over the next five years, Giesbrecht said that project will have to wait and he'll be forced to find about \$100,000 worth of savings each year.

- reprinted from the Winnipeg Free Press

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