

Conservative daycare plan gets skeptical reviews [CA-ON]^[1]

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Source: Kenora Daily Miner & News

Format: Article

Publication Date: 11 Jan 2006

AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS

The Conservative party's plan to create 125,000 daycare spots, if elected, received a skeptical response from both Queen's Park and the district services board.

Last week, Opposition Leader Stephen Harper said he would offer \$250 million to employers and non-profit organizations in an effort to help them create new spaces. These would assist small businesses and rural communities in their effort to provide affordable child care to families.

Much of the \$250 million would come from tax credits the federal government would allow for the creation of new spaces, and it would be over and above the \$1,200 a year a Conservative government would provide for young families for child care for children under age six years, said party press officer Emma Welford.

"The Liberal government would give money from politicians in Ottawa to politicians in the provinces in order to create daycare spaces," Welford noted.

Last spring, the federal government announced its long-awaited national daycare program, which included \$5 billion in financing from the last budget to help cover both capital and operating costs. A part of this helped Children and Youth Minister Mary Anne Chambers create Ontario's Best Start initiative, which will cost \$1.9 billion over the first five years of an estimated 10-year program.

A spokesman for the minister, James Ip, estimated the province's five-year program would help create 25,000 spots. However, some of the subsidized daycare spots are worth an average of \$900 a month, he said.

"I think it would be an important agreement to live up to for Ontario families," he said.

Locally, hundreds of subsidized daycare spaces are being created as part of an innovative partnership between the Kenora District Services Board, which is the agent for the province, local school boards, as well as private and non-profit daycare providers.

The board's director of child care services, Diane Apland, hoped to create 315 new spots through the Best Start funding. She added some of these spots would cost between \$30 and \$39 a day, depending on the age of the child, without subsidies from the services board for needy families.

Apland noted a quick calculation of operating costs for the 125,000 spots the Conservatives propose to create, at even \$33 a day, would total \$82.5 million a month.

"I don't think the Conservatives have an idea of how expensive child care is," she said, noting without the subsidies she thinks needy families will not be able to access these spaces.

- reprinted from the Kenora Daily Miner & News

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