

How the parties stack up on child care [CA-YT] ^[1]

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Source: Whitehorse Star

Format: Article

Publication Date: 15 Dec 2005

AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS All three parties have created their child care platforms for the 2005 federal election. It's time for an update on what's happening in child care and how this rolls out locally in our children's daycares and dayhomes. During the last federal election, Prime Minister Paul Martin promised a National Child Care Strategy with \$2.2 billion throughout five years for all licensed child care facilities and preschool programs. Overall, this is rolling out smoothly, especially since the Hon. Ken Dryden, Minister of Social Development Canada, held a "no strings attached" to the first year of funding so each province and territory could develop an accounting measurement to ensure the four QUAD principles for the strategy are met. Those who do not spend the money in the first year are ensured the money is in trust, should the instability such as the election upset the process. All provinces have signed an agreement. In the Yukon, past Health and Social Services minister Peter Jenkins was negotiating with the two other territories, as he did with the Health Care Accord, and we have yet to sign. What's the hold-up? During health care negotiations, the three territorial ministers were able to negotiate for base funding plus per capita. They had the backing of all provincial ministers. Unlike the Health Care Accord, the Liberals believe that with child care, per capita funding, a flat rate based on population, is fair. Their argument is base funding, the mechanism that levels out the playing field so the funding is equal throughout Canada and not more beneficial when one lives in a larger city than a rural, remote or northern area, is paid out through transfer payments. The argument posed back to Minister Dryden's office is that child care in the North is more costly to implement due to the high cost of living, large distances between facilities since, other than the capitals of the territories, there's generally one centre/dayhome per community. Territorial ministers responsible for child care are not being heard. Now, the negotiations are grounded with a take or leave it offer of \$1/2 million for five years to set up an accountability framework for the QUAD principles that will shell out only \$200,000 per year for five years for the actual implementation of the QUAD principles. The accountability mechanism costs one third of the actual implementation of a program that is designed to increase the quality of child care, make it available to all children and affordable for all families who use child care and whose programming is appropriate to each child's development. It's impossible, and that is why the territories have yet to sign. Here are the party positions: The Conservative Party: - \$10.9-billion over five years. - Choice in child care: \$1,200 per year child care allowance (taxable) to parents, per child under six. - Community Childcare Investment Program: \$250-million/year, capital assistance to help employers and communities create child care spaces (\$1.25-billion over five years = a little under 10 per cent of total funding promised). - Will honour year one of current federal/provincial bilateral agreements. The Conservatives did not create this plan by meeting with experts in the field. It seems the only research used was demographic. The plan doesn't reflect an understanding of the importance of quality in early learning and child care - no reference to the QUAD principles (Quality, Universality, Accessibility, Developmental). For example, how will their plan play out in terms of inclusion for children with special needs, in aboriginal communities and so on? We know that key issues across the country are wages and working conditions of child care workers; recruitment, retention and professional development of the workforce; and infrastructure support. The Conservative plan only funds capital expenses - how will this plan ensure that there are enough trained child care workers to work in these centres? It's troubling that the plan will only honour year one of the five-year bilateral agreements. It risks dismantling the extensive work that has already been done in terms of building a child care system across the country - just at a time when all of Canada's 10 provinces are developing their own five-year child care plans. Liberals: - adding \$6 billion to existing \$5 billion promised to finance early learning and child care system through to 2015. - Capital funding for child care spaces will happen through municipal/rural infrastructure programs. New Democratic Party - A Child Care Act to ensure that federal funding for child care is targeted at licensed, high-quality, non-profit child care. - 1.8 billion invested in child care next year, with annual increases of \$250 million for the next three years. This would create 200,000 additional spaces in the first year, with another 25,000 spaces annually after that. - an increase in the federal child tax credit of \$1,000 phased in over four years to help lower-income families cover child care costs and meet other essential expenses. A commitment to a National Child Care Act is a necessary evolution to the process of building a national child care system and the NDP should feel proud of such a promise. Unlike the Liberals' decision to use the QUAD principles to ensure all children have a right to regulated child care, the NDP will ensure funding goes to "non-profit" child care facilities. Questions: The National Children's Alliance, a coalition of 67 national organizations working collectively to enhance the well-being of children in Canada, has three questions for candidates regarding child care I urge you to ask: - Will your party honour the existing Early Learning and Child Care Agreements already signed by the federal governments and provinces? - Does your party plan to invest additional resources directly in child care services? If so, will these services be in the regulated child care sector to ensure quality? - Does your party believe in working with the provinces and territories to develop a National Child Care Strategy? Locally, our Liberal candidate needs to be asked: - Will your government honour the base funding plus per capita funding necessary to ensure northern child care is equivalent to the early learning and child care practices in the provinces? *

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Yukon Territory ^[3]

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