

Child care plans flawed [CA]^[1]

Editorial

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EXCERPTS

Advocates of affordable child care should be encouraged by the healthy debate on the campaign trail.

Conservative Leader Stephen Harper, Prime Minister Paul Martin and NDP Leader Jack Layton all recognize the country's deficit in child care resources and are willing to commit billions of dollars to help fix it.

They acknowledge demand for child care spaces has far outstripped supply.

The Liberal party's program, though well-intentioned in committing \$11 billion over 10 years, still falls short of what is needed.

Many of the best-trained child care workers in Canada are grossly underpaid for the work they do.

They are passionate, dedicated and caring, but they also have families of their own to feed.

What's truly distressing is that many of the Island's 400 plus child care workers are earning anywhere from \$8 to \$12 an hour.

The debate wasn't helped by Martin's senior communications advisor, Scott Reid. He got into big trouble when he told the CBC that Harper's \$1,200 a year allowance for each child under six would only give parents money to burn, more precisely, to spend on "beer and popcorn" at the expense of their children. The Liberals were painted as a party that didn't trust parents to look after their own children.

But can provincial governments be trusted, including that of P.E.I., to handle federal funds used for child care spaces? Examples are rife of provincial governments mispending money delivered to them from Ottawa for health care and other social programs.

Harper's \$1,200-a-year announcement does offer parents the flexibility of choosing their own child care providers, including family members, and would offer relief to stay-at-home parents.

Too bad there doesn't seem to be much care taken to ensure the money gets to where it's needed the most. Wealthy Canadians, who could afford to hire nannies, would also be given the dough, with no strings attached.

Too bad the country's political leaders are out on the campaign trail tossing snowballs at each other instead of putting their plans together to get a program that would satisfy stay-at-home moms and dads, single parents and working couples. Perhaps this could happen after the election.

Martin's plan and the NDP's newly unveiled Child Care Act, which would commit \$1.8 billion in its first year and rise to \$2.55 billion a year by 2009, lack an important element of choice.

Harper's doesn't do anything to make the child care profession more attractive to young people. The Tories' \$250-million Community Children's Investment Program is a pittance, compared to the Liberals' \$11-billion pledge and the NDP's plan.

On the Liberal and NDP side there is more money available to create affordable day-care spaces on the scale of Quebec's.

Parents deserve the freedom to choose how they will rear their children, while daycare workers deserve compensation that matches their skill and dedication. It looks like everyone involved in the child care debate is offering half loaves when a full loaf is needed.

- reprinted from the Journal Pioneer

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