

Whoa, baby! Chew on these child care plans [CA] ^[1]

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Source: Globe and Mail

Format: Article

Publication Date: 6 Dec 2005

AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS

The child care visions outlined by the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party are as far apart as they can get.

The Liberals have yet to lay out their full plan for the future, but in the past year, the Martin government has moved toward a national, regulated system of daycare centres. The Conservatives, on the other hand, are focusing on direct funding to parents.

"The two visions are diametrically opposed, they are really, really different. The details of the Harper program are pretty clear because they're pretty simple. The details of what happens next [with the Liberal plan] will be very important," child-care expert Martha Friendly said.

On this issue, at least, Canadians will have a clear choice between the two major parties in the election.

The philosophy: The Conservatives say families need choice in terms of daycare, and that families in which one parent stays at home with the kids deserve help, too.

The details: The centrepiece of the Conservative plan is to send \$100 a month to the parents of all kids under the age of six, for a total of \$1,200 a year.

The money could be spent however the parents wish, but it would be intended to help defray the costs of child care, regardless of the system the parents use.

The money would be taxed, but at the level of the lowest income earner of the two parents.

In addition, the Conservatives promise \$250-million a year in grants to employers and community groups for new daycare spaces, helping to create 125,000 new spots a year.

The big picture: Over all, the Conservatives say they would spend \$10.9-billion over five years on child care.

Attack on the Liberal plan: "Some want to build a national system of institutional daycare. I call that the Henry Ford model of child care. You can choose any colour you like as long as it's black. You can choose any child care you like, as long as it's nine-to-five, institutional care," Conservative Leader Stephen Harper said of the Liberal plan.

The philosophy: The Liberals have promised to help deliver a national network of regulated child-care spaces with the provinces.

The goal is to create the kind of early-learning programs that experts say are beneficial to the long-term development of children. The Liberals say their plan is guided by the principles of quality, universality, accessibility and children's development.

The Liberals have often lauded Quebec's system of regulated facilities across the province with parents paying \$7-a-day and the government footing the rest of the bill.

The details: The Liberal government has entered into agreements with all provinces, promising funds to help generate new spots for kids. The Liberals argue that the agreements will lead to the creation of 625,000 spaces over the next five years across the country.

The Liberals say they are creating the groundwork for a new system of daycare, but experts feel that further details will have to come during the campaign to flesh out their long-term proposal.

The big picture: The Liberal government announced in last February's budget that the plan to develop a national system of early-learning and child care would cost \$5-billion over five years.

Attack on the Conservative plan: "Harper claims his plan would create 125,000 spaces a year, but the average cost of a high-quality, regulated child-care space is \$8,000. Unless Harper is triple-bunking the toddlers, he has exaggerated the number of spaces to be created by 400 per cent," a Liberal statement said.

- reprinted from the Globe and Mail

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