

Tories promise new child care allowance [CA] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Stephen Harper unveiled a Conservative plan on Monday that would give parents of young children \$100 a month for child care.

The Tory leader made the announcement at a noisy day-care centre in Ottawa. "This is just like a caucus meeting, by the way," he said.

Speaking about the challenges parents face in raising kids while trying to earn a living, Harper said, "The Conservative plan for families will help parents find that balance."

The \$100 a month "choice in child-care allowance" is one of two parts of the plan. All families would receive \$1,200 a year for each child under the age of six.

The new program would not replace any existing major benefit program, Harper said. It would be in addition to the current Canada Child Tax Benefit, the National Child Benefit Supplement and the child-care expense deduction.

A Conservative government would also honour the one-year bilateral commitments the Liberal government reached with provinces for institutional child care, Harper said.

The new benefit would not be clawed back from middle-income families, he said. It would be taxable in the hands of the spouse earning the lower income.

The plan also calls for \$250 million a year to be set aside for investment in community child care. The money is meant to increase the availability of child care by offering tax credits for capital investments in child-care spaces.

Some child care advocates, however, say the Tory plan is based on old, outmoded thinking.

"We've been trying to fund child care through benefits to families or parent subsidies for 30 years, and it hasn't worked," said Kira Heineck, executive director of the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care. "We'd like to see investment directly in programs across the country."

Liberal Leader Paul Martin said he would put money into child care programs.

"Mr. Harper has said he does not believe, and I quote, in subsidized child care and early development," Martin told reporters in St. John's. "Well, I do."

Harper predicted the plan would create 125,000 child-care spaces over five years.

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