

Dryden fears vote may harm child care plan [CA] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The Liberals' nationwide child care plan is in jeopardy if the teetering minority government is toppled, Social Development Minister Ken Dryden said yesterday.

In London to speak to University of Western Ontario political science students, Dryden said he doesn't know what will happen to the plan, for which the government has allotted \$5 billion over five years.

"Certainly, the first-year funding is not (at stake)," Dryden said. "The question is what would happen in the event of a change in government. I don't know."

Money for the provinces was announced in the June budget and first-year funding was put into a trust fund. Ontario is to get \$1.8 billion for child care and early learning programs by 2010.

Ontario's first-year funding share is \$272 million.

The Ontario Best Start plan, which will see day cares as "community hubs," will breathe new life into schools across the province, Dryden said.

When revelations about the sponsorship scandal threatened to topple the Liberals in May before the federal budget vote, supporters of the day-care plan were afraid the long-awaited money wouldn't make it out of the gate.

Now, Dryden said, it's possible the push in each province for the plan will give it momentum even if the government falls.

As for a possible December election campaign, Dryden said it's up to politicians to respect that voters don't want one during the holidays.

"It's like a game. If it's going to be played, you're ready. Would I like one at this time? Absolutely not. It's the wrong time of year, and it's an intrusion."

- reprinted from the London Free Press

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