

Martin to pledge \$633 million for child care, learning in B.C. [CA-BC]^[1]

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EXCERPTS

A \$633 million, five-year funding agreement with the B.C. government for early learning and child care programs will be announced Sept. 30 by Prime Minister Paul Martin, The Vancouver Sun has learned.

The announcement, which will pump \$92 million into B.C. government coffers in the current fiscal year, has already been negotiated and was to be announced Tuesday by federal Social Development Minister Ken Dryden and his B.C. counterpart, Stan Hagen.

Invitations to the ceremony were sent out last week, but it was cancelled and the invitations recalled after Martin, gearing up for a federal election in early 2006, decided he wanted to make the announcement.

"It's something that he wanted to be a part of," a senior federal official said Tuesday.

Those who were uninvited, many of whom have been critics of both the provincial and federal governments' slow moves in daycare, are now waiting to see if they will be allowed to be present when the prime minister makes the announcement at the Union of B.C. Municipalities meeting in Vancouver.

How the provincial Liberal government uses Ottawa's \$633 million for child care could be an explosive issue in the coming session of the legislature.

The NDP, still upset the Liberals cancelled the universal daycare program New Democrats created while in power, has criticized the government for diverting federal child care dollars to other purposes. The Liberal government has also done little to integrate a wide array of programs for children under one ministry or agency, as child welfare advocates have long suggested.

The February 2005 federal budget included a \$5-billion, five-year program to fund child-care programs aimed at the regulated child-care sector. B.C.'s share, based on its percentage of the national population, is \$633 million over that full period.

Hagen said in February he was concerned about the B.C. child-care sector's ability to handle the federal windfall, which will represent a massive increase in provincial spending in the area.

"We're going to see how many applications we receive and see how we can go forward," said Linda Reid, B.C.'s minister of state for child care. "The reality is, if we can enhance and create new spaces, that's what we should be doing."

- reprinted from the Vancouver Sun

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<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7864> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7860> [4]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/funding> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/federalism> [6]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/federal-programs>