

# Dryden defends government record on Israel, day care [CA] <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

Ken Dryden could stop a Bobby Hull slap shot with nonchalance, but when it comes to Israel, the onetime Montreal Canadiens goalie and Hockey Hall of Famer waxes positively rhapsodic.

"The names... the names," Dryden intoned in a near-whisper, recalling his trip to the Jewish state last spring as Canada's minister of social development.

"Certainly, for anybody who has grown up in western Europe or North America and is from the Christian tradition, the names... whether you're particularly religious or not, they're just part of your life," he continued. "And of a sudden, they're there: Bethlehem, the Sea of Galilee, Capernaum. The names that all your life existed only in a book... there they are. And that was stunning."

It was Dryden's first visit to Israel, and it included a much-publicized tour of the Canada Centre in the northern town of Metulla where the Israeli national hockey team trains. The legendary netminder was presented with an Israeli jersey, emblazoned with a blue-and-white Star of David.

But his four-day working trip was busy enough with meetings with Israel's housing minister, Isaac Herzog, as well as visits to a day-care centre and a rehabilitation facility for disabled soldiers, and an emotional stop at Yad Vashem (which prompted Dryden to write a piece on Holocaust education for several Canadian newspapers).

Dryden's visit also kicked off negotiations for an agreement on social security between Canada and Israel that would enable the collection of state pensions and benefits by Canadians living in Israel and Israelis living in Canada.

The CJN was invited to conduct an hour-long, wide-ranging interview with the minister and MP for York Centre- a sure sign that either the governing Liberals are slowly shifting into election mode.

(The opposition Conservatives seem to be of the same mindset: this month, Dryden's Tory opponent in York Centre, Michael Mostyn, appeared alongside his party's critic for social development, Carol Skelton, at the Menorah Nursery, where Skelton denounced the government's day-care strategy.)

Dryden, who's in charge of implementing the Liberals' national day-care program, defended the plan as a huge step forward.

In the last budget, the Liberals allocated \$5 billion to create 250,000 child care spaces by 2009. Six provinces have signed on to the deal.

"There will be more spaces. The spaces will be better and they will be more affordable," Dryden said, noting that the government's allotment is a 48 per cent increase over what all governments in Canada currently spend on day care.

It's still far less than spending levels called for by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. Late last year, the OECD urged Canada to commit at least one per cent of its gross domestic product &em; or about \$10 billion &em; to child care.

The minister noted that 70 per cent of parents with children under six both work. "It is up to us as parents to find the best answers that we can. So now is the time. Child care is part of the way we live in this country.

"There is public support for something that is good. There is no public support for something that is mediocre, so the quality has to get better."

It was the small touches that Dryden noticed at an Israeli day-care centre, including a plastic protector placed on the hinged part of doors to prevent small fingers from getting caught in the crack.

"Now they're trying to put them in child care centres all over Israel. It's the little answers and the ones that you make up as you're going along that may be the most important."

Dryden's wish list includes extending quality child care across Canada; helping seniors live "purposeful" lives, not just those based on health and income security; and achieving a "breakthrough" in the protection of people with disabilities on par with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms' protection of minorities.

- reprinted from the Canadian Jewish News

**Region:** Asia <sup>[2]</sup>

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