

No new money for day care, Quebec says [CA-QC]^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Despite the threat of a province-wide day care strike, Quebec doesn't plan to use any of the money it is entitled to under Ottawa's \$5-billion day care plan to boost its day care budget this year, Family Minister Carole Theberge said yesterday.

In Ottawa, an aide to Social Development Minister Ken Dryden was quick to specify the \$165 million is earmarked for day care.

"The money is absolutely for regulated child care," spokesperson Jamie Tomlinson said.

Theberge didn't seem to share his opinion.

"It is money for the children - that is different," she said as she announced that after a 10-day truce with the Confederation des syndicats nationaux, which represents unionized day care workers, there is still no new money for day care beyond the \$1.5 billion already budgeted.

CSN president Claudette Carboneau was in Europe yesterday when Theberge gave her the news. Theberge said she and the union leader agreed to continue talks but Carboneau did not lift the union's strike threat.

Dryden is negotiating bilateral agreements that call on provinces and territories to accept the QUAD principles, modelled on Quebec's day care system.

Ottawa is handing out its first \$700 million this year to create "a nationally shared vision for early learning and child care in this country," Tomlinson said. "Quebec is widely recognized as a leader."

Last year, when Quebec got an added \$502 million from Ottawa for health care, the money went into the province's consolidated revenue fund, not directly into health.

Helene Potvin, president of the Association quebecoise des centres de la petite enfance, representing Quebec's parent-managed day care network, said yesterday it would take just \$41 million of the \$165 million to maintain the province's day care system as it is.

Potvin said members of her association were told yesterday Quebec intends to cut \$26 million from the day care operating budget on Aug. 1 and wants to sit down to discuss an additional \$15-million cut for Jan. 1, 2006.

Potvin estimated at least 850 and possibly as many as 1,000 jobs could be eliminated because of the funding cut.

She explained that Quebec's Centres de petite enfance do more than babysitting, also offering early childhood education and dealing with social problems.

With less funding, specialized employees and support staff involved in such activities will have to go, Potvin explained.

- reprinted from the Montreal Gazette

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