

Caring for our children [CA-NB]^[1]

Guest commentaries

Author: Hutjens, Tony & Gould, Linda

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EXCERPTS

The issue is as simple as it is complicated: the federal government wants New Brunswick to spend its share of a national child care deal - \$100 million - on licensed child care services. Premier Bernard Lord wants the flexibility to distribute some of the cash to parents who look after their own children. We invited the Lord government to state its case on the issue, and asked licensed day care proponents Early Childhood Care and Education New Brunswick to do the same.

**** Guest Commentary ****

- Tony Huntjens, the NB provincial minister of Family and Community Services.

Our government wants to continue to improve child care for the benefit of all New Brunswickers.

To demonstrate our commitment, I want to state clearly once again our position in ongoing negotiations with the Government of Canada on a \$100-million, five-year initiative for day care and early-learning programs in New Brunswick. The best possible agreement is one that makes funding available not just to day care facilities but also to parents who need it to provide quality care for their children.

Initially, the federal government insisted that its child care funding be used exclusively for not-for-profit day cares. It has since agreed to widen the program's scope to include all day cares. That is a change for the better but it doesn't go far enough.

What the federal government is proposing might work for Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver, but it won't necessarily work for the children of New Brunswick. It would not be fair to invest only in those children who go to regulated day care. We owe it to our children to invest in them, without exception.

While regulated day cares have an important role to play in children's development, it's the parents who can provide the best nurturing environment for the early learning and development of their children. Parents, not governments, are the most qualified judges of child care options for their own children.

For some families, the best child care option might be to send their children to day care. For others, it might be to have the father or the mother stay at home to look after their children or to have a relative do so for them. For others, it might be to have a child care provider come into their home.

That is the agreement we want for New Brunswickers and for the children of New Brunswick. It is a made-in-New Brunswick solution - not a made-in-Ottawa and made-for-Toronto solution.

We didn't sign an agreement with the federal government on May 13 because we hadn't reached the one we want. We did not refuse the money for early-learning and child care programs in New Brunswick and we haven't lost the opportunity to get that money. The money hasn't disappeared and will not disappear simply because we did not sign a deal last month. The money remains in trust for New Brunswick and not one penny has been lost. We will get the funding in its entirety when we are ready to sign an agreement. We are committed to ensuring our children are safe, healthy and given the opportunity to learn and to develop their abilities in the care of loving families supported by caring communities.

That's a made-in-New Brunswick solution that will help us to build a stronger New Brunswick for all.

**** Guest Commentary ****

- Linda Gould, parent of two children, the administrator of a not-for-profit 60-space child care centre located in Miramichi, and the past president of Early Childhood Care and Education New Brunswick.

When Family and Community Services Minister Tony Huntjens said three months ago that all new money coming to New Brunswick under a child care deal with the federal government would be directed to licensed day cares, his words were received with great enthusiasm by everyone involved in the early childhood care and education sector.

Over the past few weeks, however, the provincial media has been reporting comments made by Premier Bernard Lord and members of his team - comments that lead us to believe funds intended for improving the quality of child care services in New Brunswick will be diverted to programs still fairly unknown to the public, offering parents various alternatives in respect to day care services for their children. This leaves members of Early Childhood Care and Education New Brunswick puzzled and concerned at this "new direction" taken by our provincial leaders over this \$100-million agreement.

We don't discount the important role a parent plays in the care and education of their children; in fact, early childhood educators support parents as a child's first and most important teacher. We also support a parent's right to choose the type of child care which is right for their children, whether that be a parent's choice to remain at home, centre-based care or family day home care. But New Brunswick reality states that 76 per cent of parents are in the workforce, yet only one in nine children have access to day care services. What New Brunswick requires is a child care system that supports our present needs.

Therefore, we call for provincial leadership in the signing of a Federal Bi-lateral Early Learning and Child Care Agreement as the first step in creating a made-in-New Brunswick solution for this sector. By investing the \$100 million that has been earmarked by the federal government for early learning and child care, New Brunswick could strengthen its existing child care system with direction grounded in a structure that is:

- Publicly funded and sustainable for quality child care which parents can count on and afford.
- Part of a Child Care Act that guarantees standards and the principles of quality, universality, accessibility, developmental programming and inclusiveness.
- Publicly accountable and tied to provincial and territorial five-year plans containing goals, timelines and targets, measuring real progress in developing comprehensive family- and centre-based child care services.
- Supporting our existing commercial operators but expanded in the non-profit sector. If the federal and provincial governments allow for expansion in the for-profit sector as part of a pan-Canadian program, the entire child care system is more likely to fall under very restrictive rules imposed by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS).

- reprinted from the Saint John Telegraph-Journal

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