

# Child care cash linked to nuclear reactor deal [CA-NB] <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

See text below.

## EXCERPTS

New Brunswick's Conservative government is refusing to sign on to Ottawa's child care scheme until the federal Liberals meet their demand for \$400 million to help refurbish the Point Lepreau nuclear power plant, federal officials said yesterday.

The tactic - which smacks of a pre-election snub - has child care advocates outraged.

"It appears that the future of the children of the province of New Brunswick is being held at ransom due to politics," said Eugene LeBlanc, a member of Parents for Quality Care in Moncton.

Prime Minister Paul Martin and Social Development Minister Ken Dryden had planned to sign the deal at a high-profile ceremony in Saint John later today. But yesterday morning when provincial government officials said they weren't ready to sign the agreement - which would have allocated about \$100 million to start building the province's child care system over the next five years - the trip was suddenly off.

"Officials had reached agreement on substance and the premier's office indicated they were unwilling to proceed unless their demands for funding to Point Lepreau were first met," the official said. "We indicated that we're not willing to make our commitment to increasing child care spaces contingent on anything else."

Now it's unclear when that announcement will come. Though N.B. Premier Bernard Lord's office denied that signing on to child care is contingent on Ottawa funding the power-plant refit, they admitted both files are crucial to their discussions with the federal government.

"If they're asking for us for a favour on daycare, I'm sure we're prodding them back, saying, 'Can you move Lepreau along a little further?'" said Chisholm Pothier, Lord's press secretary.

"Lepreau is not going to kill a daycare deal, but they all get linked in the discussion."

With a federal election call that could come as early as next week, the Liberals are under intense pressure to make progress on the national child care system they promised in the last election. They've already signed with Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Ontario and plan to sign with Newfoundland tomorrow.

And that has some wondering whether the New Brunswick Conservatives' refusal to sign has more to do with backing their federal cousins facing an election than anything else.

Indeed, Lord spoke with federal Conservative Leader Stephen Harper yesterday to ensure that a future Conservative government would make a similar deal if New Brunswick doesn't sign on before the election. Harper assured him that his government would sign a similar deal.

But those child care advocates - who have been fighting for a national system of child care for decades - would rather federal-provincial agreements be signed as soon as possible.

"I'm absolutely ashamed of being a Canadian today when the people we elected are using children as pawns to get funds for nuclear power plants or their own political gain," said Monica Lysack, executive director of the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada. "Are Bernard Lord's priorities really a nuclear power plant over the well being of New Brunswick children?"

- reprinted from the Toronto Star

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

New Brunswick <sup>[3]</sup>

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Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/05/05/child-care-cash-linked-nuclear-reactor-deal-ca-nb> [2]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7864> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7854> [4]

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

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/federalism>