

Quebec isn't rushing into day-care talks [CA-QC] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The Quebec government isn't in a rush to negotiate with Ottawa over its proposed national child-care program, Intergovernmental Affairs Minister Benoît Pelletier said yesterday.

"We will negotiate when the federal government will want to begin negotiations. It's their initiative, don't forget that," he said after a joint announcement of federal and provincial funding of community programs for seniors across Quebec.

"We said this (day-care) initiative falls under one of our jurisdictions, so we're not insisting on having the federal government intervening in one of our jurisdictions. If they want to do so, then of course there are conditions we want to make sure are respected in the process."

Since Quebec has its own low-cost day-care system, it wants to opt out of the federal program with full compensation and no conditions. The federal budget promised to set aside \$700 million for the first year of the program, but Ottawa has yet to reach a deal with the provinces on how the money should be spent.

"We're having conversations, just beginning conversations to see how we can get there," Federal Social Development Minister Ken Dryden said, explaining that he is exploring the possibility of signing bilateral deals with some provinces. But Dryden warned that the program could be in danger if the minority Liberal government falls in the House of Commons.

"The key point at the moment is that the first year's funding is there in the budget, with a deal or without a deal," said Dryden, on hand for the seniors' program announcement with Pelletier and Quebec Family Minister Carole Theberge.

"The real concern right now is to see that (the budget) passes."

Pelletier said the federal budget's adoption is the only thing stopping Quebec and the other provinces from getting access to the day-care money.

The federal Liberals promised to set aside \$5 billion over five years for the national program.

- reprinted from the Montreal Gazette

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