

CBC Commentary: Sharon Gregson [CA]^[1]

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EXCERPTS

So what happened last Friday in Vancouver? The whole country expected a historic announcement. We expected to see the birth of the social program of our generation - a national child care system.

Except when the provincial/territorial ministers met with Ken Dryden in Vancouver on Friday they came away empty-handed. Disappointment hardly begins to describe the reaction from parents and advocates across the country.

So, why is it so difficult for politicians to craft a national program and support it with legislation when we already know the feds are prepared to put billions of dollars on the table? Canadians elected Paul Martin on his promise to create a national system of early learning and child care, but still our politicians are obviously struggling on moving forward.

Alberta, of course, wants us to know it has its own agenda, Quebec already has a child care system and the rest of the country struggles to find an agreement they can all live with - focusing perhaps only on their own jurisdictions.

Imagine if we were trying to launch medicare in 2005 - would it even be possible? Is any attempt at a national social program doomed to failure, or can we collectively apply pressure to make it a reality?

We know under the Social Union Framework Agreement (SUFA) that we only need a majority of provinces to agree to a plan to make it national in scope. We have to be more than a collection of individual provinces; we still have to be Canada. And Canadian children in Vancouver need quality child care just like children in Saskatoon and children in Montreal. We're not so different.

There is still hope that Ken Dryden, perhaps enlisting the support of the prime minister, can pull this one out of the tank. That he really can work some old hockey charisma and encourage those provinces to sign on to an agreement that will serve Canadians well. Parents and advocates like me from every region of this country are counting on this group of politicians to show leadership in 2005 and truly leave a Canadian legacy.

- reprinted from CBC news

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