

Tories playing politics on child care, Pannu says [CA-AB] ^[1]

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Source: Edmonton Sun

Format: Article

Publication Date: 11 Feb 2005

AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS

The New Democratic Party claims the Alberta government is playing "petty turf politics" with Ottawa over a proposed national child care program and its funding. But a spokesman for Children Services Minister Heather Forsyth says the Tory government is merely looking out for Alberta families.

"The Conservatives say the Alberta position will allow for flexibility and choice," Edmonton Strathcona MLA Raj Pannu said yesterday. "That is Toryspeak for protecting for-profit daycare, and allowing more government subsidies to flow to private companies operating child care facilities.

"The Tory position is about petty turf politics with Ottawa at the expense of children and families. But Albertans want co-operation between all levels of government on important programs like child care, not political posturing."

Children Services Department spokesman Jody Korchinski said provincial subsidies go directly to parents, enabling them to choose what type of child care they would like, whether it be a day care, a day home or kin child care where a family member tends to children.

However, the federal initiative - being pushed by Liberal MP Ken Dryden - appears to be aimed mainly at creating not-for-profit day care spaces.

"The federal government has not been clear in terms of how much funding is on the table and what exactly the funding will be for," Korchinski said. "So in some ways it is like being asked to sign a contract without being able to read all the terms and conditions. We certainly want to ensure we receive our share of the funding - that is our priority."

Alberta's portion of the proposed program is about \$100 million, which is \$30 million more than the total of what the province spends on child care presently, the NDP says. There are about 26,000 day care spaces in 533 regulated facilities available in Alberta, with only approximately 20,000 of them filled. "We have a surplus of 6,000 daycare spaces," Korchinski said.

Currently, 46% of children in Alberta are in licensed child care, Pannu said.

"Alberta's approach forces parents to keep using for-profit day cares, which are of lower quality," Pannu said.

About two-thirds of Alberta's 533 regulated day-care facilities are for-profit, Korchinski says.

- reprinted from Edmonton Sun

Region: Canada ^[2]

Tags: quality ^[3]

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<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7864> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/quality> [4]

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

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/legislation-and-regulation>