

# Act fast on child care, forum urged [CA] <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

The architect of Quebec's popular \$5-a-day child care says the rest of Canada must "seize the moment" and move quickly to open as many new spaces as possible now that Ottawa has pledged \$5 billion to turn the country's spotty patchwork of programs into a national system.

"Begin now and quickly, even if you are not completely ready," former Parti Québécois education minister Pauline Marois advised a national conference of child care activists yesterday.

"When there is a momentum &mdash; and I think there is now &mdash; you have to create the spaces. The parents will be happy, they will support you and you will not have a choice to go back."

It was the first time Marois has spoken publicly on child care outside Quebec and the 650 delegates at the conference delighted in her account of how that province jumped on the idea in 1995. Marois sensed that then premier Lucien Bouchard wanted to do something to enrich the lives of children and families in Quebec and she pounced.

"I saw my opening," she said. "Not everything was in place and I knew the costs would probably be much higher than anticipated. But I took a huge risk and I think I did the right thing. You have to seize the moment because they only come once."

Today, more than half of Quebec children under age 6 have access to regulated child care, now at \$7 a day. The province's 180,000 subsidized spaces cost the government \$1.4 billion a year. In the rest of the country, fewer than 20 per cent of children under 6 have access to regulated child care.

Earlier in the day, federal Social Development Minister Ken Dryden told the gathering that the Liberals' child care election promise has turned into a "symbolic test" of the government's ability to keep its word.

The former hockey great and lawyer who got into politics last spring said it's time to put child care critics on the defensive. With 70 per cent of parents with children under age 6 in the workforce, child care is a fact of life, he said.

"The debate about child care is over. There will be a system of early learning in this country."

In an impassioned speech in which he said building a national child care system is "exactly what I wanted to do and exactly what I got into politics for," Dryden encouraged the group to work together to get the principles right and move forward one step at a time.

- reprinted from the Toronto Star

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

Quebec <sup>[3]</sup>

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**Tags:** advocacy <sup>[5]</sup>

affordability <sup>[6]</sup>

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