

# National child care system just 'a matter of when' [CA] <sup>[1]</sup>

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EXCERPTS Finance Minister Ralph Goodale says he wants to make a meaningful start on funding the Liberals' promised universal child-care system in his next budget. Goodale signalled his intent within minutes of the Martin government renewing in the throne speech its pledge to start building a national system of early learning and child care. Ken Dryden, the government's pointman on the file, said there is no turning back from the plan to establish a national program, which, among other things, he said would involve progress reports to Canadians. "This is not a matter of 'if' any longer," stressed Dryden, minister of social development. "It is a matter of when." Dryden plans to meet his provincial and territorial counterparts early next month to kickstart discussions on how to proceed. The throne speech promised the system will be flexible enough to allow each province and territory to address its own particular needs and circumstances, wording that some critics warned could lead to a patchwork quilt of child-care programs. Dryden brushed off as misplaced concerns the Liberals might once again fail to deliver on child-care promises. "The brilliance of the throne speech is the dramatic statement that the time is now," he said. He said Canadians have come to expect such a program. He ducked questions, however, on how progress would be measured and whether the national program would be a strictly public system, or a mix of public and private. He said those topics would be part of the negotiations with the provinces and territories. While New Democrats say they are behind the initiative, Conservative Leader Stephen Harper indicated the party could dig in against the Liberals' vision of a universal child-care program. NDP MP Tony Martin, the party's child-care critic, says he's prepared to work with Dryden to spur action on the file. He warned, however, the NDP is "absolutely" committed to backing a program that is publicly funded and publicly delivered. - reprinted from the Ottawa Citizen

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