

Day care vow highlight of speech [CA] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Child care professionals in Greater Sudbury shrieked with joy as they heard Canada's Governor General utter the words "national system of early learning and child care," during Tuesday's throne speech.

However, the details they wanted to hear were not forthcoming.

Adrienne Clarkson delivered the forward-looking speech Tuesday, opening a new session of Parliament and outlining Prime Minister Paul Martin's agenda for guiding the country into the future.

With only a minority government to work with, Martin's guidance may not last long enough to fulfil his vision.

For the first time in a throne speech, the Government of Canada has made a commitment to lay the groundwork for a publicly funded national system of child care, something early childhood experts and day-care professionals have wanted for years, and something promised by the Liberals in the 1993 Red Book.

The day-care officials and workers who gathered at the Walden Day Care to hear the speech would have liked more details, but they saw the announcement as an important first step.

"The time has come for a truly national system of early learning and child care," Clarkson said, "a system based on four key principles that parents and child care experts say matter: quality, universality, accessibility and development."

The government, she added, will put the foundation of such a system in place with provincial and territorial partners, "charting a national course that focuses on results, builds on best practices and reports on progress to Canadians."

"I think it is a really good start," said Mary Lou Coffey, executive director of Walden Day Care. "It is definitely what we wanted to hear. As long as we work together — and that seems to be what this Liberal government is talking about — we have a really good start on tackling this issue."

However, she said child care professionals will keep pressuring the government for action.

"Adrienne Clarkson has acknowledged that the most important investment Canada can make is in its children," said Jo-Ann Gagnon, a parent. "Middle class families have often been caught paying high child-care fees, and it is just not affordable. Child care in this country must be open to all and affordable."

- reprinted from the Sudbury Star

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