

MP seeking national child care program. "Longest-running broken political promise in Canada" [CA] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

An NDP child care critic travelling across Canada to make sure the federal government lives up to its promise of creating a national, affordable child care program was in friendly territory in Winnipeg yesterday.

"Everybody's saying the same thing -- we have to get on with it," MP Tony Martin said yesterday.

"It's the longest-running broken political promise in Canada," said NDP MP Judy Wasylycia-Leis, who was among the day-care advocates Martin met with yesterday, including people from business, day care and social agencies.

The Liberals won a minority government June 28 on a platform that included \$5 billion to create 250,000 new child care spaces by 2009.

Prime Minister Paul Martin appointed NHL legend Ken Dryden as the new social development minister. Dryden has said recently the national day-care program will happen during his government's reign.

The Liberals mentioned the idea of a national day-care program back in 1993, said Wasylycia-Leis. The Brian Mulroney government first brought it up in 1984, she said.

Its time has come in a nation whose workforce is aging, said Tony Martin, who will table his report in the House of Commons later this year.

Day care is the best way to "level the playing field" for kids from impoverished neighbourhoods, said Martin. The MP from Sault Ste. Marie toured four day cares in Winnipeg yesterday, including the Freight House Day Nursery in the inner city.

Study after study has shown that good day care -- where children are learning and not just being babysat -- is a good investment in the workforce of tomorrow, he said.

A national day-care program will be high on the agenda of a national child care conference in Winnipeg in November. It's a priority advocates say they won't stop fighting for.

In 1982, Winnipeg hosted a national child care conference, and a Canada-wide day-care program seemed to be imminent, said Debra Mayer, who at the time was a novice early childhood educator and had no children.

She said she never imagined she'd still be waiting more than 20 years later for a national child care program.

"Now my oldest daughter is 21. Maybe they'll have it for my grandchildren," said Mayer.

Martin said he's going from city to city to build a consensus on what the new child care program should be. He said he's hearing it has to be universal, and like health care, every province should have minimum standards and requirements it has to follow to qualify for federal funding.

- reprinted from the Winnipeg Free Press

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