

NDP pushes child care: Grit promise of national program must be fulfilled: MP [CA] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The federal Liberals will be held to an election promise that they establish a national child care program, NDP MPs said in Windsor Friday.

"We're in a minority government here. Nobody knows how long it will last, so we have to take advantage of the moment we have here," MP Tony Martin (NDP -- Sault Ste. Marie), the party's social policy critic, said following a round-table discussion with local providers. The meeting was part of a cross-country fact-finding tour.

Providers and the families who need child care have been waiting a long time for a national program that ensures everyone who needs quality care can get it at an affordable price, Martin said. The rate for child care in Windsor ranges from \$30 to \$64 a day. For families with three kids, that amounts to a huge monthly expense.

"Look at Quebec, there's your example," said Martin. Quebecers pay only \$7 -- with the difference paid by the government. And that's what we're looking at for all of Canada," said Martin.

In the rest of the country, families can spend a year on a waiting list.

The job of delivering on Prime Minister Paul Martin's election promise has fallen to NHL Hall of Famer Ken Dryden, the minister of social development who won a seat in the June election.

The same promise was made by Jean Chretien in 1993, but Martin is hoping this time the Liberals will go ahead with it.

He plans to table a report on his cross-country tour and ask for a meeting with Dryden in October. "I want to be helpful, I want to help make this happen," Martin said.

Linda Kristal, Dryden's communications director, said a national child program is "a clear priority for this government." The Liberal election platform proposed spending \$5 billion over five years and Dryden has already begun speaking with his provincial counterparts on the issue.

Nationally, 12 per cent of Canada's 4.9 million children under 12 use child care.

In Windsor and Essex County, waiting lists are quite long, there are no spaces available for infants, and providers are struggling to provide quality care, because they can't afford to pay decent wages to early childhood educators, said Anna Angelidis, executive director of CAW Child Care Services.

The province recently announced 127 new subsidized spaces for the community, a welcome addition that will help alleviate the problem, said Angelidis.

- reprinted from the Windsor Star

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