

Liberals' child care vow a 'smokescreen': NDP [CA-ON] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The Ontario government's plan to spend \$58 million on 4,000 new day care spaces is a "smokescreen" to hide the fact that the Liberals are doing little on their own to ease the province's child care crisis, NDP critic Michael Prue said today.

The Liberals promised to spend \$300 million on child care, but the announcement consisted entirely of federal money, Prue said.

"There's nothing here from the Ontario taxpayers — not a red cent," he said. "I'm just trying to tell people they shouldn't be impressed by this."

Children and Youth Minister Marie Bountrogianni, who made the announcement at a west Toronto day care centre, admitted the system is in "crisis" and that the province will need more money to meet the needs of "tens of thousands" of kids on waiting lists across the province.

"There has not been by the former government one extra day care space developed over the last decade," Bountrogianni said.

Most of the \$58.2 million, part of a five-year deal reached last year with Ottawa, will go toward day care spaces, while \$19.4 million will be spent on one-time capital projects such as facilities and playgrounds, she said.

Ontario will get \$87.6 million next year, and \$117.3 million in 2006-07. All of the final \$137.3-million installment, budgeted for 2007-08, will be spent on child care, she added.

Kira Heineck, executive director of the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care, hailed the announcement but urged the province to move toward a universal child care system.

"What you have now is child care for the wealthy and the poor," Heineck said.

"Your average middle-income family without a subsidy today is spending anywhere in Toronto from \$35 to \$65 a day. So you can see how much more accessible child care would be if it were \$10 or \$7 a day."

There are about 1.3 million kids of age who need day care, but only 173,000 spots across the province.

- reprinted from the Canadian Press.

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