

Parental leaves at risk [CA-QC] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

A Conservative government would jeopardize the future of Canada's parental leave program, Social Development Minister Liza Frulla charged Friday.

"For them, basically, if you have children, you take care of them - and if the woman's in the house, all the better, it means more jobs for the guys."

Frulla said a Conservative government could endanger the deal reached with Quebec to transfer responsibility for parental leaves to the province, because it calls for the federal funding to come from the employment insurance program.

However, Conservative critic Brian Pallister accused Frulla of "fearmongering" and said there is no plan to cut parental leaves.

"There is nothing but support from my colleagues for the concept of parental and compassionate leave. That said, I'm not going to express a fear of discussing these programs. I'm not going to give in to political correctness and say the program is perfect."

Frulla's comments came after Pallister was quoted as saying a Conservative government would review Canada's employment insurance system, including whether EI or general revenues should fund such programs as parental leaves.

The question is one that is likely to confront the next government, after Ottawa appealed a Quebec Court of Appeal decision that found parental leaves were a provincial responsibility and the employment insurance system should not be used to fund such programs.

Frulla said a Conservative government couldn't afford to fund the current leave program through the government's general revenue - particularly with the tax cuts the Tories are pledging. "If employment insurance doesn't pay for parental leave, they will be obliged to cut it," she said.

Frulla said she is also concerned about Tory leader Stephen Harper's position that child care is a provincial responsibility, pointing out Ottawa currently spends \$3.4 billion a year on its national children's agenda.

Pallister said parental leaves could be funded through cuts the Conservatives would make to grants and contributions.

However, Pallister admitted his party doesn't have a policy on parental leaves.

New Democrat Olivia Chow said parental leaves should remain part of employment insurance. "Why shouldn't it be part of EI? If I as a worker contribute to employment insurance, if I need to take a leave because I have a baby, of course, I should qualify. Where else should the money come from?"

- reprinted from The Montreal Gazette

Region: Canada ^[2]

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