

PM plans \$5-billion in daycare [CA] ^[1]

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Source: Globe and Mail

Format: Article

Publication Date: 3 Jun 2004

AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS

WINDSOR, ONT, and OTTAWA -- The federal Liberals will unveil a left-leaning platform today, including a \$5-billion promise to create 300,000 licensed child-care spaces and a Pearsonian foreign policy that will open a wedge with the Conservatives.

As Liberal Leader Paul Martin lays out his party's full election platform in Windsor, he will include a major child-care plan -- called the Foundations Program -- which will hold up Quebec's \$7-a-day daycare scheme as a model for the rest of the country.

Senior Liberals say the federal government can make daycare a national program, just as it made medicare a national program after Saskatchewan invented it. "It's a crisis coast to coast in terms of child care," a senior Liberal said.

Titled "Moving Canada Forward," the platform will make early childhood development one of the Liberals' key electoral themes, alongside other social-policy planks such as health care, aid for cities and help for seniors.

The price tag is about \$40-billion over five years, but sources said \$12-billion is for contingencies, leaving about \$26-billion to \$29-billion for promises. The largest item will be the \$9-billion-plus for health care announced last week.

The \$5-billion on daycare will be spent over five years.

The Foundations Program will set four broad principles for child care - quality, universality, accessibility and developmental. Provinces would get funding for spaces so long as they were within the parameters. Quebec already meets the standards.

The Liberals insist the plan is for early childhood education, not simply daycare, and will include only licensed care spaces. Regulation of child-care facilities would be up to the provinces.

The Liberal program will be sold as not only an improvement in the quality of life for families, but a boost for children in the years before they go to school. About 1.5 million Canadian children are in paid daycare, although only about one-third are in regulated spaces.

The proposal will be one of the new elements in a platform that will give the Liberals a social-policy focus, but also stress the fiscal-management style that was Mr. Martin's hallmark as finance minister.

The Liberals hope their platform will turn the focus on to the overall cost of the party's campaign promise -- since they argue their platform is the only one based on realistic projections of the money that will be available over the next five years.

They are expected to project that the government will run less than half the \$86-billion in surpluses forecast by the Conservatives, keeping their figures far more closely based on the estimates outlined in recent economic statements and the March budget.

The NDP's program, including a major boost in health spending, carries a \$61-billion price tag over five years, largely financed by tax hikes.

The daycare program is viewed by Mr. Martin as a national priority, a Liberal official said last night, since it will help working Canadians better balance their home life and careers.

"This is a national priority and we are going to help make it happen."

- reprinted from the Globe and Mail

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