

Canada votes & Townhall meeting with Jack Layton [CA]^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Host(s): PETER MANSBRIDGE

PETER MANSBRIDGE (HOST):

We're in Vancouver for a special extended edition of "The National." One of the leaders of the federal parties is with us, and this is your turn to put him on the spot. "Canada Votes." We asked for your help with our campaign coverage. Tonight, it's your turn to take on a party leader.

CHRISTY MILLER (VANCOUVER):

My name is Christy Miller from here, in Vancouver. I'm a working mother of very two young children, a three-year-old daughter and four-month-old son. While I was still pregnant with my daughter I began investigating childcare options in the City of Vancouver and I was shocked to learn there are fewer than 200 licensed - fully licensed - day care spaces for infants in this city. Some organizations have wait lists with as many as 900 names on them. When we finally did find a spot for our daughter it cost us almost 1,000 dollars a month. Three years later the prospects aren't much better for my son, so my question to you is twofold: one, how would the N.D.P. improve the supply of day care, particularly for infants and toddlers, our very youngest children, and the second question: is what would you do to make it more affordable for parents?

JACK LAYTON (NDP LEADER):

We've proposed a national childcare programme from coast to coast to coast. A model we really like is in Quebec. I think that they are way ahead of the rest of the country actually in providing childcare. Certainly if we look at Europe, it's a fundamental to make sure that early childhood education is available. Even the Liberals have promised this. We were happy to see it in their 1997 red book, but we haven't seen... it's a promise broken essentially. My wife Olivia Chow reminds me, she's the child advocate on Toronto's city council, now running for parliament and I'm happy for that and you'll have a strong advocate in this whole programme, I tell you, in Olivia Chow. But she points out there are fewer childcare spaces in Toronto now than a decade ago. How can that be when we have families that are growing and working families? People have to work more hours now to put more food on the table, so we priced it out, and we believe the choice is this: are we going to move in the direction of building an economy that's prosperous and doesn't leave people behind and has childcare and those services available, or are we going to continue to cut taxes, reduce debt, privatize things, basically turn child care over to a kind of private market system? And I noticed you mentioned the regulated sector because there are lots of unregulated options, but some of those are pretty worrisome.

PETER MANSBRIDGE (HOST):

Do you have a follow-up?

CHRISTY MILLER (VANCOUVER):

It's a good general response but my question was very specific relating to the youngest children, children under the age of three. The staff ratios are so high that all day cares catering to infants and toddlers run an operating deficit so I guess I'd like an immediate response of what you would do and you didn't get to the issue of affordability.

JACK LAYTON (NDP LEADER):

Our approach, let me speak first about the Quebec model. Five dollars a day childcare, has just gone up to 7 dollars. It was going to go higher but Quebecers rose up and spoke out as people should do so I think that would meet the test of affordability for most people and that's the direction we'd like to see Canada go. Each province might have a slightly different approach, but the federal government has the dollars, and so we're committing to a specific number of childcare spaces over the term of our mandate. Hundreds of thousands of child care spaces. We've worked on this with many of the groups that work in childcare, who have made the best estimates of where we need to go, so specific targets, meet those targets and keep the prices low.

PETER MANSBRIDGE (HOST):

All right. Thank you.

- reprinted from the National

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