

Martin adds more social spending by speeding delivery of child-care money [CA] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Prime Minister Paul Martin will release more cash and accelerate its delivery to the provinces to speed development of a national child-care program.

He made the announcement in the House of Commons on Tuesday in a follow-up to Monday's throne speech. "Readiness to learn is shaped at the earliest stages of childhood," he said. "That is why early childhood development is a national priority. That is why we will accelerate the implementation of the federal-provincial agreement on early learning and care."

A national child care program was a popular part of the Liberals' original Red Book of policies co-authored by Martin in 1993. It struck a chord with voters before being scuppered by federal-provincial squabbles.

Provincial and territorial governments agreed last March to spend \$900 million earmarked in the last federal budget on desperately needed day-care spaces.

But child-care advocates protested that the money, spread over five years, would only trickle out at first.

Provinces were to receive \$25 million this fiscal year, \$75 million in the second year of the program, \$150 million in the third year, \$300 million in the fourth and \$350 million in the fifth.

Twenty-five of her fellow Liberal MPs urged much faster action in 2002.

They called on their own government to lift annual child-care funding within four years to \$4.5 billion so that, by 2007, every three- to five-year-old child who needs it would have a pre-school space.

Quebec's \$7-a-day child care program has been touted as an ideal, if costly, model for other provinces.

Laurel Rothman, national co-ordinator of a coalition fighting child poverty, was pleased that more cash will flow faster to create new spaces.

"Families across Canada have been waiting for decades," said Rothman of Campaign 2000 and the Family Service Association of Toronto.

"More money would mean provinces would have the resources and the insurance to start planning and delivering services."

Canada's largely informal child-care system falls far behind what's offered in several European and other countries, say child advocates.

Almost 70 per cent of Canadian women with children under 12 work, but there are licensed spaces for just 12 per cent of kids in that age group.

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