

Say goodbye to \$5 day care [CA-QC] ^[1]

Author: Dougherty, Kevin

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EXCERPTS

Quebecers can bid adieu to \$5-a-day day care.

The Liberal government of Jean Charest is considering plans to increase the amount Quebec parents pay for day care to \$7 or possibly \$10 a day.

And the daily charge would be indexed, rising to keep pace with the cost of Quebec's \$1.7-billion public day-care system.

The \$5-a-day contribution by parents was set in 1997, when the previous Parti Québécois government introduced its subsidized plan.

At a news conference yesterday, Liberal Family Minister Claude Bécharard said that if it had been indexed, the daily charge would now be \$17.85.

"So we had to look at rebalancing it," Bécharard said.

Quebec has invested \$88.4 million to build a network of 983 centres de petite enfance across the province, creating 15,548 daycare jobs while training staff and improving their wages and working conditions.

The Charest government says it remains committed to the PQ goal of having 200,000 public day-care places.

But it also wants to increase the share of the costs parents pay from about 12 per cent now to roughly 20 per cent.

A day-care place in a centre de petite enfance costs \$42.54 a day, with the government paying \$37.54 of the total.

One option the Liberals are considering would be a \$2-a-day increase to \$7 day care for all, with the exception of parents receiving employment insurance benefits.

Another possibility would be a graduated increase to \$10 a day for families with a combined income between \$70,000 and \$100,000, while maintaining the \$5 rate for families with an income less than \$70,000.

A third scenario proposes an increase to \$7.50 for all parents.

Bécharard said that for every \$1 daily increase in what parents pay, Quebec will reap an additional \$52 million.

The government will hold three days of public hearings on the future of day care, starting Aug. 27 at the National Assembly.

Bécharard said the \$10 day-care proposal is a "working hypothesis" and he is willing to listen to other propositions.

Jonathan Valois, PQ family policy critic, said the Liberal position on day care is ideological, reflecting the philosophy of Finance Minister Yves Séguin, who said in his spring budget speech: "Rather than asking what the state can do for us, we should ask ourselves what we can do without it."

"One thing is clear," Valois said. "It is the end of \$5 day care. There will be no universal system of day care."

Bécharard said at his news conference that former PQ family minister Linda Goupil had raised the possibility of \$8 day care.

Valois said that, after considering the \$8 proposal, the PQ decided it would irritate voters and fail to generate much revenue.

Hélène Potvin, president of the Association québécoise des centres de la petite enfance, said the decision to maintain Quebec's subsidized day-care system is "excellent news."

But she found it contradictory a government pledged to cutting taxes plans to slap new charges on parents first.

Meanwhile, kindergarten costs nothing, she noted. "We have made the choice that kindergarten is free."

Potvin's organization has collected 130,000 signatures supporting \$5 day care. She said she had expected to see no more than 10,000 people at a recent demonstration in Montreal urging the retention of \$5 day care.

"There were 25,000," she noted.

-Reprinted from The Montreal Gazette.

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