

Copps pledges new social spending [CA] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Sheila Copps vowed yesterday that if she were prime minister, she would cut business subsidies rather than her proposed national child-care plan.

"I don't think we should go into deficit, but I can tell you that as prime minister, if I had a choice between investing in children and other corporate programs, I'd be investing in children," the heritage minister said.

"I prefer to invest in child-care centres than to invest in big corporations."

Challenged on her claim that the new spending could come from the current budget surplus, Copps, 50, made it clear that she would find the money to fund the new social programs she is proposing.

"I think this is about choices, and I think in Canada, as much as we're all committed to a deficit-free country, we don't want an economic deficit and we certainly don't want a social deficit," Copps said. "And there are lots of Canadians right now who are living under the shadow of a social deficit."

She insisted it would be possible to pay for the child care, affordable housing and public-transit programs she has proposed from the funds that successive finance ministers have dedicated to contingency funds and debt repayment.

Asked about her response to suggestions that she should withdraw from the race in the light of Paul Martin's apparent dominance of the race, she was defiant.

"Never. I will never abandon the race," Copps said. "I am here to launch a real campaign of ideas ... I am not a quitter. I am going to be in the race until Nov. 16."

Copps spoke to reporters after releasing her 19-page policy platform entitled "Foundations: An Action Plan for Canadians."

Copps lays out a stronger role for the federal government in social policy, calling for \$6 billion in spending in the first year.

The policy would include the implementation of a billion-dollar comprehensive national child-care strategy, the transformation of the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation into the Canada Housing and Community Development Corporation - which would be prepared to ignore provinces like Ontario that do not act to use federal funds for affordable housing - and new federal funding for public transit.

Copps said that a leadership campaign was an opportunity to reaffirm values, ideals and beliefs, and a time to offer long-range perspective and long-term solutions.

"The practice of democracy through leadership campaigns strengthens political parties, and should lead to the strengthening of our country," she said. "In fact, the practice of democracy strengthens democracy."

-Reprinted from The Toronto Star

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