

# Politicians saying little about how they would help ease the cost of child care [CA-NB] <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

The fate of New Brunswick's economy rests in the control of a number of factors: low corporate taxes, affordable post-secondary education and a baby's cry.

In this election, you'll hear a familiar message from New Brunswick's three political leaders.

They'll all invest more money in health care, provide better education for children and create an economic environment that spurs job creation.

In that discussion about getting more New Brunswickers working, there's one aspect that hasn't gotten a lot of attention.

What will we do with the children of all these new workers because a significant portion of them are going to be women.

According to Statistics Canada, the number of New Brunswickers over the age of 25 with full-time jobs rose to 258,600 in 2002, a net increase of 4,700.

Of those new jobs women outnumbered men 2-1, with 2,800 more women working between 2001 and 2002, compared to 1,900 men.

All told there were 147,500 men working full-time in 2002 and 111,100 women.

Odds are, at some point in their careers a lot of those women are going to have a baby.

How will New Brunswick businesses and the provincial government accommodate this new reality?

Consider some of these factors. Both the Liberals and the Conservatives have promised to aggressively recruit new doctors for underserved areas in New Brunswick.

Their incentive packages are targeted at young doctors. However, under the existing fee-for-service arrangement doctors are not entitled to maternity benefits, which means when a doctor has a baby and stops practising, she also stop earning money.

The Conservatives have promised family practitioners a minimum salary level of up to \$175,000 for those who agree to set up a practice in a designated area.

It might help attract doctors if that contract included maternity leave.

Then there are the young entrepreneurs of New Brunswick.

Again both Liberals and Conservatives have made much about the glory of owning a small business, but just like doctors, women who are their own bosses also can't count on receiving any income if they take time off after having a baby.

Even women who work for companies with maternity benefits must calculate how long they can afford to stay at home before they need to return to the office in order to once again earn their full salary.

For families where men and women earn roughly equal amounts, having a baby can be a very expensive endeavour, but it is a price they are willing to pay.

For a province that so desperately needs to increase the participation rate in its workforce (the actual number of people working), easing child-care costs is a smart investment.

Both the NDP and the Conservatives have some ideas on how to do that.

NDP Leader Elizabeth Weir is highly critical of the former Liberal government's decision to cut operating grants to child-care centres and she's not impressed with the Conservative government's failure to reintroduce provincial funding to the system.

She's pledged to restore funding (right now all money for child care in New Brunswick comes from the federal government) and add new

subsidized spaces, particularly for people with low to moderate income and single parent families.

The NDP will also make the funding available to the child, not the centre, to give parents flexibility in choosing where to send their kids.

Ms. Weir will also raise the salaries of child-care workers and offer skills upgrades to staff.

Conservative Leader Bernard Lord has a few ideas of his own.

He will create 1,500 new subsidized child-care spaces by raising the family income threshold for a full day subsidy under the Day Care Assistance Program to a net income of \$22,000 from \$15,000.

The Conservatives will also raise the subsidy rate by \$3.50 a day for full day care and by \$1.50 a day for school age children.

That works out to new rates of \$22 a day for children under the age of two, \$20 a day for pre-school children over the age of two and \$10 a day for after-school children.

Of the three parties, the Liberals have the least to offer.

Shawn Graham has one promise to make: he'll enhance early childhood investments with the goal of matching the national average in child-care investments.

Politicians should remember that in order to increase the number of workers in New Brunswick, the province and its corporations must do more than pay lip service to increasing the participation of women.

They are key to New Brunswick's prosperity.

So too, therefore, is the care of their children.

-Reprinted from The New Brunswick Telegraph Journal

**Region:** [New Brunswick](#) <sup>[2]</sup>

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