

Threat to daycare spaces prompts calls for Ottawa, Queen's Park to step in [CA-ON] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS The threat to thousands of daycare spaces in Ontario because of the looming end to a \$63.5-million subsidy has child-care advocates demanding that the federal and provincial governments reinstate the money. In Ottawa, Toronto MPs are calling on Prime Minister Stephen Harper to continue the special subsidy. Daycare advocates say 22,000 daycare spaces are under threat in Ontario — about 6,000 of them in Toronto. On Wednesday, during question period in the House of Commons, Toronto MPs said the end of the subsidy is "short-sighted." York Centre MP Ken Dryden said Harper is not showing leadership on the issue "and the Canadian public is the loser." Judy Sgro, the Liberal MP for York West, wondered what will happen to low-income families who lose the subsidy. "How can the prime minister claim he's helping the most vulnerable when he is imposing these short-sighted cuts," she asked. NDP Leader Jack Layton, who also represents a Toronto riding, said last month's federal budget did nothing to address the problem. "[The] budget needed to address the continuation of previous commitments to the funding of child-care spaces, and it failed to do that," Layton said in an interview with the Canadian Press. "Families in the midst of an economic crisis are going to have a difficult time finding child care. The result is some of them may lose their jobs because they'll have to stay home." Federal Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development Diane Finley said the Harper government is taking a different approach to child care, one that doesn't fund daycare centres. "Three years ago, we took action when we launched the universal child-care benefit," she said. In 2005, the federal Liberal government and Ontario entered into a bilateral agreement for Ottawa to provide \$1.8 billion in child-care funding over five years. But when the Conservatives took power in Ottawa a year later, they terminated the funding and instead put in place their universal child-care benefit, which provides \$100 per month for each child under the age of six. Ontario received only the first instalment of the money — about \$270 million — and decided to split up the money over four years. The remainder of that money will run out in about 14 months, said Deb Matthews, Ontario's minister of children and youth services. "We have made great progress since we've been elected, added 22,000 child-care spaces, subsidies for more families," Matthews said Wednesday. "But we're asking the federal government to help sustain the progress that's been made." The issue is not going away any time soon. On Wednesday, the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care said it is starting a campaign to head off what it calls a "daycare disaster" in the making. The OCBCC wants the provincial government to replace the funding when it presents this year's budget. ... Advocates say the provincial Liberals still haven't lived up to their 2003 election promise to spend \$300 million on daycare. - reprinted from CBC News

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