

PQ accuses Liberals of bias in daycare contracts ^[1]

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See text below.

EXCERPTS

Premier Jean Charest's government is embroiled in yet another controversy after the Parti Quebecois unveiled what it claims is a network of Liberal party patronage in the awarding of contracts to operate daycare spaces.

In 2008, the Liberal government added 18,000 spaces to its \$7-a-day childcare program. The PQ cross-checked Liberal party donor lists with the names of private daycare operators who received contracts for some of the new spaces.

In the National Assembly, the PQ yesterday listed the names of people in three regions who gave generously to the Liberal party and got spaces.

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In the Laurentian region just north of Montreal, nearly 70 per cent (319 out of 464) new daycare spaces allocated in 2008 went to private daycare operators who had contributed a total of more than \$50,000 to the Liberal Party, the PQ said.

Unlike Quebec's non-profit early-childhood centres, which were competing for the spaces, the private daycares can charge customers extra money for additional services.

The party told the National Assembly that one operator, Samil Al Ahmad, his wife and two daughters contributed \$24,000 to the Liberals since 2003. Mr. Al Ahmad was awarded 160 of the new spaces for a private daycare. His daughter Lara received 140 spaces. All were awarded despite competing bids from non-profit centres, the PQ said.

In LanaudiÃ©re, a region just east of Montreal, the PQ said 40 per cent of the daycare spaces were awarded to Liberal-friendly daycare operators. In one instance, operator Ada Bianco contributed \$3,000 to the Liberal party in 2008, the maximum annual contribution allowed by law, and was awarded 80 spaces that same year to operate a private daycare centre. In Montreal, many new daycare spaces went to first-time party donors, the PQ claimed.

"It's a coincidence," said Family Minister Tony Tomassi. "I can assure you that all the projects were accepted based on the excellent quality of services that was going to be offered."

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The City of Montreal municipal council unanimously adopted a motion yesterday urging Mr. Charest "to hold a public inquiry as soon as possible."

Montreal has been the focus of police investigations into allegations of price fixing and collusion in city contracts with construction firms.

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- reprinted from the Globe and Mail

Region: Quebec ^[2]

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