

Sault federal election candidates discuss childcare ^[1]

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Source: Sault This Week

Format: Article

Publication Date: 13 Apr 2011

EXCERPTS

As the federal election campaign continues, Sault This Week asked the following questions to each of the five candidates running for MP in Sault Ste. Marie.

How should daycare costs be paid? What portion of the cost should be paid for by the federal government, and what portion by families?

Conservative candidate Bryan Hayes said, "What we need to look at is how childcare is handled. We are the government that introduced the universal childcare benefit in 2006, \$100 a month goes to the parents. The parents have the choice how they use those funds, and in the event they don't want to use it for childcare, they can for example put it into an education fund for their children's university or college education down the road. The Conservative government also provides \$250 million a year to the provinces so they can provide childcare spaces, and how the provinces divide up that money depends on the income of parents, those who need to be subsidized are subsidized by the province. The key challenge is to make sure there are spaces available. We want those places available. If there's no daycare available and a mother wants to work, sometimes she's simply not able to. The key is to keep providing that right balance of childcare spaces. In Sault Ste. Marie last year, there were 105 new licensed childcare spaces created for four and five-year olds, I know that 44 of those were made available because of the \$250 million the Conservative government provides. The Liberals say they will provide \$500 million to the provinces for childcare spaces, but I like the balanced approach of the Conservative government, with the childcare benefit, to give parents more say in how that money gets spent. Our approach is more balanced."

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Green Party candidate Luke MacMichael said, "We are definitely in favour of subsidized daycare, as well as early childhood education and nourishment along with that...we are 100 per cent committed to high quality, federally funded childcare, accessible to any family that wants to have it, but we'd like to see more childcare spaces in the workplace, so we propose a \$1,500 tax credit, per child per year, to go directly to employers that provide workplace childcare. For Sault families this would definitely be a plus. Providing credits to workplaces would hopefully encourage more employers to open up daycare spaces."

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Marxist-Leninist Party candidate Mike Taffarel, regarding the daycare issue said, "We believe the government needs to increase funding for social programs such as daycare. Some employers cover those costs, but what needs to be done is a national program with national standards...[daycare] needs to be funded for those who can't afford the costs of it".

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NDP candidate Tony Martin said, "We think the government needs to create more daycare spaces, first of all. There aren't nearly enough childcare spaces in Canada, except maybe in Quebec. There's a shortage of facilities and spaces, and even the ones that do exist aren't high quality in terms of the early childcare learning experience, and providing at least one good nutritious meal or snack per day for children...I'm not saying there aren't any good childcare facilities at all, but quality childcare in general is not available at the moment, that's something that's lacking in the system. As for the cost of daycare, it must be affordable for parents and not prohibitive... the parents and the provinces, in something like a 75 per cent to 25 per cent partnership, should pay part of it, but the federal government should pay the lion's share."

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Liberal candidate Christian Provenzano said, "We're the only party that wants to create additional early learning spots for children. With respect to payment, both the federal and provincial governments have to work together, with the lion's share of the cost a public cost, as opposed to a private cost. And Canada actually doesn't have any federal leadership, no coordinated early learning and childcare policy. The former Liberal government had a childcare strategy. We tried to do this before, but Jack Layton and Stephen Harper got together and took down Paul Martin's government in 2005. So in this election campaign we're proposing another strategy, recognizing we'd have to be very conscientious of the resources we would allocate....We'll begin with \$500 million for childcare in the first year, and we'll raise that annual commitment to \$1 billion by the fourth year, an annual commitment. Those resources would be used to partner with the provinces, to deliver quality childcare and early learning across the country. Research shows that early childcare education profoundly assists a child in social and educational development, and it's important for an economic reason because if parents know that their child is in a good safe spot, the parents can rest assured and be more productive at work knowing their child is in a good place. This election to me is very much

about values and choices. If you look at what we're proposing for the first year, its equivalent to the cost of two of Stephen Harper's fighter jets. Childcare is more important. As for cost, the ratio has to work, I don't have a specific ratio, but the federal government and the provinces have to work together at the table so that's its affordable for parents."

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-reprinted from Sault This Week

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