

Struggling NBers see hope in parties' pledges ^[1]

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EXCERPTS.

Amid increasing housing and child-care costs and sharply rising gasoline and food prices, New Brunswick families struggling to make ends meet are looking to the federal election campaign for some relief.

With each of the parties promising to help families, Lynn LeBlanc hopes to see some support to cope with the province's soaring cost of living.

The single mother, who lives in subsidized housing on Fredericton's north side, says government cutbacks and rising costs make it difficult to afford the basics.

"It's extremely hard to get by, especially with one income, you count every penny," she said in an interview on Monday. "With gas and milk prices going up, but most wages staying the same, people are starting to do without."

Mount Allison University sociology professor Vanessa Oliver said making ends meet has been getting more difficult in the past decade for Canadian families.

"Research has continued to show the growing gap between the rich and the poor in Canada and, unfortunately, many New Brunswick families are falling into that gap," she said.

The International Monetary Fund's World Economic Outlook released Monday warned that the finances of Canadians families are declining rapidly as inflationary pressures take hold.

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LeBlanc, who works at the Fredericton Regional Family Resource Centre, said the most important issue in the election should be children's education and health care.

"Our children are our future and, if they are not educated and looked after health-wise, what kind of future does our province and country have," she said. "The government should properly fund child care, education and health care."

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Mount Allison's Oliver said the three key issues for families in the federal election are child care, home care and poverty reduction.

Oliver said families with infants and special needs children, rural and aboriginal families, and francophone's outside Quebec are in particular in need of support.

"Children who grow up in low-income families often do worse in school, have lower literacy rates, earn lower incomes as adults and require higher levels of social, health and justice services in our communities," she said. "All of this could be greatly alleviated by social programs and spending that is attuned to the complex needs and contexts of lower income families."

However, Oliver cautioned against "throwing money at the problem." Instead, she said investments that address addictions and mental health issues, as well as targeted social assistance and a fair minimum wage, are the way to go.

As for the election platforms of the main parties, Oliver said the Liberal commitments to families, although lacking in some areas, go further than Tory promises.

"It's more than we have seen from the current Conservative government that continues to throw insignificant amounts of money at parents, without committing to overall social programming and an injection of funds into much needed areas like social housing, social assistance and childcare," she said.

While she admits the NDP are unlikely to win the election, she commended the party's commitment to eradicating poverty and \$700 increases of the child tax benefit.

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Region: New Brunswick ^[2]

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