

No longer talking babysitting, Michael says ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

NDP Leader Lorraine Michael spent Sunday afternoon participating in a child care forum hosted by the Canadian Union of Public Employees in St. John's.

Michael was joined at the Battery Hotel by Child Youth and Family Services Minister Charlene Johnson and the Liberal candidate for Virginia Waters Sheila Miller to talk about each party's plan for early childhood education.

Most in the room agreed changing and improving the system won't be simple, nor will it happen overnight. Everyone agreed change is needed.

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There was also agreement that improving child care is the economically sensible thing to do, as studies show every dollar invested into child care programs pumps back more than \$2 into local economies.

While Michael and the NDP are advocating for a publicly funded and administered child care system she said, "You don't shut down private daycares, you work them into the system."

She said that's what other provinces, such as Prince Edward Island, have done.

If the NDP forms the government Oct. 11, it plans to move ahead with pilot projects on full-day kindergarten in its first year in power.

Michael told The Telegram later child care workers don't get the respect they deserve and that's reflected by low wages.

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Overall, Michael said she felt there was much support for a public system in the room.

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Michael said just as home care should be part of the public health care system, early childhood education should be part of the public education system.

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Johnson said she knows first hand how hard it can be to find affordable and quality child care.

She said she put her daughter on a waiting list for daycare when she was three months pregnant and didn't hear back until her daughter was 20 months old.

"As part of (the PC) strategic plan, we did say we would be announcing a 10-year child care strategy this fiscal year," Johnson told the crowd.

Therefore the Tory plan should be released by the end of March 2012, but that suggests the plan won't be made public before the election.

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Miller has worked in early childhood education (ECE) for more than 20 years.

"I see many shortcomings," she told the crowd.

But she also suggested she didn't agree with a fully public system.

"The private sector has been the backbone of child care for 35 years," she said.

Miller also said what many other ECEs in the room repeated during the question and answer phase.

"If we don't have qualified early childhood educators then we cannot have a good quality child care system and right now we have a major shortage in that field," she said.

After the event, Michael told The Telegram much of what she heard wasn't new to her.

"I don't think we're lacking information, I just think (the current government lacks) political will to make it happen quickly," she said.

-reprinted from the Telegram

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