

# Child care, health care, poverty rule NDP debate <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS:

VANCOUVER-A national child-care plan, health care and First Nations poverty emerged as the dominant issues at a town hall forum headlined by nine NDP leadership candidates hoping to clinch the top job.

Nathan Cullen, the lone British Columbia MP in the race and a father of 16-month-old twin boys, said the Conservative government's policy of providing \$100-a-month per child to families is "a slap in the face" when a national child-care plan is needed.

Toronto MP Peggy Nash, a mother of three children, said she would make affordable, accessible and reliable child-care program a first-term priority if she wins the leadership race.

Nash, along with Cullen and Manitoba MP Niki Ashton were most confident during the forum attended by about 400 delegates who'd also turned out for the provincial NDP's 50th anniversary convention.

The format for the forum involved the candidates being split into three groups of three, with each person responding to a different policy question in one minute.

Former party president and strategist Brian Topp, considered the frontrunner in the race, began Saturday by announcing another high-profile endorsement.

Janet Solberg, the former president of the Ontario section of the NDP, joins an impressive list of Topp supporters, including former party leader Ed Broadbent.

While Topp also has the backing of several MPs and MLAs from the B.C. New Democrats, he has no experience as an elected politician in the race to replace Jack Layton, who died in August.

During the forum, Topp appeared to be among the least confident of the candidates.

Ottawa MP Paul Dewar, Montreal MP Thomas Mulcair, Nova Scotia MP Robert Chisholm and pharmacist Martin Singh of Nova Scotia were the other candidates participating in the forum.

It was the first of two gatherings in British Columbia for the leadership hopefuls in a province that's home to a third of the NDP's 96,000 card-carrying members across the country.

-reprinted from the Toronto Star

**Region:** Canada <sup>[2]</sup>

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