

Pass the beer and popcorn: Why did reporters fail to tell Canadians the real story about the Conservatives' childcare policy? ^[1]

The Canadian Association of Journalists, vol.13, no.1

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Source: The Canadian Association of Journalists

Format: Article

Publication Date: 1 Apr 2007

AVAILABILITY

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-Full magazine in pdf ^[2]

Excerpts from the article: Is it possible that a 30-second sound bite about beer and popcorn gave the federal Conservative Party a free ride from media analysis on their Universal Child Care Benefit policy in the last election? More than a year later, it's time to reassess the scrutiny journalists on Parliament Hill gave to the \$2.5 billion program that delivers \$100 monthly cheques to families for each child under six. During the election campaign Paul Martin aide Scott Reid infamously said: "Don't give people 25 bucks a week to blow on beer and popcorn. Give them child-care spaces that work." ... It became "a look at a 30-second clip rather than a real discussion of substantive issues," such as the fact that there actually was nothing to guarantee, as Reid pointed out, that the money go to childcare. Others involved in the childcare debate described media coverage of the Tory plan as "shallow," lacking in both critical analysis and basic information. So what went wrong? Did journalists allow Prime Minister Stephen Harper to "frame" the policy as one of choice, and fail to remind readers of the facts? Or did columnists buy the Harper spin and inadvertently help reinforce his message? You be the judge. ...

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