

Time to scrap the Universal Child Care Benefit ^[1]

Author: Chapnick, Adam

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EXCERPTS:

Next month, the federal government will introduce another austerity budget. More public sector jobs will be eliminated, and more services will be cut, all in the name of restoring Canada's fiscal health.

The government will present itself as the guardian of the public purse, respectful of provincial jurisdictions, and focused on helping working families. The opposition will disagree. And no one will talk about the Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB), an indefensible program that has cost Canadians approximately \$15 billion since it was first introduced in 2006.

Back when federal coffers were flush, a newly elected minority Conservative government replaced a Liberal plan for universal daycare with \$100 per month cheques to parents with children under the age of six.

Undoubtedly aware that full-time childcare costs families much closer to \$1,000 per month than \$100, the government nonetheless claimed that these cheques would provide parents with a choice between working full-time and staying home to bring up their young children. Members of the opposition fumed, but (understandably, at the time) refused to force an election over a plan that offered support to, among others, struggling Canadian families.

Seven years later, it is hard to imagine that anyone from across the political spectrum can truly believe in the UCCB.

Constitutionally, social welfare is a provincial responsibility, so Conservatives who claim to support the strict division of powers between the provinces and the federal government should oppose Ottawa's involvement in childcare policy altogether.

Fiscal conservatives from every party should oppose the benefit because it lacks a means test. In other words, the UCCB blindly redistributes taxpayer dollars without checking to see whether the recipients really need the money.

Members of the opposition, and New Democrats in particular, should oppose the benefit in solidarity with the Occupy movement. The UCCB provides, over six years, more than \$7,000 in public funds to members of the top 1 per cent (who have children) at a time when the poorest of the poor are struggling to survive.

As public policy, the Universal Child Care Benefit in its current form should please no one.

That it remains is evidence of the lack of political courage emanating from Parliament Hill. The government is ashamed to admit that its policy is an economic failure, and the opposition is afraid to advocate cuts to any national program, regardless of whether it's actually serving the public good.

Shame on all of them.

-reprinted from the Star

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