

# Push for parliamentary daycare sign of younger MPs <sup>[1]</sup>

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### EXCERPTS:

OTTAWA - Gone are the liquor store, the barber, the dry cleaner, even the masseuse.

Now, in a sign of change on Parliament Hill, there's a move afoot for a different kind of workplace benefit - a daycare.

NDP Leader Thomas Mulcair has written to House of Commons Speaker Andrew Scheer asking that the idea be considered in light of Parliament's changing demographic.

"The face of Parliament has changed significantly over the last three decades," Mulcair wrote in his July 8 letter.

"More and more young women and men are being elected to serve constituencies across the country. In my own NDP caucus, we have many parents with young children and more on the way," he wrote.

"We have a responsibility to support these members, and all Canadians, by creating the infrastructure necessary to ensure this trend continues," Mulcair said.

Among them is Rosane Doré Lefebvre, MP for the Montreal-area riding of Alfred-Pellan and mother of Madeleine, 14 months.

She's among a wave of young New Democrat MPs elected in 2011: the caucus has 21 members age 34 and younger. Several are now new parents or expecting, bringing the challenges of balancing work and parenthood.

"I don't want to have privileges because I am an MP, but I want to make sure I can do my job at the same time as being a parent," Doré Lefebvre told the Toronto Star in an interview.

But being an MP can be especially tough as the demands of parenthood add to an already busy work schedule that includes committee meetings, some night sessions of the Commons in Ottawa, along with serving constituents in the riding.

And because of their own work commitments, not all spouses can make the move to Ottawa to be with their political partner.

As a result, Doré Lefebvre says the lifestyle can stand as a barrier to young people contemplating politics who wonder how they can juggle it all.

"No, it's not easy, but we can do it."

"It's a career barrier, especially for women, so we have to make sure we have accommodations. Not just for the NDP, but for all parties to make sure we have more young elected members of Parliament," she said.

It's especially important given the changes that Parliament is undergoing with younger MPs and more women.

"It's a total transformation of the Parliament right now," she said. "People are not used to seeing pregnant MPs on the Hill. It was pretty rare but it's getting more and more common."

Her daughter will be attending the Children on the Hill daycare in the fall, a facility in the parliamentary precinct. However, it closes by 6 p.m., a problem on those days when Parliament sits at night.

In his letter, Mulcair said that creating a work environment that makes being an MP accessible to all Canadians "would be a worthwhile endeavour."

Mulcair notes that a lounge in Centre Block is now being used as a family room, but is urging the Commons to go further.

He suggests a "reasonably costed pay-for-service, drop-in child care" available while the Commons was sitting as well as when parliamentary committees meet.

Liberal MP Carolyn Bennett said her party supports efforts to make Parliament "more family-friendly" and says such ideas have been on the agenda for the all-party women's caucus.

"There are many things that we are working on but we certainly feel that access to quality child care is a priority," Bennett said in an interview.

She's hoping that Scheer supports the idea.

"We want Parliament to be an exemplary employer," Bennett said. "Clearly we want to ensure that it isn't a deterrent to people thinking that they will run for Parliament."

Through a spokesperson, Scheer, himself a father of four young children, said he would not comment on Mulcair's letter.

**Region:** Canada <sup>[3]</sup>

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