

Lakritz: Lukaszuk on progressive roll with daycare stance ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

Wow, this is refreshing - a truly progressive position from a Progressive Conservative. I refer to Tory leadership candidate Thomas Lukaszuk's statement that if he becomes premier, he will ensure that there will be enough daycare spaces to meet the need.

I'm impressed, but I'm also disheartened. Impressed because it's great to see a politician acknowledge that women need and want to go to work, and therefore require child care arrangements, rather than a politician who dances around the question and leaves the distinct impression that women really ought to be at home with their kids. Lukaszuk is simply acknowledging reality when he talks about how the "inadequate number" of licensed daycare spaces creates a situation in which "Albertans ... simply can't go to work because they don't have adequate child care."

Even better, he talks about the government helping to subsidize those daycare costs for parents who would otherwise be forced to stay home and go on welfare if they can't pay for child care.

But I'm disheartened because it's been more years than I care to count since my own children were in daycare, yet the lack of daycare spaces is as problematic today as it was back then.

Contrast Lukaszuk's refreshingly practical attitude with that of his opponent, Ric McIver, whose position is: "I want to give parents the choice how they deliver child care ... whether they stay home or have a family member do it or put them in a daycare."

Ric, parents have always had that choice. They're not sitting around breathlessly waiting for you to bestow upon them something they don't have. And if more daycare spaces are created, it has nothing to do with someone's choice to stay home with her children. Just because some mothers choose not to go to work doesn't change the fact that daycare spaces are scarce for those who need them.

As for McIver's comment about having "a family member do it," we're living in 2014, not 1955. Plenty of people don't have family members who are willing or able to do it, and plenty of others, given the highly mobile state of the workforce, don't have family nearby at all. Today's grandparents are the baby boom generation, and chances are, they're still in the workforce themselves or lead busy lives with their own projects and interests. Pretty much gone are the days, Ric, when grandmas spent their afternoons baking cookies for the grandkids.

What Lukaszuk's statement does is accept the reality of life in 2014, without (thankfully) passing judgment on it. More than enough judgment has been passed on it over the years. I've heard people say they don't want their tax dollars going to subsidize rich parents who use daycare. They don't understand that subsidies are strictly for low-income women.

I've heard others say that if women want to work, they shouldn't have children or should postpone child-bearing till later. As if life can be all neatly planned out on a timetable. As if women should be punished for wanting to have children and still fulfil their career aspirations. Nobody ever says men should postpone fatherhood because it clashes with their career choices.

Women need to work to help make ends meet, women want to work because they long to contribute their talents and abilities to their fields of interest, marriages end and newly single moms have to go to work to support their kids. Daycare is expensive and lower-income families need government subsidies so they can afford it. Without subsidies, those parents who otherwise can't afford daycare might end up on welfare, which is a far greater burden to the taxpayer over the long run.

In 2014, we shouldn't even have to resort to these justifications, and the same old objections should have long ago been put to rest; it should just be accepted that women work and they need child care. End of discussion.

Now that Lukaszuk has shown himself to be in sync with the modern era on child care, he should step out of the 1950s on another issue. If he becomes premier, he must ensure that Alberta joins the rest of the provinces and stops exempting farm workers from occupational health and safety regulations and employment standards laws. Go all the way on being progressive, Tom.

Region: Alberta ^[3]

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