

Childcare will become key election issue, Ken Dryden tells conference ^[1]

Author: Press, Jordan

Source: Ottawa Citizen

Format: Article

Publication Date: 15 Nov 2014

AVAILABILITY

Read online ^[2]

EXCERPTS:

A former federal Liberal cabinet minister who negotiated a childcare deal with provinces suggests the issue could become a key election battleground for the Liberals and NDP.

Ken Dryden, who was a minister in Paul Martin's Liberal government, told a national conference of childcare advocates on Saturday that the Conservatives haven't provided a plan for a national childcare system, leaving the door open for the opposition parties.

The NDP have proposed a \$5-billion plan for a national childcare program to be negotiated with provinces.

Liberal leader Justin Trudeau made a commitment Friday to a program to be negotiated with provinces, but his commitment lacked specifics or a dollar figure. His comments received criticism from the approximately 500 childcare advocates and educators gathered for the three-day conference.

Dryden suggested the two parties could engage in a political game of one-upmanship over child care.

"They will be competing like crazy against each other, but part of competing like crazy against each other should be competing like crazy against each other in terms of child care," Dryden said.

"The higher one party sets the bar, then that's good news because then it generates pressure on the other party to match."

Dryden said "people are ready for something a whole lot bigger" than they were a decade ago.

"In the years since - without the federal government offering any kind of push - the provinces, many of them, have done remarkable things," Dryden said. "Now they need some help. They need a fresh push from the federal government."

Dryden's keynote talk came a decade after he last spoke to this childcare conference and negotiated deals with provinces on a national daycare plan.

The plan was scrapped when the Tories took power in 2006. In its place, the Conservatives have created a set of tax credits and a monthly, taxable daycare payment.

"We trust parents to do what is best for their children and for their individual situation," said Christine Csversko, a spokeswoman for Candice Bergen, the minister of state for social development. "That is why we brought in the universal childcare benefit to give parents choice in the type of child care that works best for their family."

The NDP have proposed to eventually spend \$5 billion annually by 2023, and asking the provinces to spend approximately \$3.3 billion more to create or maintain one million childcare spaces in both non-profit, and existing for-profit centres across the country.

There were some at the conference who don't feel the NDP plan is ambitious enough, hoping Mulcair would pledge to spend billions more to create more spaces: One million spaces would approximately double the available spaces in Canada today, and would be enough spaces for about half the number of children under age five.

Conference attendees in the main plenary, and in smaller meetings, have said they will be more active in pushing child care leading up to the scheduled October 2015 federal election.

Region: Canada ^[3]

Tags: federal programs ^[4]

Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/14/11/childcare-will-become-key-election-issue-ken-dryden-tells-conference> [2]

<https://ottawacitizen.com/news/national/child-care-will-become-key-election-issue-ken-dryden-tells-conference> [3]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7864> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/federal-programs>