

Mulcair praised for universal daycare ^[1]

Author: Welch, Mary Agnes

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EXCERPTS:

NDP Leader Thomas Mulcair won huge applause for his universal daycare pledge. Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau offered vague words but few hints about his party's daycare policies. And, the Conservatives didn't show up.

More than 600 people gathered in Winnipeg for the biggest national daycare conference in a decade, one buoyed by a new federal debate over the state of child care in Canada. That debate has been bracketed largely by Mulcair and Prime Minister Stephen Harper and competing family-focused policies, both announced last month.

In his marquee pre-election pledge, Mulcair promised to create Canada's first universal daycare system that would offer parents \$15-a-day child care and one million new spaces. After an eight-year phase-in, the transfers to the provinces would reach \$5 billion. The provinces would be expected to chip in 40 per cent of the cost.

"Over 30 years, successive Conservative and Liberal governments have talked about creating child-care spaces, they've talked about a national plan," said Mulcair. "They've created precisely zero child-care spaces."

Mulcair's plan earned significant buzz at this week's union-funded conference at the Fort Garry Hotel. Attendance is double what organizers expected, and discussions have largely focused on the need for universal child care and the economic arguments for such a system.

Conference organizer Morna Ballantyne said child care is fast becoming a wedge issue in the upcoming federal election.

Late last month, Harper's government announced a two-pronged plan of tax breaks to help families. Income-splitting will allow couples with children to shift up to \$50,000 in income from the higher earner, almost always the father, to the lower earner at tax time. The benefit is capped at \$2,000. The Conservatives also pledged to boost the universal child-care benefit, which sends \$100 cheques to families for each child under six to help pay for day care. Those monthly payments will soon go up to \$160. For the first time, parents of older children will also get \$60 a month.

At Friday's sessions, nearly every delegate who spoke expressed contempt for the Conservative plan, saying income-splitting and boosting the child-care benefit is miles from a proper national child-care strategy, does nothing to create more high-quality spaces and does little but reinforce traditional gender roles.

Instead, many pointed to Quebec's \$7-a-day universal system and new research from Université du Québec Montréal Pierre Fortin that Quebec's system allowed 70,000 women to re-enter the workforce. And, for every \$1 the province spent on day care, \$1.65 was returned in taxes.

Manitoba's spending on child care, the second highest in the country, also earned kudos.

But, conference-goers continued to lament low wages for child-care workers, a persistent shortage of spaces, spotty quality and little integration with the education system.

Harper declined to attend the conference. Organizers also invited Candice Bergen, a Manitoba MP and the minister of state for social development. She did not respond to the request.

Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau, whose party has yet to reveal its child-care policies, spoke via video and offered no details about his plans for day care.

He told conference-goers he will work collaboratively with the provinces to create a comprehensive child-care plan.

Region: Canada ^[3]

Tags: federal programs ^[4]

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/14/11/mulcair-praised-universal-daycare> [2] <https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/local/mulcair-praised-for-universal-daycare-282801961.html> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7864> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/federal-programs>