

# Quebec's broken promise on daycare fees was inevitable <sup>[1]</sup>

Editorial

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EXCERPTS

As broken promises go, this is a doozy. After vowing not to raise Quebec's \$7 daily subsidized daycare fee during the general election this year, Premier Philippe Couillard has now almost tripled it for the province's wealthiest citizens and raised it on a sliding scale for everyone else whose annual family income is over \$55,000.

One couple quoted in The Globe and Mail will see their annual daycare fees for two children jump from \$3,796 to \$10,400. If they voted for Mr. Couillard's Liberals, they must be regretting it today. Mr. Couillard shouldn't have done that to them. Gaudily broken political promises are always damaging to voters' faith in the democratic process, and the Premier deserves whatever damaging fallout comes his way.

But as creepy as the betrayal is, in retrospect it was inevitable. An income-based sliding scale for subsidized daycare makes sense, even if it doesn't win votes. Arguably, a sliding scale should have been there from the start; federal NDP Leader Thomas Mulcair, who is promising \$15-a-day daycare across Canada, ought to take note.

Look again at the numbers in the second paragraph. The family in question has an annual income of close to \$150,000 and was paying \$3,796 per year for daycare for two children. In some parts of Canada, a couple with half that income might pay closer to \$25,000 per year. Even with the increase, the Quebec family will still only be paying one-third as much as someone in Ontario, where the average monthly cost per child in a licensed daycare is \$1,152 regardless of one's income.

If a government is going to provide an affordable daycare program, it needs to be financially sustainable. The flat-fee conceit is noble, but it's hardly a prerequisite for operating a successful publicly funded service. In fact, it seems to be a drawback: Quebec's \$2.3-billion daycare program is underfunded and there are long waiting lists everywhere.

So, what is more important - ensuring that low-income families and single parents have access to affordable daycare by charging middle- and upper-income families a higher fee that would still be the envy of similar families in every other province, or maintaining an idealistic flat fee that puts the program at risk? Mr. Couillard's broken promise has injected a little reality into the debate about affordable daycare.

**Region:** Quebec <sup>[2]</sup>

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