

Not political child's play ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

While the birth rate has been declining in recent years, the 2011 census revealed an unexpected baby boomlet across Canada that may push child care to the forefront in the federal election, scheduled for Oct. 19, if not earlier.

The three major parties are on high alert.

Stephen Harper's governing Conservatives are busy lauding its proposals, chief among them the expansion of the monthly universal child care benefit from \$100 to \$160.

The counter-proposal from Thomas Mulcair's New Democrats is highlighted by a \$15-a-day child-care plan and spending \$5 billion annually until 2023.

Slower off the mark are the Liberals, with no firm official platform or dollar figure but featuring Justin Trudeau's commitment to a program negotiated with the provinces.

Canadians are about to experience endless daily rounds of campaign pitches as the three major parties kick child care around like a political football.

Advocates for an improved system and parents relying on child care say the issue deserves serious, thoughtful discussion with less rhetoric and more substance.

Sensing the possibility of an early election, the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada, which grew out of the second national child care conference in 1982, has already launched its campaign with other groups, explaining to voters what it sees as the major issues in the fight. It is dedicated to a publicly funded non-profit system.

"Our campaign is non-partisan and straightforward," said co-ordinator Lyndsay Macdonald. "The election result we want to see is a firm commitment from the federal government, working alongside the provinces and territories, to build up a universal system with quality and affordable spaces."

Ian Gibb, the child services manager for the City of London and Middlesex County Child Care, knows the legislative structure and maintenance of the system are the responsibility of the province under the Child Care and Early Years Act (replacing the Day Nurseries Act on Dec. 15, 2014).

Yet Gibb still feels child care should be a key issue in the upcoming federal campaign, in large part because of the value of a good early education for children, while allowing parents opportunities to continue their career paths at work or in school.

Region: Canada ^[3]

Tags: legislation and regulation ^[4]

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