



Child Care Advocacy Forum Provincial Election 2001

In a few weeks, British Columbians will go to the polls to elect a new provincial government. This election will be a critical one for child care and the stakes are high.

In past elections, our goal has been to raise the profile of child care. This time CHILD CARE IS CLEARLY ON THE AGENDA and our goal is to make sure that, no matter who forms government, **BC continues to build a comprehensive, publicly funded child care system that entitles ALL children access to quality early childhood experiences and programs.**

We need to make sure that every candidate running for election makes a commitment to work for a child care system in B.C. that:

- entitles ALL children access to quality early childhood experiences and programs
- offers families choices from a range of quality child care and other family supports
- moves away from a user-fee system to a publicly funded one

To be successful, we need to make the size and strength of the constituency that will **VOTE CHILD CARE** visible. And to do this, we need your help! We have developed an election package that you can use in your community.

Please copy and distribute these materials widely. Use them, change them, make them your own. Remember - over the last year we have made a real difference and we can do it now.

STRATEGIES

While all candidates will be asked to make a commitment to the 3 messages above, in the current context, we may need different strategies for different parties/candidates.

1. Strategy with the Liberals

Our strategy with the Liberals (and other opposition parties) should be to secure as solid a commitment as possible to a child care position and program that is consistent with our 3 key messages. We will need to:

- ensure they hear from families served by the first phase of the program and from those who want to know 'when its their turn' so they appreciate the level of support for this program and the consequences of cutting it.
- press them for specifics on what they will do, how much money they will commit and whether they will cut, maintain or increase the school-aged child care initiative.
- develop responses to the concerns/issues they are raising (eg. targeting, a made in B.C. system, more study/discussion, all-day Kindergarten, tax cuts, etc.)
- appeal to those within the Liberal party who have supported progressive child care policy in the past.

2. Strategy with the NDP

Our strategy with the NDP should be to indicate our support for Child Care B.C. while pressing them to strengthen and improve it by:

- speeding up the implementation of Child Care B.C.
- including registered LNRs and extended family caregivers in the program
- addressing the remaining 'unpaid low wage redress bill' in the child care sector

PRE-ELECTION ACTIVITIES

- Lobby the Premier to implement the next phase of Child Care B.C. (School-aged spaces in licensed Family Child Care and Infant-Toddler Group Centres) effective April 1, 2001.
- Ensure the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition hear directly from parents served by the school-aged program about how important it is for them and from parents who are not yet served but want the program extended to cover them.
- Meetings with Liberal MLAs at the constituency and provincial levels to ensure they understand that child care is an issue and to secure commitments.
- Possible appearance on Open-line shows
- Preparation of election materials including:
 - I VOTE CHILD CARE Buttons
 - Candidates' Commitment (modelled on one used in the federal election)
 - Constituents' Letter to Candidates (")
 - Good Answers to Tough Questions (responses to key issues eg. targeting, tax cuts, all day K, etc)
 - Questions to Ask Your Candidates
 - Summary of Party Positions
- Meetings with Partners to secure resources and support
- Preparation for a province wide mailing of election materials/ Continued work on our E-Mail list/network capacity

ELECTION ACTIVITIES

Depending on the timing of the call, activities will include:

- distribution of election materials/Buttons
- organizing the Candidate's Commitment action

- ensuring child care is raised at all candidates meetings and in leadership debates
- pitching the idea of a Leaders Debate on Children's Issues' to the media
- initiating and responding to Letters to the Editor/Op Eds
- encouraging and supporting local/community actions to highlight child care
- If funding is secured, designing and using a Forum's website

Where do the Parties Stand?

The New Democrats -

Over their two terms in office, the NDP increased overall spending on child care from approximately \$40 million to \$200 million. Increases came through the introduction of Infant-Toddler Grants and the Wage Supplement Initiative (now the Compensation Contribution Program), increased subsidy rates and uptake; capital grants and expansion of Child Care Resource and Referral Programs.

In 1999, the NDP released a Discussion Paper and asked for public input on future directions for child care. Based on the response, the NDP made a commitment, in the March 2000 Throne Speech, to begin to build a publicly funded child care system in B.C.

The first phase of the new system was implemented in January, 2001 and covers 15,000 before and after school spaces in group programs. Families using these spaces pay a maximum of \$7 a day for before and after school care and \$14 for a full day of care and the provincial government provides grants to the operators to cover the additional costs of care.

In January, 2001, the NDP announced Child Care B.C. - a 4 year plan to make all licensed spaces in family, group and pre-school programs available at a maximum fee of \$14 a day by 2004. The plan also includes a 20% annual increase in the number of licensed spaces for a total of 85,000 spaces. The full plan will cost \$400 million a year.

The Liberals -

To date, the Liberals have not unveiled a detailed child care plan. In response to the announcement of Child Care B.C., the Critic stated that she was not prepared to honour NDP promises and that she supported the creation of an all party committee to explore early education. She also indicated interest in All-day Kindergarten.

In recent correspondence, the Liberal Leader, Gordon Campbell stated that:

- B.C. Liberals support and will continue to fund child care programs. They support the goal of increasing access to child care.
- Parents need to be offered a choice for their children.
- While the NDP consistently points to the child care system in Quebec as a model, Quebec's child care model is not flawless and has been subject to criticism for not serving enough families and for leading to budget shortfalls.
- Liberals want child care that is affordable, efficiently managed and targeted to those who need it.
- Liberals are sceptical of any initiative rolled out so close to the end of this government's mandate. Child Care B.C. is a massive new undertaking with profound long term ramifications.
- At the very least, this plan (Child Care B.C.) should be referred to an all-party committee of the Legislature for further discussion and study.