

Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC

Working for a non-profit child care system that is high quality, affordable, accessible and accountable.

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Tax cuts and promises won't build a child care system!

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By now, we hope that our members and supporters have seen and used our child care related federal election materials and tools which were designed to raise the profile of child care in every riding in BC and to 'get out the child care vote'. (For election materials, go to www.cccabc.bc.ca, www.cccabc.bc.ca/forum, www.childcareadvocacy.ca, and www.firstcallbc.org)

The good news is that child care has become an issue in the election with the federal Green, Liberal and New Democratic parties promising to take action. The Green party says it will "hold a referendum on creating a national public daycare program"; the Liberal party says it will "phase in a contribution of \$5 billion over the next five years, beyond funds already committed, to accelerate building the national system" and create 250,000 new spaces; and the NDP says it will spend \$5.25 billion to "create an additional 200,000 high quality, publicly funded, affordable child care spaces within four years".

Now, with two weeks to go, we think there are 3 key issues that will have an impact on our ability to move our child care agenda forward after June 28th.

1. Taxes and Child Care

It isn't popular to talk about taxes because, as we are told daily, everyone hates them. Too many of us have lost sight of the connection between the taxes we pay and the services we receive. But, as we have learned in BC, big tax cuts mean service cuts and increased user fees which impact most on low and moderate income families.

If we are going to build a good publicly funded child care system in Canada, we need to understand that taxes are not always 'evil' and that sometimes it makes sense to pay for things collectively rather than individually. We think it makes sense to fund a child care system through the tax system because:

- Families are at their lowest earning power when their children are young. When they most need child care, they are least likely to be able to afford it.
- Children's development is time sensitive and doesn't wait until their families can afford quality care.
- The benefits of investing in child care outweigh the costs and will lead to increased tax revenues down the road.
- The earlier we invest in our children, the longer we all reap the benefits.

We aren't tax experts, but we know that in the current user fee system, children from well off families are more likely to be in quality care than children from lower income families.

And, we know that, on their own, tax cuts to low and moderate income families will never be big enough to cover the cost of today's child care fees.

For example, consider the federal Conservative proposal to lower personal income taxes for people earning \$35,000 - \$70,000 a year. Experts say those earning at the upper end would save about \$2,500 while those at the lower end would save around \$450 a year. While every penny counts for low income families, these 'savings' do not come close to paying for quality child care for either family.

The Conservatives are also proposing a per child tax deduction of \$2,000. Experts say this would mean that families earning enough to be paying taxes, would at best see their annual personal taxes reduced by around \$320 to \$580 per child. Critics say that spending on social programs would likely be significantly reduced and again, the individual family's savings wouldn't even cover the cost of one month of child care fees in a quality licensed program.

So, while there are ways to make the system fairer for working families and to spend our taxes more wisely, if tax cuts mean that we have insufficient revenue to build a child care system for all or if tax cuts are used as a substitute for building a system – they are not part of a child care solution.

2. Talk – Action = Zero

It is a tribute to the hard work of child care advocates across Canada that child care is, once again, an election issue and that some of the principles we have advanced are reflected in election promises. In the face of defeats, broken promises and setbacks – we have made the case and convinced the public that our vision can work.

But – as we have learned the hard way, election promises don't necessarily lead to action. So we encourage our members to look beyond the 'promises' and consider the track record of the politicians who are making them.

Consider whether political parties have delivered on their child care promises when they held power or had the chance to deliver. If a party hasn't held power, consider whether their promises are consistent with their overall values and their other positions. Finally, consider how we are going to hold the parties who are making child care promises accountable for delivering on these promises after the election.

In our view, maintaining a strong, independent and, when necessary, critical voice is the only way to keep elected officials accountable and to make sure that their talk is backed up by action. We need to let them know that we will applaud positive steps, but will be a force to contend with if they break their word.

3. Accountability

Speaking of accountability, we remain concerned about the lack of attention being paid to provincial accountability for potentially increased federal child care funds. We know the sad story in BC. In spite of having received almost \$250 million in federal funding over the last 4 years, BC has cut, not increased child care funding.

(For details on the first two years of federal funding see www.cccabc.bc.ca/forum/pdf/CCAF_ECDanalysis.pdf).

It is not too late to remind the politicians that we expect them to hold BC and other provinces accountable for the use of federal child care funding to build a publicly funded child care system and to supplement, rather than replace provincial expenditures.

Remember – it is our hard work that got child care back on the agenda. We have a renewed opportunity to make progress in this election. Let's get out the child care vote and show that we are and will be a force to reckon with.

Let's Vote Child Care!