

**Carole James speech to the
Coalition of Child Care Advocates
January 27, 2004**

- Thank you for that warm welcome, and thank you for inviting me here today.
- I'd also like to thank you, as an organization and as individuals, for the passion and the dedication you show, every day, in your work to provide the children of British Columbia with a healthy start in life.
- As many of you know, I've devoted a good deal of my life to building a better world to raise our children in.
- I've worked on planning the regionalization of services for children.
- I've worked with co-operative pre-schools.
- I've served as the Director of Child Care for the province.
- I've been a foster parent for 20 years.
- And as I stand here before you, I'm looking at some of the most dedicated defenders of our children that this province has ever seen.
- So between us, I'm not sure we need to spend a lot of time talking about how bad child care services have become in BC since the election of Gordon Campbell.
- We know how bad it is.
- Instead, I want to talk about what we're going to do about it.
- You and I.
- And that means talking about what brought me here today – the New Democratic Party.
- Let's cast our minds back a few years and take a look at what the New Democratic Party did while it was in government.
- In 1992, when the NDP had just been elected under the leadership of Mike Harcourt, this province had only 42,000 licensed child-care spaces.
- By 1999, this number had nearly doubled, growing to 71,000 licensed spaces.

- In 2001, the NDP committed to increasing the number of child care spaces in BC to 85,000 by the year 2004.
- That would have been achieved right about now.
- Think about that!
- And it didn't stop there. New Democrats established the Child Care BC program, making before- and after-school child care affordable and available for families all around the province.
- In 2000 and 2001, New Democrats took it a step further.
- We proposed an expansion of Child Care BC that would have provided quality before- and after-school care for 19,000 kids and by 2004, it would have saved working families up to \$6000 per child.
- And this was only part of what the New Democrats did for child care and for children while in government.
- I know that sometimes the New Democratic government made some tough choices. I know that we made mistakes. I know that sometimes we could have done more.
- But when I look at the New Democrat record on child care, I'm proud.
- It's one of the reasons I've been a New Democrat for all these years, and ran for the leadership of this Party.
- It's not the only reason.
- I'm also proud of how New Democrats built new schools, kept class sizes small, and held tuition at an affordable levels.
- I'm proud that we raised the minimum wage and created apprenticeship programs to help give kids a start in life.
- We increased investment in health care, even while Paul Martin cut funding to the provinces.
- I'm proud that job creation and small business growth reached record levels under a New Democratic government.

- I'm proud of the New Democrat record on the environment, creating new parks and laying the groundwork for a greener economy.
- There's another reason I'm here today.
- I'm worried about the future of our province.
- Since he came to power in 2001, Gordon Campbell has made one bad decision after another and led our province in the wrong direction.
- He's closed our schools and hospitals.
- He's doubled tuition fees for our kids.
- He's slashed safeguards for our environment.
- Line-ups at the shelters and food banks in our neighbourhoods are getting longer and longer.
- He's privatized public assets.
- 200-thousand people are unemployed and looking for jobs.
- He's torn up freely-negotiated contracts with hard-working people.
- He's laid off thousands of people, driven down wages and hired poorly-trained replacements for the front-line work in our health care and community services.
- Our economy is now among the worst in Canada.
- He's run the largest deficits in BC history – even though New Democrats left him with a \$1.4 billion surplus.
- What kind of leadership is this?
- It's the kind of leadership he showed when police raided the Legislative offices of some of his most powerful Cabinet ministers.
- He decided to sit on a beach in Maui, working on his tan, hoping the story would blow over rather than return to BC and face the public.
- Take a look at his leadership on the issue that you work on every day.

- Gordon Campbell promised they would target child care funding to help parents who need it the most.
- You can see it for yourself, in black and white, on page 26 of their election platform. They still have it up on their web site, and it makes for very interesting reading.
- They also promised to increase child care choices for parents by encouraging the expansion of safe, affordable child care spaces.
- That's also on page 26.
- And they promised to devote the resources to the job needed to put the interests of kids first.
- Well, we all know what he did.
- Campbell blew 2.2 billion dollars on tax cuts for high-income earners and big business.
- That was their first day on the job.
- Since then, they've been cutting vital public services and raising fees on everything from licensing to parking to try to make up for the shortfall.
- That leaves ordinary British Columbians paying more for government services than before the tax cut.
- Lower and middle income families are paying more, but getting less.
- And it's hurting our kids.
- After just a month in office, Gordon Campbell announced his decision to scrap the New Democrat program for universal, affordable child care.
- They said it was too expensive.
- It would have cost 16 million dollars – not a lot compared with the 250 million dollars Campbell handed to the corporate sector in the form of tax reductions.
- ... Not a lot compared to the 6.5 million Campbell spent on his reckless and ultimately failed scheme to sell off the Coquihalla....

- ...not a lot compared to the 18 million – and counting – Campbell spent on a fancy new “web portal” to replace the perfectly good BC Government web site...
- ...not a lot compared to the 12 million Campbell spent giving a fee-reduction gift to stockbrokers...
- ...and not a lot compared to the 5 million dollars – and counting -- Campbell has spent so far on ads designed to convince the public that our health care system isn't falling to pieces as fast as it clearly is.
- So while he couldn't make an investment in child care – and investment that pays off for everyone in society - he seemed to have plenty of money to waste on pet projects and dubious schemes.
- Gordon Campbell is fond of saying that his top priority is the bottom line – but it seems to me that the last time a budget was balanced in BC was while New Democrats were in government.
- Even his colleagues at the Vancouver Board of Trade recognize that child care is a sound financial investment.
- They've gone on record in support of universal child care, because they recognize that it's a crucial investment in the economy of our province.
- It's an investment that pays off for every one of us – even people who don't have children.
- You know these stats better than I but I want to take a minute to remind us of their importance.
- A 1998 study conducted at the University of Toronto showed that we can save 2 dollars in taxes for every 1 dollar spent on the child care sector.
- Study after study, expert after expert, has said kids who have been in licensed child care do better later in life. They are more likely to finish school, and less likely to get involved in drugs, crime and unwanted pregnancies.
- There is at least a 2 to 1 payback in economic benefits if we invest in our children from birth to age six.
- You'd think that a government that says they care about the bottom line would care about these facts.
- Instead, Campbell and the Liberal government have pulled the rug out from beneath child care services and the people who work in them.

- They've reduced funding for the 40 childcare resources and referral centres around the province.
- They cancelled an agreement that would have helped increase the wages of child care workers, helping to reduce turnover and keep skilled and dedicated staff.
- Child care workers typically work long hours and earn poverty-level wages.
- They've been excluded from employment standards and the most basic worker rights.
- They've faced higher than average risk of physical injuries, infectious diseases, and stress.
- New Democrats aren't going to stand by and let Gordon Campbell take us back there.
- Since taking power, the Liberals have cut the heart out of BC's child care system, chopping over 30 per cent from childcare operating funds.
- In the last two years, the childcare budget has been cut by more than 26 million dollars.
- These cuts are making it impossible for many of BC's best day cares to stay afloat.
- As child cares close, the limited availability of space is creating a childcare crisis that only promises to grow.
- As well, the funding cuts have caused childcare costs to skyrocket as facilities struggle to make up the shortfall.
- At the same time, the income threshold for the childcare subsidy program has been reduced, resulting in fewer single mothers and families being able to afford quality care.
- As childcare availability decreases and costs increase, many parents are being forced to cut back on their childcare or to place their children into substandard childcare situations.
- But don't just take my word for it.
- Lynn Stephens, the former provincial minister responsible for child care, admitted it.
- She told the Vancouver Sun that the reduction in the childcare subsidy has left some parents with no choice but to remove their children from licensed day care.

- Stephens was responding to a report by the City of Vancouver that found that pre-school programs saw 88 per cent of children from subsidized families drop out of the program between April and December 2002.
- The situation on the east side of Vancouver got so bad that the City had to step in and created subsidies to help low-income families.
- Stephens denied that this amounts to downloading provincial costs to the City, and she claimed that her government's changes to day care truly supports families, children and day care providers.
- It's a slap in the face for the many thousands of parents and caregivers who have experienced the Liberals' childcare changes firsthand.
- With more and more families struggling to balance work and home, the Liberals don't seem to understand how important quality childcare is to BC's future.
- And now we find ourselves in a situation where only 10 per cent of children in BC have access to licensed day care...
- ...where there's no hope for rural families live far from services...
- ... for shift workers who require non-traditional hours of care...
- ... for families who require part-time care...
- ... and families whose children have additional support needs.
- This is not good enough.
- I know there is a better way for children and families – a fairer way that will ensure a strong and healthy community and a strong and healthy economy.
- I know that there's a more balanced, more responsible way to govern this province. I know that we can restore economic security for low and middle income British Columbians.
- I know we're going to get there by bringing British Columbians together. Not setting them at each others throats.
- We need an end to the confrontation brought about by Gordon Campbell, and a return to consensus building.
- British Columbians must work together.

- That's the only way to make sure we and our children will have a modern and thriving economy...
- ... a protected and healthy environment...
- ... and communities that support and enrich the lives of families.
- We must re-invest in health, education and child care.
- Here's the bottom line:
 - ... by working together, with this organization, with businesses, with communities, with labour -- New Democrats can build a better BC.
- A BC that gives children, and their families, hope.
 - ... better opportunities...
 - ... and fairness.
- New Democrats are working hard to get us there.
- Every day, we're standing up on behalf of ordinary people in this province – holding the Campbell Liberals to account both in the Legislature and in communities around the province.
- Joy MacPhail and Jenny Kwan are facing overwhelming odds in the Legislature.
- They're the only voices, in the Legislature, calling for positive, practical solutions to the challenges we face in health care, education, the economy, the environment, and in child care.
- I've travelled all over the province in last few weeks, visiting literally dozens of communities, hearing the concerns of ordinary people.
- I hear different stories, and different concerns, but everyone is calling for a more balanced approach – one that balances compassion and support with responsible management and leadership.
- In the next few months there's going to be a federal election.
- It will be an opportunity to hold Paul Martin to account for the promises the federal Liberal government made about a national child care program.
- A year after that, a provincial election, and our chance to have Gordon Campbell answer for his reckless mismanagement.

- We need to make accessible, affordable child care a key issue in both elections.
- I'm excited about what's happening in our Party.
- I'm excited about the team we're building – both federally and provincially.
- I'm excited about the growing number of people who are joining the Party every day.

- As we prepare, you and I will need to work together.
- We need your ideas, your dedication, and your support.
- We all know how important child care is.
- Unfortunately, to the Liberals – FEDERAL AND PROVINCIAL – it's not even on their radar screen.

- We need to elect people who believe, like we do, that child care is a priority.
- I look forward to working with you,
- and I thank you for your commitment on behalf of the children of British Columbia.

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