

A Child Care System for All of Canada's Children No More Talk – Now is the Time for Action!

July 2004

The federal election is over and the possibility of making real progress on our child care agenda is better than it has been in a long time.

Child care advocates made child care a key election issue. Both the federal Liberal Party and federal New Democratic Party (NDP) responded with significant child care commitments. And, in the English Leader's Debate, Paul Martin (Liberal), Jack Layton (NDP) and Gilles Duceppe (Bloc Quebecois - BQ) all lauded the Quebec child care system as the 'way to go'.

We now have a minority Liberal Government (135 seats) with the NDP (19 seats) and BQ (54 seats) holding the 'balance of power'. This means that the federal Liberals will need to find common ground with the NDP and the BQ to 'win votes' in Parliament.

This puts us in a better position than ever to hold them accountable for keeping their child care promises.

What Did They Promise?

- The **federal Liberal party** promised the foundations of a National Early Learning and Child Care Program to ensure that children have access to high-quality, government-regulated spaces at affordable cost to parents. They said they would:
 - phase in a contribution to provinces and territories of \$5 billion over the next 5 years, beyond funds already committed to build the national system.
 - enshrine in legislation four principles for the national system - quality, universality, accessibility and developmental programming.
- The **federal NDP** promised to work with provinces and territories and to provide 5.25 billion over the next 4 years to create an additional 200,000 high quality, publicly funded, affordable child care spaces.
- The **BQ** supports Quebec's current approach to child care - the only jurisdiction in North America with a publicly funded, universally accessible system. Quebec provides access to regulated child care for a parent fee of \$7 a day. The BQ wants a fair share of federal funds to support Quebec's child care system.

Why Might a Minority Government Be Good for Child Care?

There are 308 seats in the Canadian House of Commons. If a party wins 155 seats or more, they have the majority they need to implement their agenda.

In this last election, the federal Liberal party elected 135 MPs. They elected more MPs than any other party so are still the governing party. But, they are 20 MPs short of the magic number they need to win many votes in the House.

This makes them a minority government. They will need at least 20 more votes from MPs who are members of other parties on important issues. As a result, opposition parties have more influence over the government's agenda. Minority governments require consensus and compromise and have produced some of

our best and most cherished social programs including Medicare and the Canada Pension Plan/Quebec Pension Plan.

Given the child care promises made during the election, many of our social justice partners believe that this time – a new child care program should be the top priority. **We agree!**

What Needs To Be Done?

We have to move quickly. Over the summer, we expect that the Liberals will develop their legislative agenda while the NDP decides on their priorities. We must mobilize the largest voice ever to make sure that child care is on the list.

Advocates across the country are working on a **Keep the Promise Campaign** to:

- Tell Paul Martin that we expect him to enshrine the principles of a pan Canadian child care system in legislation **during this term of office.**
- Tell Jack Layton that we expect him to make 'action on child care' a condition of NDP support for the Liberal government.

In BC, we also need to ensure that federal funds are used to:

- Build a high quality, universally accessible child care system
- Supplement, rather than replace, provincial child care spending.

We will need strong accountability measures that require provinces to develop child care systems based on principles of quality, universality, accessibility and developmental programming as a condition of receiving federal child care funds. We will also need sufficient federal funding to make this vision possible.

What Can You Do?

- Actively support the 'Keep The Promise Campaign' by sending an email to Paul Martin and Jack Layton
- Call, email, or visit your newly elected MP, especially if they are Liberal or NDP, and tell them you expect immediate action on child care.
- Speak up in community coalitions about the opportunity to make a child care breakthrough if we all work together.
- Stay tuned to the Coalition's website for the latest campaigns.