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Fri. Nov. 12 2004 11:34 PM ET



file photo of hockey legend turned cabinet minister , Ken Dryden

Dryden urges co-operation on day care effort

Canadian Press

WINNIPEG — Squabbling over national day care could sidetrack efforts to get a program up and running, Social Development Minister Ken Dryden warned Friday.

Dryden told 600 delegates at a national child-care conference in Winnipeg that the program will be a reality, but there is still a lot of work to be done with his provincial counterparts and those who work with

young children.

"My biggest fear is that in the months ahead, the history of little fights will distract us and de-energize us from the big fight to create a national early-learning and child-care system," said Dryden.

Dryden met with provincial ministers last week, but said another meeting is needed early next year to iron out how \$5 billion in federal funding will be allocated over five years.

The money is intended to help provinces introduce or improve day-care programs. Governments will be held accountable for how the federal dollars are spent.

Dryden said he can't guarantee talks won't stall because of the same jurisdictional wrangling that has plagued federal-provincial health-care talks for years, but he believes there is momentum.

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"What we need to do is come out absolutely front and centre and say, 'This is what we need and we're taking these steps to get there and those looking to stand in the way of that do it at their peril.' "

The child-care conference, organized by the Canadian Council on Social Development, is the first major policy gathering focusing on early childhood education in 20 years.

There was an air of optimism at the Winnipeg Convention Centre among day-care advocates, who say they're confident Ottawa and the provinces are committed to making a national program a priority.

Council president Marcel Lauziere said the most important thing is to get the right program in place, one that will offer publicly funded, non-profit child care to everyone who needs it.

"There's really a mish-mash right now," said Lauziere. "We could simply decide to sprinkle that money around and just not fix anything, so let's take the time to do it well."

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However, the Canadian Union of Public Employees released a legal opinion at the conference warning Dryden that Canada could open itself up to trade challenges under NAFTA and the World Trade Organization if the day-care program is not public from the outset.




That could lead to U.S. box-store-style day-care chains expanding in Canada, said the report written by lawyer Steven Shrybman.

But a publicly funded system is not the only priority of day-care operators such as Caryn Lafleche, who was host to Dryden earlier in the day at her francophone centre.

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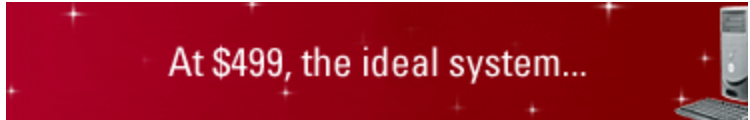
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Sat, November 13, 2004

For the children
Nat'l system makes sense: Doer
By BOB HOLLIDAY, STAFF REPORTER

It's time for provinces to "stop the blame game" and start working with the federal government to establish a national system of early childhood development, says Premier Gary Doer. "It makes a lot of sense to work with the federal government," said Doer, minutes after federal Social Development Minister Ken Dryden reiterated a Liberal pledge to provide \$5 billion dollars over five years to fund a national child-care system.

Doer said he's more optimistic than he's ever been about a national system after meeting with Dryden, who was in Winnipeg yesterday to speak at the Canadian Council on Social Development conference.

The Liberal pledge would mean an annual take of \$37 million for the province. The first cheques would be issued in April following a budget expected sometime in February, said Dryden.

'LITTLE BY LITTLE'

Implementation of the program is contingent on the minority Liberal government fending off any non-confidence votes in Parliament.

"Little by little you move your way along. We need to find the steps," said Dryden.

"The debate about child care is over. It is not a matter of if, but of when. It's time to get on with it and get at it."

The premier said people shouldn't take "a top of the mountain or nothing" stance, but should work

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Dryden warns against squabbling over daycare

Saturday, November 13, 2004 - Page A10

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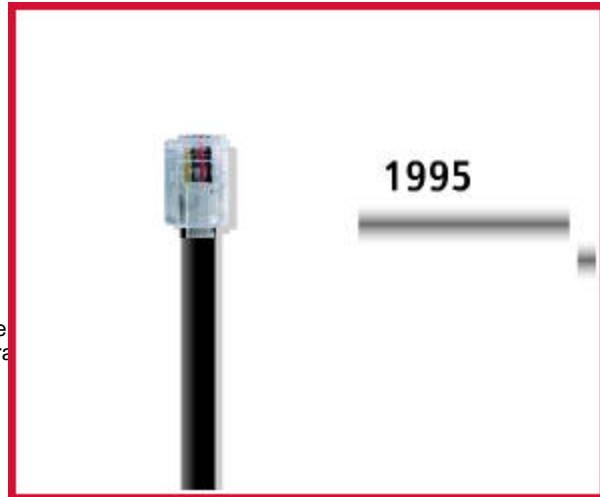
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"My biggest fear is that in the months ahead, the history of little fights will distract us and de-energize us from the big fight to create a national early-learning and child-care system," he said.

Mr. Dryden met with provincial ministers last year to iron out how \$5-billion in federal

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Nov. 12, 2004. 08:33 PM

Turf wars could stall day-care plan, warns Dryden

FROM CANADIAN PRESS

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Nov. 13, 2004. 01:00 AM

Act fast on child care, forum urged

Ex-PQ minister makes pitch

Dryden calls issue `symbolic test'

LAURIE MONSEBRAATEN
 STAFF REPORTER

WINNIPEG—The architect of Quebec's popular \$5-a-day child care says the rest of Canada must "seize the moment" and move quickly to open as many new spaces as possible now that Ottawa has pledged \$5 billion to turn the country's spotty patchwork of programs into a national system.

"Begin now and quickly, even if you are not completely ready," former Parti Québécois education minister Pauline Marois advised a national conference of child-care activists yesterday.

"When there is a momentum — and I think there is now — you have to create the spaces. The parents will be happy, they will support you and you will not have a choice to go back."

It was the first time Marois has spoken publicly on child care outside Quebec and the 650 delegates at the conference delighted in her account of how that province jumped on the idea in 1995. Marois sensed that then-premier Lucien Bouchard wanted to do something to enrich the lives of children and families in Quebec and she pounced.

"I saw my opening," she said. "Not everything was in place and I knew the costs would probably be much higher than anticipated. But I took a huge risk and I think I did the right thing. You have to seize the moment because they only come once."

Today, more than half of Quebec children under age 6 have access to

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regulated child care, now at \$7 a day. The province's 180,000 subsidized spaces cost the government \$1.4 billion a year. In the rest of the country, fewer than 20 per cent of children under 6 have access to regulated child care.

Earlier in the day, federal Social Development Minister Ken Dryden told the gathering that the Liberals' child-care election promise has turned into a "symbolic test" of the government's ability to keep its word.

"Child care is a priority for Canada and it is also a priority for my government," he said. And while \$5 billion over five years is a modest amount to build a national system around the principles of quality, universal access, accessibility and developmental enrichment, it is enough to get started, he said.

The former hockey great and lawyer who got into politics last spring said it's time to put child-care critics on the defensive. With 70 per cent of parents with children under age 6 in the workforce, child care is a fact of life, he said.

"It's absolutely clear child care is how we live in this country and this is not going to change," he said.

"The debate about child care is over. There will be a system of early learning in this country."

In an impassioned speech in which he said building a national child-care system is "exactly what I wanted to do and exactly what I got into politics for," Dryden encouraged the group to work together to get the principles right and move forward one step at a time.

"Those trying to get everything perfect now... will distract us from the real goal," he said. "I am not a perfectionist. I want to win."

There will be battles in government and within the child-care community about how best to proceed, Dryden warned. But he urged the group not to get bogged down.

"My biggest fear is that in the months ahead, the history of little fights will distract us from the big fight."

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Keep child care public, economist tells Dryden

Market can't deliver, forum warned

Federal minister crafting national plan

Laurie Monsebraaten
STAFF REPORTER

WINNIPEG—Child care must be a public service and not a market choice, says an economist with the University of Toronto's management studies program.

For the market to work, consumers need to be able to easily judge quality and use their purchasing power accordingly, Gord Cleveland told 650 delegates at a national childcare conference yesterday.

However, when it comes to child care, quality is not easy for parents because most of the care and learning goes on when mothers and fathers aren't there, he said.

"And if you don't have good quality child care, you don't have anything," he said in a presentation that was crafted as a letter to federal Social Development Minister Ken Dryden.



MICHAEL APORIUS/CANADA NEWSWIRE
Federal Social Development Minister Ken Dryden makes crafts with youngsters and child-care worker Monique Bruneau at a Winnipeg daycare. Dryden has the job of delivering on a Liberal pledge to commit \$5 billion over five years to start a national child-care system.

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Dryden, who opened the conference Friday and attended sessions yesterday, has been charged with delivering on the Liberal government's pledge to commit \$5 billion over five years to begin building a national system of early learning and child care, based on the principles of quality, universality, accessibility and developmental enrichment.

A meeting between Dryden and his provincial and territorial counterparts earlier this month resulted in a general agreement on Ottawa's four principles as a basis to move forward. They are scheduled to meet again in January to finalize a plan in time for the Liberals to commit \$1 billion in their February budget.

Cleveland said it's important for Dryden and the ministers to get the goals right at the outset. And one of those goals should be to create a public system in which public money funds non-profit services available to all children instead of funding subsidies for parents or commercial centres, he said.

While most private child care in Canada today consists of "little mom and pop centres" that don't look much different from community-run operations, Cleveland warned that when governments start pumping billions of dollars into a national system, large corporate enterprises will spring up, as has happened in the United States and Australia.

"They will have an incredibly poisonous effect on the evolution of child care over time and the public will lose control over how much quality we want," he warned, adding that numerous studies have shown quality tends to be better in non-profit operations.

Large corporations ` will have an incredibly poisonous effect on the evolution of child care.'

Gord Cleveland, U of T economist

Earlier this month, Dryden said Ottawa's definition of universal child care does not mean it will be free. Cleveland agrees, saying parents should be expected to pay about 20 per cent of the cost, or about \$7 a day, as is the case in Quebec. In Europe, where most countries have early learning and care systems, parents pay between 10 per cent and 30 per cent of the cost, he noted.

Parental fees are important because they reduce the public's cost, are fair to those who don't use the system, and give parents a stake in their children's care, he added.

It is estimated Ottawa would have to spend roughly \$10 billion a year in today's dollars to fund a high-quality system that is accessible to all

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children. Since Ottawa is starting with just a tenth of that amount, Cleveland urged Dryden to begin with 4- and 5-year-olds so that services quickly become universal.

"Start with something that gives parents the promise of a coming system," he said. As with Quebec, which also began with older children first, the public will make it impossible to slow down or turn back, he said.

In an interview yesterday, Dryden said he has thought about the value of focusing the first federal money on 4- and 5-year-olds, who in many provinces are already enrolled in kindergarten programs funded through the education system, but he's not convinced Ottawa should be so specific.

As for the question of commercial versus non-profit delivery for child care, Dryden told reporters Friday it's still up for discussion with the provinces.

But just like education and health care, which were initially provided by a range of operators before becoming public systems, child care, which is delivered in many provinces through commercial centres, must be allowed to evolve, he said.

However, a legal opinion sponsored by the Canadian Union of Public Employees released Friday suggests that the North American Free Trade Agreement and other foreign trade deals signed since public education and health care were established could tie Ottawa's hands in the future if it allows public funding to go to commercial child-care operators.

Without negotiating specific new arrangements under these trade deals, governments would not be able to limit investment by foreign child-care companies attracted to Canada by increased public funding, warned Steven Shrybman, a lawyer with Sack Goldblatt Mitchell.

"Creating a system that allows commercial child-care companies to acquire a significant stake in the system represents high-risk behaviour that significantly increases exposure to trade complaints and foreign investor claims," he wrote. Dryden said he has thought about the issue, but he hasn't yet read the legal opinion.

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National law on child care sought

Parents, activists urged to join push

Don't settle for crumbs, Lewis says

LAURIE MONSEBRAATEN
FEATURE WRITER

WINNIPEG—Activists and parents shouldn't settle for crumbs when Ottawa and the provinces meet in January to hammer out the country's first national child-care agreement, Canada's former U.N. ambassador Stephen Lewis told a national conference on the issue yesterday.

"Don't be intoxicated or hypnotized by what has taken place," he said, referring to the Liberal government's pledge to pump \$5 billion over the next five years into a national system based on the principles of quality, universality, accessibility and developmental enrichment.

In an address that closed the three-day conference, Lewis told about 650 child-care workers, activists, parents and academics they should push for a national child-care act — like the Canada Health Act — that legally binds the provinces to spend the new federal money on programs that promote Ottawa's stated principles.

Federal Social Development Minister Ken Dryden and his provincial and territorial counterparts came to a general agreement on those principles at a meeting Nov. 2, but Lewis reminded the gathering there are many details to be nailed down before they meet again.

Lewis now serves as the United Nations' special envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa.

In addition to legislation, advocates must push Ottawa to put more money

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on the table and promise financial support beyond just five years, Lewis said, adding about \$10 billion annually should go into early learning and care programs.

Advocates must also insist the new money funds programs — not fee subsidies or vouchers, Lewis said.

Currently, most public spending on child care outside Quebec is used to subsidize parent fees, leaving no money to build new centres, upgrade existing facilities or improve programs.

"We don't need funding to shore up the fragmented, piecemeal child-care system we have now. We need to create something new and formidable," he said. "And I profoundly believe you've got to ratchet up those dollars and ratchet them up quickly."

Lewis said advocates need to bombard federal and provincial politicians with their demands.

"Remember, the politicians are embracing a principle for which you have laboured for a lifetime," he said. "Don't let it slide away or emerge deformed or undermined."

University of Toronto child-care expert Martha Friendly, who has been advising federal bureaucrats on this issue for more than 20 years, believes the country has never been closer to a national agreement.

In addition to direct lobbying of federal and provincial politicians, Friendly said advocates will be turning to provinces, like Manitoba, which supports national legislation, non-profit services and a long-term financial commitment from Ottawa, to play a leadership role in January's federal-provincial meeting.

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