



## Child care and extra cash, too

### Harper urged to honour agreement

#### Canada can do both, YWCA head says

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A deal is a deal and Canada's oldest and largest community agency serving women and girls is not prepared to let Prime Minister Stephen Harper's new Conservative government rip up federal-provincial child care agreements signed last year.

"We are not opposed to income support," YWCA president Paulette Senior said of Harper's promise to replace the national child care initiative with a \$1,200 taxable allowance to parents for every child under six.

"But families also need child care," Senior said.

"We believe Canada can do both and we are asking the prime minister to ... move forward on building a national child care program," she told a strategy session with federal and provincial politicians in Toronto yesterday.

Enlisting the help of parents, other community agencies, business leaders, municipalities and provinces will be key in the battle to save the agreements, the politicians agreed.

And with a recent poll of chief executive officers showing they disagree with the Conservative government's child care strategy, there is a strong economic case to be made to save the deals.

"We need to raise the volume on this issue," said Ontario Children's Minister Mary Anne Chambers. "This was not an agreement with the Liberal government. It was an agreement with the government of Canada."

No federal government in recent memory has ever used the standard one-year notice clause to cancel a federal-provincial deal, said Liberal intergovernmental affairs critic John Godfrey (Don Valley West).

Harper used that clause to notify provinces last month that the deals would be scrapped as of next March. The move wipes out \$3 billion of the original \$5 billion in child care funding to the provinces and puts the future of a national system of high quality early learning and care programs in serious jeopardy.

The YWCA is one of the country's largest child care providers and has been a long-time supporter of a national system. A national study conducted by the YWCA and released yesterday shows that Canadian families, irrespective of where they live or the size of their communities, want a nationally funded public child care system instead of a cash payout.

Harper has said the Conservative plan gives families more personal choice in their child care decisions. But the YWCA study, conducted between the fall of 2004 and the fall of 2005, notes that fewer than 20 per cent of Canadian children have access to licensed child care and without more services, many parents don't have any choice.

Harper's plan to create 125,000 child care spaces by providing tax incentives to businesses and community groups won't help either, the meeting heard. A similar plan in Ontario during the Tory regimes of Mike Harris and Ernie Eves didn't produce a single space, said Chambers. Families want their children in daycares close to home and preferably in their local schools, not in office towers, she added.

Under Ontario's Best Start child care initiative, 25,000 new spaces for preschoolers and kindergarten students will be created in local public schools.

None of the federal opposition parties are against giving families more money, said Liberal social development critic Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's).

"But we must de-link the offer of \$1,200 for snow suits or snow boots or other things families need and a child care system," she said.