

Child care in focus as Return to School looms

As families gear up for a return to school this September, attention on the Federal campaign trail has turned to child care with the two leading parties offering different visions of how to provide child care to Canadian families.

The two leading parties – the Liberals and Conservatives – have announced competing viewpoints, with the Conservatives favouring a tax credit to allow families to make the best choice for them, while the Liberals and NDP have proposed a more ‘universal’ approach to child care.

Here is how the candidates vying to be the next MPs for Newmarket-Aurora and Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill view the issue.

NEWMARKET-AURORA

NDP candidate Yvonne Kelly says an NDP government will work with the Provinces to create a ‘universal system’ that will offer \$10 a day childcare spaces for families ‘regardless of where they live.’

‘The positive impacts [of this] will be felt by families immediately because a universal system will provide affordable childcare and the spots necessary so families don’t have to wait for months to return to work,’ she says. ‘It will also relieve a tremendous amount of stress I know parents experience when their future is so uncertain. I have colleagues and friends who have been looking for childcare spaces since before their infants were born and even now when they are ready to return to work, have not been able to find childcare that is accessible to them. Delaying a return to work for families when most need two incomes to pay their bills and remain housed is not acceptable when we can create the spaces we need. This is now our most complicated issue by far. Political will is the determining factor in getting this done.’

Ms. Kelly describes the Conservative plan to introduce a tax credit to help families find childcare as a proposal that does nothing to create new childcare spaces or make childcare more affordable, but Conservative candidate Harold Kim says the Conservative plan will ‘enable more women to choose to participate in the workforce’ through providing this break.

‘This allows families to choose the type of childcare that’s right for their family, without penalizing them for not choosing where Trudeau would like you to send your children,’ he said. ‘Families are tired of being told what’s best for them by governments and Trudeau’s plan is an expensive Ottawa-knows-best approach. Conservatives know that Canadians are smarter than that. And as the Liberals have made childcare promises in eight previous elections since 1993 and never delivered, I leave it to you to think about the chances of it even happening.’

Mr. Kim says he wonders why it has taken the Liberal leader so long to make announcements on childcare, just in time for a ‘critical election’ and says he has not seen anything that indicates more childcare spaces will be created through the Liberal proposal.

‘The Conservative childcare plan brings Canadians back into the decision-making about their families, their health, their environment,’ he says. ‘Taxes in Canada are the highest in the world. Imposing tax after tax to pay for things that people didn’t ask for, for failed and ineffective programs, for Trudeau’s family and friends to enjoy the high life is what Conservatives object to most. A tax credit is a clear and direct financial benefit to Canadian families, to help them cope through the high cost of raising families in Canada today.’

But Liberal candidate Tony Van Bynen says his party’s plan to bring childcare costs down to \$10 a day was developed in collaboration ‘with some of the country’s leading childcare and economic policy experts.’

‘It’s investing up to \$30 billion in the next five years, and at least \$9.2 billion/year every year after, to create new spaces and bring down costs for families,’ he says. ‘It’s a plan that has support from business leaders, major charities, and childcare advocates from right across the country. It’s the most effective way to do this, and in the last few months – regardless of what my friends of an

orange persuasion might try to claim ? we've kept our promise and signed agreements with nearly every province and territory to make \$10/day childcare a reality. I fully expect the Ford government here in Ontario to sign on after the election. The Conservative plan would cancel the agreements that have already been signed, and replace them with a tax credit scheme that will benefit the wealthiest folks while leaving the ones who need this support the most paying more than they would under our plan.

?Simply put, the best way to foster new spaces is to have the federal government put up the money required to create those spaces. Our plan, as confirmed by childcare policy experts, will create more than 125,000 new regulated spaces. Tax credits won't do that. Anyone who has had to put their kids into childcare knows just how incredibly expensive it is. Our plan will allow parents in our community to know their kids will be taken care of without wondering how they're going to pay for it. That also has some pretty significant economic upside, as well, because every dollar you invest in child care has a return of between \$1.50 and \$2.80 in economic growth, and helps more and more young parents ? women, in particular ? be able to go back to work.?

AURORA-OAK RIDGES-RICHMOND HILL

For Conservative candidate Leona Alleslev, providing ?accessible and affordable? child care is a priority.

?Canada simply doesn't have enough spaces and they are too expensive,? she says. ?Ontario cities have the highest median cost at over \$21,000 per year for an infant. In Ontario, there are only enough regulated centre spaces for approximately 20% of children under five years, and very few of them are subsidized. Worse still, there are even fewer spaces that support parents who work part time, have irregular schedules or are shift workers. The Conservative plan represents an immediate step in the right direction. A refundable tax credit that won't take five years to implement and will offer increased support right away to all families to offset the high costs of childcare. It will also create additional spaces because as it becomes more affordable for families to access these services, more home based and regulated child care providers will be established.

?COVID 19 has shown that the nature, routine and pace of work is likely to change after the pandemic requiring a wider array of childcare options that address flexible work schedules and shift work. As someone who operated two small businesses and worked as an aircraft manufacturing manager, I know how challenging it is to find childcare that can meet the demands of work schedules that are unpredictable and change daily. I will work to expand the Conservative Party childcare policy to include incentives for businesses and provinces to partner with childcare providers to deliver spaces that offer increased flexibility to meet the needs of their workforce.?

As the mother of six in a blended family, Liberal candidate Leah Taylor Roy says she too understands the ?demands? of parenting and says her party's plan to build ?high quality, affordable and flexible early learning and child care system? across the country is ?the best path forward.

?While I am glad to see the Conservative Party has addressed child care in their platform, their plan is a half-measure that does not address universal child care, the importance of quality early learning and the equally critical issue of the lack of supply,? says Ms. Taylor Roy. ?The Conservative Party's proposed tax credit won't help when parents cannot get their kids into child care in the first place.

?We have many young and growing families in Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill. The demand for spaces is so high that we are seeing families apply for child care spots as soon as they find out they're pregnant. Finding quality child care that's close to home shouldn't have to feel like playing the lottery. The Liberal Party's plan would lead to the creation of over 125,000 new child care spaces in the next five years across Canada. We will invest up to \$30 billion dollars and work with child care providers across the country to make this a reality. Parents today should be able to participate in the workforce feeling confident that their children are well-cared for and thriving in quality affordable child care centres and homes.?

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter