



CBC Commentary

Debra Mayer

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Introduction:

Ministers responsible for child care will soon be putting flesh on the bones of Canada's new national child care program. Debra Mayer is a child care advocate who teaches developmental studies at the University of Winnipeg. On Commentary, she lists the principles she'd like to see guide the program.

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Next week on February 11th in Vancouver, federal, provincial and territorial ministers will gather behind closed doors to work out a deal for a cross-Canada child care system.

As a mom, a taxpayer and a long-time child care advocate, I'm working hard to influence the outcome of this backroom meeting. I want the right deal for our children - not just any deal. So I have some advice for the ministers about the building blocks that will make this system the best it can be.

The first block is legislation that guarantees high quality care to children no matter where in Canada they live, and regardless of their abilities, economic status, their culture or language.

The second block is accountability - by that I mean concrete plans that measure real progress. More money for child care? You bet! But money with strings attached.

Third is public funding that makes quality child care affordable. In Quebec, parents pay no more than seven dollars a day. The government pays the rest. Here in Manitoba, we've also said "No" to a market model that can lead to really high fees. Preschooler care is capped at just over \$18 a day and low-income parents are provided with further support.

Which brings me to building block number four: non-profit services. I believe this is the way to go as the system expands. Non-profit delivery is a proven element of quality child care. There's no room for profit in the care and education of our children. In Manitoba, the commercial sector is very small. With our high regulatory standards and capped fees, commercial centres can't meet the standards and make money.

But no amount of regulation can protect us from what really worries me: corporate child care using trade challenges to move into Canada. The largest child care business in the world -- an American corporation -- runs close to two thousand child care centres. I don't want our tax dollars going to any child care Wal-Marts or to stockholders in the United States.

Non-profit care is not about big institutions. It's about locally-based services, in communities big and small; governed by parents and reflecting what families want for their children.

Our first new social program in a generation must be based on sound fundamentals. It must put children, families and communities first-not profits and not politics. Canadians don't just want any deal. They want a child care deal.

For Commentary, I'm Debra Mayer in Winnipeg.