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Danielle Kubes: Universal daycare bad for women, children and the economy

If we're going to spend billions to support women's preferences should we not let her decide those preferences for herself?

Danielle Kubes, Special to National Post

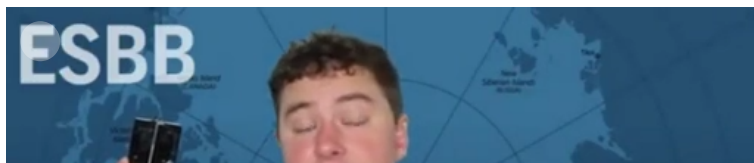
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Little Flower Daycare in in Calgary. PHOTO BY GAVIN YOUNG /Postmedia

I should like the idea of universal day care.

The powers-that-be tell me that as a young woman, working, and married — I'm the very demographic for whom low-cost tax-payer funded daycare would supposedly help the most.



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Yet, I despise the very concept. The Swedes can keep it.

On Monday Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland announced a \$10 a day national child-care plan modelled after the Quebec program that's set to cost \$30 billion to introduce and \$8.3 billion annually to maintain. The provinces, if they agree, are on the hook for 50/50, so the cost could be double.

The budget declares the benefits of universal daycare like universal truths: economic growth, early learning development and mothers with children aged one to four years old get to participate in the labour force to the same extent as fathers do. Plus — feminism, just because.

Oh the hubris!

Not, to be clear, that I'm against outsourcing child care in itself. Parents who wish to send their children to private daycare are free to make that choice — and pay for that choice themselves. Actually, they likely don't even have to pay for it all themselves because low-to-medium income families already get help from the government, sometimes in three different ways: through cash from the Canada Child Benefit (CCB), through provincial daycare subsidies and through deducting up to \$8000 of child care expenses at tax-time.

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So before Canada dishes out tens of billions to implement a nation-wide creche, perhaps redundantly, should we not first stop for a moment and examine the budget's claims more critically?

For, as it turns out, universal daycare is good for no one — not our economy, not our children and certainly not our women.

Advocates argue that universal daycare is ultimately good for the economy because the government can collect taxes from the now-working woman, plus the taxes of the daycare worker. But when economists Michael Baker, Jonathan Gruber and Kevin Milligan examined the Quebec program in the Journal of Political Economy in 2008 they concluded that the increased tax revenue only offset the cost of the \$2.6 billion program by 40 per cent.

A 2015 study in the journal Labour Economics on Quebec's program by Catherine Haeck, Pierre Lefebvre and Philip Merrigan states that "even in the best case scenario, the costs were larger than the benefits".

Only one study, by Pierre Fortin, Luc Godbout and Suzie St. Germain, claims the program "pays for itself"

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reach that conclusion because daycare supposedly raised maternal participation in the workforce 3.8 per cent. But we shouldn't be so quick to assume that it was daycare alone that was responsible — both older women and male participation in the workforce increased in the same time frame, and this effect is not replicated in any European country with universal daycare. Any economic claims are suspect, at best.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

Nor is there much evidence that universal daycare is good for children. Despite the budget lavishing praise on the Quebec system, two [long-term studies](#) on its childcare system, also by Baker, Gruber and Milligan, tell a dark tale. These scholars talk of consistent and robust evidence for negative effects on child outcomes, especially for boys. Think more hyperactivity, inattention, aggressiveness, issues with motor and social skills plus a reduction of the child-parent relationship. "Most strikingly," they report, "We find a sharp and contemporaneous increase in criminal behaviour among the cohorts exposed to the Quebec program, relative to their peers in other provinces."

OK, then.

But surely, if it's not in the best interest of our children, it must at least be good for their mothers?

Except, when we actually bother asking mothers what they want instead of regurgitating the handbook of The Feminist Cause, we find that what they really want, the world over, is to work part-time. Astonishingly, mothers with young children don't want to put work at the centre of their lives.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

In only [25 per cent](#) of Canadian couples with a child under six were both parents working full-time, according to Statistics Canada. In a recent [Angus Reid poll](#) 84 per cent of Canadian parents said they wished to stay home full-time until their children were in grade school. Almost [60 per cent](#) of mothers with minor children say working part-time is ideal, according to a PEW Research Center survey conducted in America in 2007. Even advocacy group, the Working Mother Institute, found in a 2015 survey of employed mothers that [70 per cent](#) of respondents would choose to work part-time if they could still have a meaningful and productive career.

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Universal Daycare

And if low-cost daycare was the only barrier preventing mothers from working full-time then we would expect to see closer to equal labour participation rates between the sexes in countries which have implemented it. But we don't. Not even close.

In Sweden, 32 per cent of women with one child work part-time. In Denmark 22 per cent. In England, 45 per cent. In Iceland, 38 per cent and in Norway, 37 per cent. And the more children women have, the more they rely on part-time work — a full 30 per cent of Danish mothers, 40 per cent of Swedish mothers and 60 per cent of British mothers with three or more children work part-time.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

Offspring, it appears, makes no difference to men's work priorities, except to make them work harder and longer — the male employment rate in Europe is 73 per cent, which increases to 85 per cent with one child and increases yet again to 89 per cent with two children — almost entirely full-time.

So if we're going to spend billions of dollars in public money to purportedly support women's preferences should we not let her decide those preferences for herself?

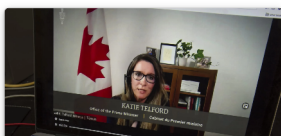
We could, for example, send mothers a bigger CCB cheque so that the ones who want, or need, to work full-time can further offset the cost of private daycare, and others who want to use it to replace a lost wage or pay for in-house help can have more financial support to do so. We can also experiment with ways to reduce the high cost of private daycare, such as reducing red tape and regulations to increase supply.

But certainly the last thing we should do is impose a top-down, inefficient program driven by an ideology without hard evidence of the advantages.

The big issues are far from settled. [Sign up for the NP Comment newsletter, NP Platformed](#) — the cure for cancel culture.



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TS

Tom Shultz

16 DAYS AGO

This must be the eight election in a row where the Liberals promise "daycare".

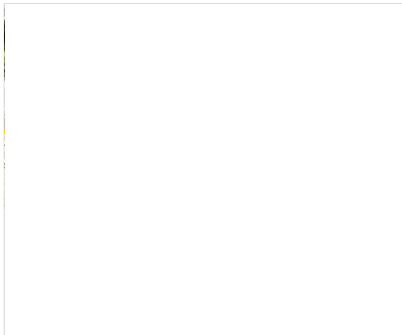
How many times will Canadians fall for this manipulation?

I

4

0

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JB

Joe Bloe

17 DAYS AGO

That's exactly the kind of pointless and false argument I expect from a newspaper that doesn't care about facts and are too willing to give space to extremists with false ideas and bad opinions.

1

7



Terry French

17 DAYS AGO

When I was a pre-school child in the 1960s, my dad worked full-time and my mom worked part-time. She was able to do so because if an arrangement she worked out with my grandmother and a friend of hers in the neighborhood, who looked after my brother and I until my mom got home from her job. Many children in my suburban neighborhood at the time were cared for in a similar.manner.

I relate this experience to provide an example of the way people's attitudes about child-rearing have changed so dramatically since that era. Back then, parents understood that it was their responsibility, not the govrnment's, to ensure proper childcare. They relied on family, friends and neighbours and compensated them for their help out of their own pockets. Unfortunately, either each passing decade since, Canadians have been increasingly willing to transfer their parental responsibilities to the state by way of institutional, impersonal child care largely at the expense if the public purse.

The example of the changed attitudes toward childcare areblematicnof a larger and more profound cultural shift in Canadian society: a transfer of personal responsibility, accountability and self-sufficiency to a reliance on publicly funded governmental bureaucracies. The net result of this transformation has not been positive overall. Each successive generation has become more selfish, narcissistic and morally rudderless. As a society, we're unfortunately reaping what we've sewn in terms of family and societal dysfunction because of this collective abdication of personal responsibility. It didn't have to be this way.

7 REPLIES

12

1

CE

Charles Eastbourne 17 DAYS AGOReply to **Terry French**

So classically conservative. If only we could just go back to the 1960s, or better still the 1950s, the world would be a better place. No wonder the Conservative Party struggles to get elected.

On a more practical note, I doubt many of those 1960s childcare solutions are relevant today. Those neighbours are working themselves and grandmothers often live in other provinces or other countries. It's not that current mothers lack responsibility, it's just that the world has changed.

3 REPLIES ^ 0 v 4

JB

Joe Bloe 17 DAYS AGOReply to **Terry French**

Ironically, right wing people are the most selfless, because their ideology tell them you shouldn't pay for others, but others should pay for them when they need it and ask it!!!

1 REPLY ^ 0 v 2

**Terry French** 17 DAYS AGOReply to **Joe Bloe**

No it doesn't. You're deluding yourself.

1 REPLY ^ 1 v 0

**Terry French** 17 DAYS AGOReply to **Charles Eastbourne**

No, social and economic stability and harmony were much better then than today. Most families also stayed intact with much lower divorce rates. Children were better adjusted, there was much less of a need for psychiatric help and drugs because people had closer connections to their neighbours through their involvement in voluntary associations like the Optimists, Kinsmen, etc. Nobody was mutilating themselves because they were so confused that they believed they were born in the wrong body, addiction rates were lower and people found moral and spiritual guidance from their faith communities.

If you can't see how badly society has disintegrated because of the increased reliance on the state and the social malaise, particularly selfishness, that pervades today's society, it's because you're wilfully blind to it.

^ 3 v 1

PA

Philip Allan 17 DAYS AGOReply to **Charles Eastbourne**

I don't see anyone advocating for a return to the 50s or 60s; it is not possible because as you note, the world has changed. As a kid who grew up in the 60's, the world was a lot less structured. That generation is generally more independent than those that came after. Parents want their kids to have a better life, but sometimes you only appreciate what you have when you have to struggle to get something, and not have it handed to you on a platter.

^ 6 v 0

JB

Joe Bloe 16 DAYS AGOReply to **Terry French**

The majority of Canadians prove you wrong, because they LOVE it!! But again, conservatives have always been a minority, especially since they are getting more and more to the right.

^ 1 v 3

DU

Default User 17 DAYS AGO

The NDP is really pushing for this. They will quickly be unionized and then watch the cost to the taxpayer escalate as they go on strike for higher wages every year or so.

^ 11 v 0

**Yan Eznayu** 17 DAYS AGO

But more civil servants = more Liberal voters!

^ 11 v 0

**Rene Wells** 17 DAYS AGO

Opt out, I say, when the Finance Minister comes calling in my province. Keep your boondoggle and don't

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2 REPLIES ^ 11 v 0

MV

Michel Vallieres 17 DAYS AGOReply to **Rene Wells**

A province can opt out. The problem is that such province will leave on the table that federal money that it would have received and the taxpayers in that province must still pay for the federal share of the program in the other provinces like all canadian taxpayers collectively. It's a losing proposition.

1 REPLY ^ 5 v 0

**Rene Wells** 17 DAYS AGOReply to **Michel Vallieres**

Perfect! And I hope we do opt out, Michel. The 50-50 buy-in catch that Ottawa attached should be called a "borrow-in." They may want to carry on with their reckless deficit financing, but we won't.

Time for Ottawa to stop filling its bag with cash to leverage and pit each province against the others with these one off's. Endless borrowing is the real losing proposition... EDITED

^ 8 v 0

**Karin Bougie** 17 DAYS AGO

But I'm not sure \$10 a day daycare is the answer when provinces have to foot half the bill. Taxes in those provinces will have to be raised to cover it. We would all be heavily taxed and we would all have to be have-not provinces like Quebec, getting billions in equalization every year, for it to work.

5 REPLIES ^ 10 v 1

3

SHOW OLDER REPLIES

ET

Erin Thiessen 17 DAYS AGOReply to **Michel Vallieres**

Your obvious (and unflattering) bias aside, along with the lack of source for your numbers, let's go with that and do some math...

Currently €1230/month (€14,760/year) comes out to a CAD amount of approximately \$22,000/year. That is with an exchange rate of 1.5 which is considerably higher than when we were there and the exchange was 1.35 or so.

This wage is what she told me pretty much everyone made regardless of their job (unless they were top executives). She and her husband were fully employed in jobs that required education and training (as I recall she was an accountant for a medium sized enterprise). On top of that, you need to accommodate the significantly higher cost of living : electricity, heating, water, food, and transportation are all considerably more expensive than here. Property is through the roof.

The average salary in Canada is \$49,000 according to the 2019 Stats Can numbers.

Incidentally, she was not complaining. She had come to France as a refugee of the Yugoslav wars. She knew hardship.

^ 1 v 0

ET

Erin Thiessen 17 DAYS AGOReply to **Michel Vallieres**

If you don't like the French example, I could also provide you with a Swedish one. While the education system here loves to hold up our post secondary graduation rates as a triumph, in Sweden it is actually considered contrary to your personal interests to pursue post secondary unless the job you will be able to do means a lot to you personally. Tax rates are designed so that everyone's net income comes out about the same, so choosing more school over working puts you behind in your income earning by 3-4 years.

The point is that there is a huge cost to extravagant and wide-ranging social services. You don't get to have your cake and eat it too.

^ 4 v 1

GD

Gayle de Bloeme 17 DAYS AGO

Nice. You have my vote.

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Wonderful. Where is that money coming from?

^ 4 v 1

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IH

Ian Halman

17 DAYS AGO

According the author we should abandon universal daycare because it is ideological in it's origins and limits choices for rich people...does she hear herself? My gawwd rich people will always have the option to go elsewhere or stay home. This is about taxing the rich to help others without such choices, if rich people are afraid of taxation i am sure they can hide in the Cayman's to avoid taxes like the rest of the expats there and elsewhere.

2 REPLIES ^ 1 v 13



Terry French

17 DAYS AGO

Reply to Ian Halman

Everybody who earns a paycheck will be taxed for this unnecessary and expensive social engineering project, nit just "rich" people. Envy like yours is not a pretty sight.

^ 11 v 1

F.

Findantruth .

16 DAYS AGO

Reply to Ian Halman

There are already subsidies for childcare for the working poor and lower middle-class families. There was nothing in the article about limiting choices for rich people. What was in the article was that it doesn't make economic sense, it doesn't lead to better outcomes for children - in fact, it leads to poorer outcomes, and that most women are not looking to try to enter the workforce while their children are very young. IF the idea is to provide more choice to more women, then why not raise the Canadian Child Benefit amount. Those women that want to work more hours will now have more money for daycare expenses, and those women that would rather work fewer hours so they can raise their children themselves, will have that option. That would be supporting REAL choice and not a 'one-size fits all solution'.

^ 2 v 0

DD

DARCY DRAPER

17 DAYS AGO

Stop being so reasonable and logical. Liberals depend on the infinite quest for holy grails and the acquiescence of their followers to "believe".

^ 11 v 1

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