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Child-care advocates took your questions

Globe and Mail Update

Child care was a hot topic during the election campaign and was one of the main planks in all the parties' platforms. Before the election, the minority Liberals, backed by the NDP and Bloc, established a national child-care program, a \$5-billion, five-year deal that would transfer funds to the provinces and territories to expand community-based child care. All 10 provinces signed agreements in principle and received the first year of funding to address immediate needs like waiting lists and wages.

The Conservatives, on the other hand, barnstormed across the nation with a promise to overhaul child-care funding. Instead of cash transfers to the provinces, they vowed to give \$1,200 a year directly to parents for each child under 6.

After the Conservative party won the election, Prime Minister Stephen Harper declared federal funding for the national program would cease on March 31, 2007. In February, the new government said it would move quickly to institute the child-care allowance, making it effective as of July 1, and announced payments would commence as soon as legislation was passed.

With us on-line this afternoon were Monica Lysack and Kate Tennier, two child-care advocates who represent different sides of the debate.

Now, this is not a political discussion. Our guests are not representatives of political parties, nor are they politicians. They belong to groups that have different philosophies on how child care should work in this country. They're here today to take your questions and hear your views on child care.

One last thing. Today's discussion will follow a relatively new format, allowing each of our guests to answer readers' questions and critique their co-guest's response. Ms. Lysack and Ms. Tennier will take turns being the first to answer readers' questions. We'll see how it goes.

Monica Lysack is the executive director of the [Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada](#), and has worked for three decades in various roles in the early childhood profession, including 10 years in child-care policy development with the government of Saskatchewan. Ms. Lysack was a member of the intergovernmental working group for the [Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care](#) and a member of the national steering committee for the OECD review of [Early Childhood Education and Care Policy](#) in Canada. She is completing a graduate degree in early childhood education.

The Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada was founded in 1983 to promote quality, inclusive, publicly funded, non-profit child care accessible to all. The association's more than 140,000 members include parents; caregivers; researchers and students; and women's, anti-poverty, labour, social justice,

disability and rural organizations. The organization is non-profit, membership-based and regionally representative.

Our other guest is **Kate Tennier**, founder of [Advocates for Childcare Choice](#), who lives in Toronto. Ms. Tennier has a background in political science and education and was an elementary school teacher for several years focusing on early literacy. Ms. Tennier operated a home-based business while raising her children and has used both full-time and part-time "parent-regulated" child care. Ms. Tennier is a left-leaning "red" libertarian which means that individuals must be given control over their own lives but that they need financial backing to fulfill these responsibilities. Recently, Ms. Tennier wrote an opinion piece for The Globe entitled [Fund the child, not the system](#).

Advocates for Childcare Choice is a grass-roots group which, unlike most day-care activist groups, does not receive government funding. It believes that parents must be the decision-makers when it comes to the care of their young children. It also argues that government-regulated child care has not been proven to be better for children than the other forms of care parents currently choose. It believes that funds should "flow with the child" so parents can make their own care decisions, including parent or outside care.

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Michael Snider, globeandmail.com: Hello readers and good afternoon to our guests today, Kate Tennier and Monica Lysack. We're very happy to have the two of you here today to talk with Globe readers about child care. Readers, we've already received more than 50 questions/comment — way, way too many to answer in an hour — but we will get to as many as we can. So, without further delay, let's get busy.

Ms. Lysack and Ms. Tennier, before we open the floor, would you please give our readers a sense of what your respective visions for child care are.

Monica Lysack: Thanks for the invitation to participate in this discussion, Mike. Child care, as we can see from public discussion and the media is a critical issue to families. I overheard two young dads on the bus the other morning discussing their great luck in getting into a wonderful child care centre here in Ottawa. It's a top priority for parents and grandparents — an issue that they struggle with as they patch together arrangements - and they feel lucky when they find something that works. Child care needs to be more than a matter of luck.

My vision for Canada, for our children, for parents, and for communities is that we will continue to develop a national system of universal, publicly-funded, quality child care that is available to all who choose to use it. This is the cornerstone of comprehensive family policy that includes flexible paid parental leave for all new parents and increased family income supplements through the National Child

Benefit. My vision is a Canada that values children and shares a collective responsibility for their well-being — and supports parents of young children during this important period of their lives. Early learning and child care programs are of high quality, community-based and parent-run and provide a range of supports and services to all kinds of families, including drop-in and extended hour care, parent resources, toy-libraries... the possibilities are endless. Parents' and children's needs will be equitably met, regardless of where they live in Canada or Quebec, their income, or their ability. It is a Canada where all children are given the opportunity to thrive and parents and caregivers are valued and supported.

Kate Tennier: Please note: While I am one of the majority of Canadians who believe that funds for childcare should 'flow with the child', the views expressed here are my own.

My Canada is one where parents are allowed, encouraged and supported to be 'in the driver's seat' regarding care and other decisions impacting on their families. The wonderfully diverse, functioning, 'bottom up' system of care we currently have in our country will be all but destroyed by a National Daycare Program. Instead, we will get a government imposed, 'counterfeit community', a term coined by Toronto community activist and winner of the Jane Jacobs award, Jutta Mason.

Not only will true communities be destroyed but the financial cost, if we are to have the 'universality' that daycare activists want, would be unfathomably large. Even if parents paid \$7 per day, Canadians would have to spend over 26 billion dollars per year on this program! Most of us would have no problem spending that amount of money on families, but there are a multitude of other more cost effective initiatives it should be used for, not the least of which is funding parents so they can spend more time with their kids or helping families secure stable housing, something which has an irrefutably positive impact on the wellbeing of young children.

Our findings point to the conclusion that most of the reasons and evidence that daycare activists cite for us 'needing' a national daycare program does not play out in reality:

1. 'More daycare' has not been proven to reduce child poverty levels here or abroad.
2. Government regulated daycare has not been proven to be better than other forms of care. And the form most pushed by the government, institutional daycare, has consistently proven to deliver the worst results for kids.
3. Such a program does not provide a 'ramp' to women's equality. Countries with higher female labour force participation have a larger gender wage gap. As Helen Ward, President of Kids First Parents Association of Canada states, 'more daycare' frees up young mothers, particularly poor ones, to work at, lowing paying McJobs.
4. It is not working in other jurisdictions. Sweden is currently undergoing demands by a growing number of parents (six protest groups) to allow parents to care for their own children. And a recent peer-reviewed comprehensive report on the Quebec system notes alarming developments for both children and their parents and has as one of their conclusions that, "more access to childcare is bad for these children."
5. Aside from the fact that this never should have been used as a justification for 'more daycare' this program has not been proven to be good for the economy. In Quebec, taxes generated from increased workforce participation do not cover the costs of new daycare spaces and this has been noted by many in Sweden as actually being a 'drag on their economy.'

Finally, our research has uncovered some alarming views that inform the development of such a program:

1. That parents if parents were to receive funds directly, they will spend the money on themselves although they haven't specified whether it will be on beer and popcorn.
2. That parents don't know how to pick proper childcare and that the care providers most parents use right now are described as 'unsupervised, untrained, unlicensed and... lacking prospects in the regular job market'.
3. That one of the main rationales for this program was inspired by the deep involvement of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, a supra national 'economic prosperity' think tank. The goal of increased participation of mothers of young children to address the issue of the aging population is one of their main goals.
4. That kids are to be given 'early learning' so that they can 'hone their skills for the looming economic showdown with China and India'. This 'human capital' notion of children is in the words of Helen Ward is turning our kids into 'GDP fodder'
5. Finally, they suggest that to a large extent, kids will do better if they are in an 'government controlled early learning and care' centre than with their parents, in other words, daycare is better than Mom or Dad.

Peter McVey from Halifax, N.S., on sabbatical in France writes: We have raised two daughters using a range of day care methods. The first daughter attended non-profit day care from age six months until she was four. The second had in-home care by a daycare-trained, daycare-educated (two-year ECE program) 'nanny'. This year we are attempting to home-school our youngest daughter without assistance while on sabbatical, and are discovering that we lack the skills to do a really good job. Clearly, each of these methods of child care has strengths and weakness.

My question for Ms. Lysack is, how do we ensure quality child care and quality early childhood education, rather than child-minding or group babysitting, with the uneven skill and training of day care workers, ranging from excellent to poor?

My questions for Ms. Tennier are similar, as two parents, each with two university degrees and a good income, we realize we lack the skills of a trained child educator, and turned to one trained in the day care system to find these skills. How will these skills develop if 'the system' is not funded directly, at a higher level than presently? As well, how will families without our income level find quality child care with only \$1,600 in additional money, when it costs much, much more to hire a qualified person, even with child care tax breaks?

Kate Tennier: Mr. McVey, these are very good questions. As a long-time proponent of the 'parent as educator' model, all I can do is quote good old Dr. Spock, "Trust yourself — you know more than you think you do." Ken Dryden's office actually stated that many Canadians have been clamouring for a public education campaign to help parents with parenting skills so they can fulfill this role. Secondly, I don't believe that little kids should be 'taught' so I see no value in training people how to 'teach' little kids.

As for the cost, this is one thing we are all in agreement on - Canadian families need more money. But to answer you directly, the Conservative plan is offering \$1200 per child whereas the Liberal plan would have worked out to only \$500 per youngster.

Monica Lysack: Peter this is a really great question. It is always interesting and informative to see what other countries do — and I am embarrassed, quite frankly, by how little attention we in Canada pay to early childhood educators' credentials. This is reflected in the poor pay they receive as well. It creates a cycle: poor pay = recruitment and retention issues = lower quality. One of the priorities of the national child care framework is an emphasis on improving the child care work force to ensure that children receive the best care and education possible.

Raymond Letellier from Ottawa writes: I am not in favour of spending my tax dollars to support this child care program that Mr. Martin promised in his election platform, it does nothing to support poor families. The day care package Mr. Harper has started is the best package as it addresses all level of life and not just the middle and upper class. It seems we are paying and paying through the nose for things that we should not be paying for even in death we pay. When I had my first child there was no daycare, and each Family received \$6.00/month we all made it through until now, then someone came up with the idea of daycare. I believe that daycare should not be funded at all by government, if people want to work then pay your own daycare, I did pay my own all these years and not the government.

Monica Lysack: Raymond, the times are changing. Three quarters of moms with young children are employed. That is our economic reality. We (yes, I'm an employed mom) contribute \$83 billion to the Canadian economy. Labour shortages are predicted. We need a strong workforce — and we need to ensure that parents in the workforce are supported.

There is solid economic rationale for investing in child care. Internationally respected Canadian economists from the U of Toronto did a cost-benefit analysis in 1998. It showed that for every dollar invested, the return was \$2. Unlike a famous American study that showed a return of \$7 for every dollar invested, this study considered the entire population, not just the disadvantaged. So the return is even higher if you included savings to the criminal justice and welfare systems.

There were two kinds of benefits that were identified: one was income and employment benefits — increased productivity - mothers earned more and families were better off — and the second were the developmental benefits to children — savings in remedial education, children do better which in the long-term is better for Canada's future.

Kate Tennier: Hello Raymond, unfortunately for Ms. Lysack, she is betraying the real reason for a 'national daycare program' — the economy. Three quarters of mothers are not in the work force. Please look up the definition of 'work force participation' and you will see what we mean! So, this is about getting parents of little kids out to work... hmm. Makes the Conservatives look like the 'nice guys'. Please e-mail for the link to Krashinsky and Clevelands report. Anyone with grade 2 math will easily detect the strange 'economics' that went into coming up with the '2 for 1' deal they have coined. Please note, one of the factors is they state that kids will be better served in a program than at home with a parent. Also, please read their quotes about care providers. It is hard to 'respect' them after reading these statements. Ms. Lysack other claims can similarly be refuted.

Charles Ferguson from Winnipeg writes: I live in the 'core' area of a city, below the poverty line with three children under 6 years. Will the \$3,600 (?) year I get from the Government help me enter my children into 2-3 existing (?)spaces so my kids will have a chance to develop early on and rise up in society? I am hearing the money won't help, the spaces are already full with a waiting list. Which

Canadian families are going to benefit from these payouts? People who can afford to stay at home AND educate their own kids?

Kate Tennier: Charles, three kids under the age of 6 — whew! Once again, it is a myth that you need to have your children in a daycare or 'early learning centre' to learn — it is not something that as a Primary Specialist I would have wanted for my own children.

One of the problems with the whole current situation is that there are 3 levels of government involved, all with different delivery modes. I would advocate that cities and provinces take all existing 'monies' and share them equally (on a sliding scale) so parents can be fully funded to make their own choice — and remember, home care of your own choosing has never been proven to be inferior to government controlled care.

Monica Lysack: Well Charles, at least you live in a province that has a vision for making high-quality child care a priority so it will be available to parents like you who choose to use it. The waiting lists demonstrate how many parents need and want child care despite the high cost and limited accessibility. What if the government mailed you a cheque and told you that you were responsible for organizing and paying for your children's education because they stopped funding schools? What kind of choice is that really? No matter how much money parents have, they can't buy what doesn't exist.

Kate, I think it's unfortunate that you and your group want to **reduce** parents' choices and have everyone stay at home.

Julie Mathien from Toronto writes: I have two questions: Check out the Caledon Institute website. Caledon has done a study of how the Harper proposal will play out. For example, a moderate-income employed single parent (who would also, presumably, need child care) will only get slightly over \$800 per year per child and, with the cancellation of the federal funding would have fewer early learning and child care options. The spouse (not working outside the home) of the high-income professional would receive about \$1100 per child per year (without the same need for child care). What's fair about that? How will this improve choice for that working, single mom?

Monica Lysack: Julie, I think you've hit on some really important information. Lower income families are actually penalized with the Harper family allowance plan. So, we will have a situation where employed parents with low or moderate incomes receive the least benefit and the higher income families with one parent at home receive the greatest financial benefit. It is great that some families have more options available, but I agree Julie - what's fair about ripping off the lower-income and single parent families? And children lose out too... with no access to the developmental programs that research shows are so beneficial, particularly for children in disadvantaged circumstances.

Kate Tennier: Julie, some of the argument that the Caledon Institute used in that article didn't add up when they talked about two-parent families as the \$1,200 will be taxed on the lower earner, not family income. However, believe it or not, I agree with the Caledon Institute that because it looks like we won't have a National Daycare Program imposed on us, we should instead drastically beef up the CCTB.

There are no conclusive studies showing that low income kids do better in these 'developmental' programs. Kids in this situation in the British Best Start program actually did worse than kids outside the program.

We are all trying to get to the truth about what will be best for our young kids.

Sara Landriault from Kemptville writes: The only reason the daycare advocates want the funding to flow with them is because they don't trust parents. Do you remember 'beer and popcorn', I do. Kate Tennier has a better argument for all including the daycare centers. If you 'fund the child' then the funding will flow out to childcare in all forms. The parents who use institutionalized daycare will have the spots they need and the parents who don't use it will have the money they need as well as the respect.

Kate Tennier: Sara, hello! Yes you are right. In much of the 'literature' which informs the daycare activists and therefore the politicians' views, there is an implicit and explicit assumption that parents aren't to be trusted. As a nation, the people we must trust for the care of children are their parents - otherwise we have a recipe for disaster.

Please e-mail me and I will forward the exact spot where the daycare activists state that you, Sara, will spend the money on yourself, not your kids (will you spend it on beer and popcorn?!) and that if you did need care for your child/children, you wouldn't begin to know how to pick that care.

Sounds like you 'get the National Daycare Program' Take care and thanks for writing!

Monica Lysack:Hi Sara and Kate. As members of the same organization, this is a great place to compare your ideas! Your group insults parents. Parents always have and always will be the most important people in their children's lives. They make the best decisions they can about how and where to spend their money - and quite frankly it's no one else's business! (I confess — I am a mom and have purchased both beer and popcorn at various times in my life.) Yes, income is important but so are services for children.

Mothers — whether or not they are in the work force & "raise their own children." We wouldn't think of saying that fathers don't raise their own children if they're employed. (Very insulting to working mothers). Parents are important but early learning and child care programs are important as well. The research shows that children benefit from going to an early learning program by the time they're 2 and a half or 3. Parents know this — is why so many children whose mothers aren't employed outside the home use the system too. Sara, we've spoken before and I know that you are very happy using the Ontario Early Years program, one of the programs supported by the federal funding that you are critical of.

Philip Beadman from Regina writes: I am fully in support of the Conservatives Child Care plan. I have 3 children, 2 under 6 years of age. My wife stays home and takes care of them and we make do on a single income. An extra 200 dollars a month would help us out immensely. It disappoints me greatly when I hear that the opposition is going to fight the Conservative's legislation on this matter. Why can't every parent benefit from a child care plan, instead of only the few who choose to put their child in government regulated child care. Even if I were to put my children in child care it would be private; not public. My question is: Why do we not hear the politicians and lobbyists fighting for the parents who

don't have access to public child care, who choose not to use public child care or who feel their children should be raised by themselves instead of the state?

Monica Lysack: Hello to a fellow Reginan, Philip. I agree that families like yours will benefit from receiving extra income. Families with one parent at home also receive benefits through the tax system. This is all good. So are you saying that because your family has the benefits of stay-at-home parents (a minority of families), that Canada shouldn't recognize and support the needs of the majority of families in which both parents or the lone parent are employed? I think the majority of Canadians support a balanced approach. Besides, I would bet that your young children, like the vast majority in Saskatchewan, will attend some kind of early childhood program before they go to school. That is part of the system that advocates are promoting.

Kate Tennier: Philip, once again, I am compelled to correct Ms. Lysack's incorrect statements: One, 'stay at home parents' do not form the minority in Canada and those who have children in outside care have them on average for only 27 hours per week. Two, this program is not intended to have as it's priority, unfortunately, the early years drop ins, even though Ms. Lysack has stated this repeatedly. In fact, the provinces could only take the money if it were to be used of 'childcare.' And three, once again, the disingenuousness comes out — Ms. Lysack and the other paid daycare activists are not promoting a 'balance approach' enough to take this claim seriously. Good luck — I grew up with four sisters — I know what it's like to have lots of kids around!

Shellie Bird from Ottawa writes: I am puzzled by the arguments used against the creation of a national child care program and can only conclude that it is fear of change, not fear that parents won't have 'choice' that drives them. I think the same fear was at the root of early debates about investing in public education. It is important to remember that there was strident opposition to public education in the early days with citizens firmly convinced that investing in public education was unwise, unsound, unfair and would hurt families. How when we live in a country as rich and prosperous as ours can we believe that we don't have enough money to invest in public institutions that benefit our children, support families and our nation?

Kate Tennier: Shellie, Hello. I agree with you that I want more money investing in families. However, investing it a program with a very narrow scope and one which even though Ms. Lysack has protested is not true, would offer first and foremost institutional care.

I study educational history and the analogy is not there with public schooling. Along with the fact that we are talking about really little kids, we are talking about leaving them in centres for up to 13 hours per day (BC allows you to do that), 50 weeks out of the year. Also, in the 1850s people just didn't want to pay for other people's kids to go to school — here the argument is about who should be making choices as to a baby's care. Take care.

Monica Lysack: Hi Shellie. I am puzzled too. I wonder what is so threatening about pleasant community-based child-care programs that are completely focused on children's development — providing them with fun activities, conversations to stretch their minds, and surrounding them with loving well-educated care-givers. It happens all over the world — only more of it and better — yet in Canada — some people are threatened. Every time I go into a cozy family child care home or centre and see happy relaxed children I wish that every child in Canada would have the same opportunity.

Those who oppose child care like to use "institutional care" to conjure up negative images. Anyone who has seen a good child care program knows that in Canada they are most often community-based and parent-run.

Communities decide what will meet their needs — and when the resources are available — develop programs that focus on the things that they think are important. Parents decide what is important to them. The programs may be full or part-day; they may be located in a large community building or school or they may be licensed family child care homes with a small number of children.

Lynn MacDonald from Ottawa writes: Can one of you explain to me why, as a taxpayer who chose not to have children, my tax dollars are being used to take care and educate somebody else children? I always thought that raising children was a parent's responsibility, not society. When people make a choice to have children, then they should also take on the responsibility and if having one parent stay home to raise the children is not feasible financially, then maybe they should ask themselves if they can afford to have children.

Monica Lysack: Well, Lynn, I guess we just see the world differently. You, as a tax payer who chose not to have children, also pay for children's health and education. I think most of us think that it is in the public good to invest public dollars to ensure that we have happy, healthy, well-educated children. (I've already mentioned the economic benefit.) You had 'em — you pay for 'em is an outdated idea. We are seeing the results of not investing in our children in the increased mental health issues in youth, community violence and gangs, and broken families. Personally I feel privileged to be in the fortunate position of paying taxes that contribute to the collective good of Canada.

Kate Tennier: Lynn, as astounding as this might sound, I agree, almost, with Ms. Lysack. Other than the fact that our children will be supporting you in your old age, if you are so lucky to live that long, it is simply the 'right thing to do'.

What we need though is to ensure that parents remain central to their child's lives (and by no means does that preclude any and all parents from working outside the home). And once again, violence, gangs, 'broken homes' are not solved by more daycare. Canadians instinctively know that — we just wish the daycare lobby would come to their senses on that one.

Lyle Demery from Ottawa writes: I would agree that parents should have a choice in child care but what good is it to be able to choose when choices are so limited? \$1200 per year per child does nothing to reduce waiting time for the available day care spaces nor does it increase the number of available spaces in our community. This is not about putting child care choices in the hands of the parents, it's about leaving child care to the whims of the marketplace. I'm not against giving choice to parents — I would just prefer that our government focus on creating more options.

Kate Tennier: Lyle, lots of Ottawa writers today — wish I were there, that's where I grew up.

The whole thing about 'spaces' is one of our sticking points. We don't believe that 'spaces' should be funded - quite often as it is now, we are funding empty spaces, that means we have money going to administrators, rent, electric bills, etc, not kids. Also, the fact is that most Canadians don't want and are

not asking for daycare spaces. In the ideologically neutral Vanier Institute of the Family's groundbreaking February, 2005 'Aspirations' report, Canadians ranked daycare as their fifth choice.

I think we are all in agreement that families of young children need way more money but it must be directed to them, not government controlled programs. Also, once again, the Liberal plan only amounts to \$500 per child, far less than the Conservative plan. Thanks and take care.

Monica Lysack I agree with you Lyle — where are the choices? Of course parents should have choices. That is why we need to increase the number of options available to them — and make those choices affordable. Currently thousands of children are on waiting lists for regulated child care spaces. Cutting \$4-billion that was committed to developing child care spaces to meet that need reduces the number of choices available to parents.

The Vanier Institute wrote a rebuttal of this interpretation of this poll — in a Globe and Mail op ed that Alan Mirabelli wrote early in January. Once again Kate, you are misrepresenting data. However, we can look at a poll that reflects aspirations and values or we can look at facts. What women actually do is the reality — not a poll. The fact is — mothers themselves have made the choice. 70-75% of them are employed. They are already using some form of child care but they have few choices available. High quality affordable care is not readily available as it is in other countries despite the fact that participation of mothers in the workforce is growing faster than in many other countries.

How will \$100 a month address this? And, I might add, it is only non-working parents that receive the full benefit — working mothers will receive much less after taxes. If this government is serious about supporting mothers to stay at home, it would cost probably ten times the amount they are proposing. Our society has made a decision to support parents to stay at home during the first year of their babies' lives — and while parental leave benefits are far from perfect and exclude many new parents, it is a start. So should we extend that for the entire first five years? Let's pay everybody \$20,000 a year to stay home for the first five years. Who wouldn't like that? But responsible governments understand balance. This government is demonstrating a lack of understanding to a complex issue. You can't just ignore the problems you don't like. And whether this government likes it or not, parents and children need and want good affordable child care — independent of any family allowance benefits that are being proposed.

Joe Bro from Toronto writes: Can we just end this debate by stating that we want to fund and support a comprehensive high-quality universally available national child care system, and at the same time allow parents to freely opt out and receive commensurate financial support? Yes, this would be affordable and would at least partially if not entirely pay for itself by enhancing the healthy development of our children — the future citizens, parents, workers, and taxpayers.

Monica Lysack: Yes! It seems pretty simple, doesn't it Joe. While child care advocates have always supported a broad range of family policy options, including family allowance, there are a few people out there like Kate who, for some reason, just can't accept that some families want another choice - and that choice is regulated community-based child care.

Actually, if Canada were like France, Norway, Australia or most of the developed countries in the OECD, we would be spending much much more on regulated child care than we currently do. France

has a universal system of free early childhood services for children 2 and older — virtually every 3 year old in France attends — this system began in the 1880s in France - and lots of services for younger children — which they have been working to increase. Norway has long provided a child allowance to at-home mothers until the child is three — as does Finland — but they also provide publicly-funded high quality child care.

Perhaps Kate doesn't understand the Swedish system that she describes in her opening comments.

Kate Tennier: Joe, Solomon speaks! Yes, wouldn't this be the answer. But, the national childcare system (daycare) alone would cost \$30-billion per year (!) if it were fully 'accessible'. (Two million kids under the age of 6 times 15 thousands bucks a space — rue cost). This would have to be in place all the time like the school system to make it 'accessible'. Then, we would have to give very close to the same remuneration to parents in compensation to make it fair, so no, I don't think it is affordable, or rather, we would need to look for wiser ways to spend our money.

Also — the benefits of 'universal daycare' have not been proven for little kids and if we look at Sweden or at what is happening in Quebec, it is not a model that many of us think should be imposed on the rest of Canada. Interesting point, thanks.

Monica Lysack: Estimates for a national child care system are about \$10-billion annually. Economists estimate a return of two to one (\$20-billion). This is not only affordable but it makes sense.

Kate, are you suggesting that even without investing in child care that Canada could afford to pay parents to stay at home? (See my response to Lyle above.)

Kate Tennier: Joe and all, I am glad this is the last question — Ms. Lysack's increasingly personal attacks are not something I normally have to put up with.

Again, corrections: daycare activists are not talking about anything other than childcare. If this was a sincere wish to make sure that all care decisions were respected and supported, they would have not supported the daycare deals with the provinces unless equality was ensured.

No, we fully understand what is happening in Sweden and we talk on a regular basis to parents, politicians, etc, in that country and some who have had to leave due to the fact that the only 'state benefits' given in the name of 'family policy' is free daycare, daycare which I might add, now can have group sizes for one to three year olds of up to 22 kids per group! with no legislated number of adults in place. As Swedes have the highest number of sick days in the EU, the hoped-for three adults can actually be only one or two. And this is the utopia we are supposed to look to for inspiration?

Michael Snider, globeandmail.com: Readers, thank you all for writing in. The volume of questions for our guests tipped the charts today and I wish we had the stamina to carry on all day. Very sorry to have not gotten to more questions, but we'll activate the comments feature in a few minutes so you can have your say.

If you have any other thoughts about the Discussion format or would like to see a particular reporter/columnist invited on or a particular subject covered, let us know. You can email your thoughts to msnider@globeandmail.com

Ms. Tennier and Ms. Lysack: This has been a fantastic discussion and I'd like to warmly thank you both. I hope that you will join us again.

Monica Lysack: Thanks Mike. This was gruelling, but fun. It was great to have a conversation about this important topic. I know there are hundreds of thousands of children and parents across Canada who are counting on child care. I truly hope that this government will listen to the 64% of Canadians who voted for a child care system — and will have the courage to act in the best interests of children — and will honour the child-care agreements.

Kate Tennier: Ms. Lysack stated: "Kate, I think it's unfortunate that you and your group want to reduce parents' choices and have everyone stay at home." It is unfortunate that Ms. Lysack chooses to reduce the argument to its most petty level. As a teacher who initiated a Career Day at my school with the goal of emphasizing non gender-stereotyped occupations (female backhoe operator, male nurse and stay at home Dad), she has picked the wrong argument to use with me, or with any of the majority of Canadians who believe in the freedom to make the right choices for their own family.

I repeat, look up the definition of 'employed' and 'workforce participation' and Canadians will see why this is a disingenuous 'fact' to use while making these claims.

I spoke with the well-respected Alan Mirabelli about his Op-Ed. My understanding from our very warm conversation was that he wanted to protect the integrity of the report and to clarify what the report actually meant and that the 'aspirations' of families are very complicated. And, we, as Canadian citizens, have never said that due to the VIF report, families say they don't want a national program. What we have said, is that daycare is only their fifth choice and that because of that why would Canadians want a national program in which daycare centres are being promoted first and foremost.

On a more positive note, we are optimistic that because the 'debate' has finally started, Canadians will for the first time be able to receive the accurate information about the myths and pitfalls associated with a national daycare program, information so long denied to all of us. Once that happens, I know that Canadians will be able to make good decisions about how best to care for our young children.

A sincere thanks to all — on balance, a very enjoyable experience.

Kate Tennier