

National daycare is not an issue of women's rights

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I never watched Leave it to Beaver or The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet.

Yet I am frequently accused of harkening back to these days I don't know, which are represented by shows I never watched, when I stand up against a national daycare program.

The absence of national daycare is not a slight against women. And it's my working thesis that it's largely women who knew these shows first-hand (boomers and their children) who view it as such.

The advent of women working outside the home is a bell that won't be un-rung. And those women who are privileged to be mothers also enjoy taking care of their kids. We therefore face a conundrum, since everyone agrees children don't take care of themselves.

In our communities and in this thing called family, we need to figure out how to make life for parents workable. All the evidence shows that a national, federally funded daycare program will not do this. We can know this with confidence, since Canada has the example of a provincial daycare system in Quebec, where research shows wealthier families access the system on the backs of the poor.

Quebec, where waiting lists remain. (This is predictable, since people tend to choose subsidized things in greater numbers. This is not a free choice: How many of us have bought something we didn't particularly want because it was on sale?)

Quebec, where research shows mothers' stress levels remain high, even as quality of the program for kids remains low.

When something sounds too good to be true, it generally is. It's easy to point to a system you do not have to solve all the problems you do have. Even if more funding were magically available (which it is not), Quebec's daycare system would not necessarily improve.

Consider my home province of Ontario, where we spend more and more money on public education. It bleeds into a system that delivers less and less to fewer and fewer students. The stated goal of many daycare activists is to make the new federally funded daycare part of the public school system.

This would only mean that very small children would be subject to a lack of attention to special needs just as older children in the public system are now. It would mean a lack of special programs for toddlers, just as is happening for older children right now. It would mean a lack of learning and most likely, fairly frequent strikes — one is looming in Ontario for September.

It would also mean that parents with special needs (irregular schedules, or part-time work) would be left high and dry.

I know: The Shangri-La of daycare programs is supposed to deliver all of this and more. Everyone will get exactly what they want from your friendly federal government monopoly. Does anyone really believe this?

The lack of a national daycare program is very far away from sexism. On the contrary, a national daycare program is paternalistic, because it tells families how to raise their own children.

Furthermore, making national daycare into an issue of women's rights makes the most anti-feminist statement of all: That men in general and fathers in particular have nothing to do with caring for children.

Women today can enter the work of their choosing. We go to university in greater numbers than men. We are engineers, politicians, firefighters, op-ed writers and a host of other formerly male-dominated professions.

If you like the idea of national daycare, go to town in supporting this idea. I say it won't work and we are being sold a bill of goods. People of good will can differ on this. The only thing I ask is we halt all accusations of sexism. Let the memories of Ward and June rest in peace. I certainly never knew them.

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