

The Policy Playoffs:

How

Period one saw victory for Team Gold.

Evidence and common sense won.

Let me jog your memory about the how that part of the game unfolded.

I coined the term She-cession in March 2020. It was the first time women were left out of the economy, and in c dki y c { . dwv ðhqt v jg i qqf qh wu c nnö < vq eqpvckp v jg eqpvc i kqp 0

Most recessions are he-cessions ó men lose 95 to 97 percent of all jobs at first, then the ladies catch up. This time the opening months saw women lose 65% of the jobs, because they were non-essential and people-facing jobs. Non-essential work involves retail, personal services (like hair and nail salons, gyms and massage parlours), hospitality (like bars and restaurants), recreational travel (which includes the getting there, and the staying there, transportation and hotels).

That summer I invented a jingle: No recovery without a she-covery. No she-covery without childcare. It was a hit.

The first self-declared feminist government of Canada sang along with the lyrics. They saw the link dgvy ggp geqqp o ke rgthqt o cpeg cpf y q o gpø u c dknkv { vq y qtm, and saw how taking care of ejknftgp y j q eqwnfpø v i q vq uejqqn qt cvvgpf ejknfectg was becoming a choke-point in recovery. The problem was crystal clear. So was the solution. The feds acted.

But they acted also because they had a fiscal reason to act. Based on almost 30 years of data from Quebec, they knew subsidized childcare pays for itself. More women working more, more personal income taxes. Those additional revenues typically outstrip the outlays on subsidized childcare.

But the data also show that y jgp {qw fqpø v rtkqtkvk | g *early learning* as part of childcare, and only focus on low-cost-to-parents babysitting, you literally leave money on the table.

Since the 1980s, governments of every political stripe have put the policy priority on growing the economy.

Early learning and childcare grows the economy, not just today ó as more mommies go to work - but tomorrow. But to score that goal, you have to shoot to where the rwem ku i qkpi. pqv y jgtg kvø u been.

Cpf kvø u i qkpi uq o grnceg pgy. hcuv 0 Ygøtg fgcnkpi ykvj v jg o quv y kfg-spread labour shortages we have seen since the 1950s. Itø s not just happening in Ontario, or in Canada. Itø s happening in every nation that had a baby boom after World War II.

Birth rates have been dropping ever since the late 1950s, and the combination of the pandemic and soaring housing costs has meant they are dropping further still. Because they aren't forming families as frequently, partly because

There are more people leaving the labour market than entering it.

We are just beginning a period with the highest dependency ratio seen in half a century. What does that mean? The working age cohort, the population that supports those of us too old, too

When the baby boom entered the labour market, it was the biggest generation of young workers. And twice as big as previously, because girls thought they were just as good as the boys.

Double whammy. Because this huge working-age cohort of young workers ran into two back-to-back recessions (one in 1981-82 and one in 1990-91).

After decades of labour surpluses, we are entering decades of labour shortages. We will need all hands on deck.

Enter the ladies. Labour shortages mean get the ladies to work. Paid work, that is. Today the focus is not just adding more people to the paid work force, but adding to the number of hours they work. That's where the most juice is to get more out of what we've got. For now.

But in not so long, 10 years, maybe less, the focus will be on the kids we today are investing in...or *not* investing in, as the case may be. We will reap what we sow.

I will shamelessly now use the analogy of a hat trick to describe the potential of how we can win one of the biggest challenges of the early 21st century: not enough workers.

Stay with me. Yes. Early learning and childcare is the hat trick of public policy.

We shoot and we score! Goal 1 for a Canada Wide Early Learning and Childcare Strategy!

jobs that offer

This is where you boo. Or uc{ ðUjc o g!ö

Because this is a shamefully deliberate strategy: Keep a lid on the pay of publicly-funded workers in childcare, eldercare and healthcare so that for-profit providers in the private sector increasingly look like attractive options, and care in such facilities becomes the obvious alternative, at least for those who can pay extra.

Kvøu cr rcnkpi0 Cpf kvøu itqy kpi kpgswcnkv{0 C o qpi parents. Among children. And among workers. Deliberately. By public policy.

It suggests a terrible math. Yq o gpøu g o r nq{ o gpv tcvgu ctg cv tgeqtf jki ju. and a lot more women with young kids have joined the labour market. Dwv kvøu pqv dgecwug yg jcxg created a lot more licensed high quality care, though that was a stated goal a couple of years ago. No. Weøre actually struggling to provide care in the spaces we *used* to have.

The only solution to this puzzle is that we are warehousing, not nurturing, a growing percent of our most precious future resource, those kids we are producing at ever-diminishing rates.

Deep in period two, ygøtg urgp f kpi o qtg cpf igw kpi less; and ygøtg rc{ kpi hqt kv. kp so many ways.

When the federal government finally committed to spending OUR money (not theirs) to improve early learning and childcare, they plunked down \$30 billion over five years.

Sounds like a lot of coin, right? Vj cvøu v jg tgc uqp kv y cu resisted for years by even this administration, the self-declared first feminist government of Canada.

But that \$30 billion pales in comparison to other things this government is doing.

Did you know we spend almost \$30 billion *a year* qp ej knftgpøu dgpghkvu ó a cash transfer to parents.

We spend double that, close to \$60 billion a year, on transferring cash to the elderly through old age security.

And, wait for it...we spent \$80 billion in one year alone for the Canada Employer Wage Subsidy! That went to employers, and we later found out that a lot of them didnøt even use it to subsidize wages!

Uq y jkng kvøu c nqv. kvøu pqv cu o wej cu {qw oki jv v jkpm.

Cpf kvø s not buying what we thought it would.

Yes some parents have seen their childcare costs cut in half, but only

The people who already had access to licensed care, which is ó by and large ó the middle and upper-middle

Y g pggf uvtqpig iwctftcknu ctqwpf j qy qwt rwdnke fqmct igvu wugf hqt rtkxcvg rtqhk0 Vjgtg kupøv enough taxpayer money to satisfy *this* type of expansion.

We keep talking about and funding training, but without equally vigorous recruitment and retention plans we can spend all the money in the world on training and continue to have more childcare spaces without people.

That means more empty playrooms. That means longer wait lists. That means more people will sink time and money into training, then leave the profession. What a waste of time and money, publicly and privately.

Y g jcxgpøv {gv uggp rncvgcw vjg g o rnq{ o gpv tcvgu qh yq o gp ykvj pre-school age children.

That means those kids are going somewhere. But if regulated childcare spaces ctgpøv expanding, we may simply be spending a lot more while hardwiring more poor outcomes for a growing share of the next generation?

Not looking ahead means we could end up in the ditch, even with an extra \$30 billion y g flfpøv have a couple of years ago.

Money without a plan is just that: more money.

And that takes us to the third period, the one that will decide who wins the game.

Kvøu vk o g hqt gxgt{qpg kp vjku tqq o vq uvctv o cmkpi pqkug cdqww vjg gng o gpvu qh vjg rncp y g pggf to put in play to avoid going into the ditch.

- Pay people better.
- Put enforceable conditions and guardrails on public funding
- Build on the public assets we already have and educate down where you can.
- Expand first in the areas where families have the least access to decent service.

Period three is just about here.

Provinces are about to start renegotiating the second phase of action plans with the feds.

It would be surprising if there is no promise of new federal money and no threat of bad press.

That combination is powerful leverage for the feds and for stakeholders (that means you) to constrain bad behaviour and scale up the good.

This is now about how you get involved. How are you making your concerns known, not just to our governments but to our communities?

Vgc o I qnf eqwnf nqug vjku ic o g. dwv vjgtgøu uvknn rngpv{ qh time to turn the score around.

