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10247 124 Street NW  
Edmonton, Alberta T5N 1P8

**P: 780.414.1124**  
**F: 780.414.1125**  
**T: 1.800.661.9201**

**E: office@albertaliberal.com**

## Daycare operator not impressed with Stelmach's 'plan'

**Edmonton** - The Progressive Conservative's 'plan' to create 14,000 new day care spaces is a "pie in the sky" goal, says an Edmonton day care operator.

"They must have a magic formula somewhere," says Leon Comer, owner of Starbright day care in the west end. "I have no idea where they would be able to create those spaces."

Comer noted that because of skyrocketing lease rates, it is getting harder and harder for day cares to survive, much less add another 14,000 spaces. He also questions where they would find available staff.

Weslyn Mather, the Alberta Liberal candidate for Mill Woods, who was the Children's Services shadow minister in the last session of the legislature, says the Tory 'plan' has a major hole in it.

"Spaces without staff are useless," says Mather, who has travelled the province listening to the concerns of day care operators and parents. "The spaces are not the problem; the problem is funding."

"Staff need competitive wages," says Mather. "There is little incentive for anyone to open a facility because operating grants were taken away by the Conservatives a number of years ago."

The Stelmach government has failed miserably in helping Alberta families find day care spaces. Alberta has regulated day care spaces for only about 10 per cent of our children; Quebec and the Yukon accommodate 30 per cent. Worse yet, Alberta is the only province in the country where the number of day care spaces dropped between 1992 to 2004, while in the rest of the country the number of spaces actually doubled.

The Alberta Liberal Action Plan for Child Care calls for the creation of new child care centres through increased start-up funding, and operational funding for accredited centres, pre-school, out-of-school care, and day homes. A Kevin Taft government would boost wage enhancements at every level to help child care centres recruit and train staff.

To assist families, under a Kevin Taft government, children aged 6-12 will be eligible for subsidies, just as they are in every other Canadian province. We will also reduce the number of hours required for subsidy eligibility. With this support, more families will be able to afford out-of-school care and respite care for children.

Leon Comer is available for comment at 915-1965. Weslyn Mather is also available for comment at 994-4655.

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For more information contact:

Michael Spears, Media Liaison  
Alberta Liberal Campaign 2008, (780) 919-2617