

Harper reincarnates family allowance with universal child-care benefit: It took a former Tory government 8 years to dismantle, and today's government 9 years to restore

By James Fitz-Morris, CBC News Posted: Apr 02, 2015 5:00 AM ET Last Updated: Apr 02, 2015 4:17 PM ET

A few decades ago it was the Liberals and the NDP attacking a Conservative government for even thinking about messing with monthly cheques sent to Canadian families.

Economists and policy-makers had argued for decades that the baby bonus or family allowance, as it was called then, was expensive and inefficient, in that it sent cash assistance to rich and poor alike.

How times have changed.

Today, of course, the NDP and Liberals are deriding the family allowance's reincarnation — the universal child care benefit — because, in part, it helps those who don't need it.

Intentionally or not, they are echoing a man whom they have attacked for decades.

"A legitimate question has frequently been raised," bemoaned newly minted Prime Minister Brian Mulroney in 1984, "regarding the fairness of someone who makes \$500,000 a year receiving these kinds of benefits."

Birth of family allowance

Family allowance was introduced in 1944 by the Liberal government of William Lyon Mackenzie King as a response to worries about a postwar economy and skyrocketing poverty as men returned from war and women left the factories.

Newsreels from the time boasted that "the standard of living in every home across Canada will be raised by the Family Allowances Bill."

Recognizing the obvious good politics of putting cheques in the mailboxes of every family home "across the Dominion," the Conservatives of the day put up half-hearted opposition and the Family Allowance Bill quickly passed with the rare unanimous consent of the House of Commons.

Tories wanted national daycare

Forty years later, Mulroney proposed canceling the allowance cheques and creating — wait for it — a national daycare program to help Canadian families.

The Tories pledged billions of dollars to create 200,000 subsidized daycare spaces — only to have the plan scuttled by the Liberal-dominated Senate.

Those who opposed national daycare said the money was better off directly in the hands of Canadian parents to spend on their children's needs as they saw fit.

And it's now the Conservative prime minister attacking the NDP national daycare plan because, as Stephen Harper puts it, "I know that the NDP is strongly opposed to anything that gives money to people as opposed to taking it for government or for bureaucracy,"

Give it back or let them keep it?

Any fiscal conservative will tell you a far better choice would be to leave money with people, rather than "taking it for government or for bureaucracy" and then "giving" it back.

"The easiest way and the most efficient way is to simply let them keep more of [their money] in the first place," says Aaron Wudrick, national director of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. "And if you have to target help at a certain group — do that."

Of course, this is an election year, and Wudrick acknowledges he's speaking from an economics point of view.

"There's clearly a political incentive to [pay out the universal benefit] because governments like to be seen to be giving money to people — we get that," he says. "But obviously we are not politicians trying to get elected; we're concerned about the efficiency of the system as a whole."

The problems with the family allowance were clearly identified in the 1960s, Mulroney spoke publicly about them in the 1980s, but only pulled the plug on the program in 1992, his last year in office and a time when, he hoped, the ballooning deficit would give him enough political cover to make tough choices.

Entitlements hard to give up

"It takes a long time to, sort of, condition people to back away from something they are entitled to," according to Raymond Blake, professor of history at University of Regina.

He has studied and written about the history of family allowance in Canada.

The attractiveness of family allowance then, and the universal child care benefit now, is the simplicity of receiving a cheque in the mail (or automatically deposited into your account) as opposed to a tax credit that is calculated behind the scenes and added to paycheques directly — even if that is, most economists believe, the better way to do it.

"The government will know this is not going to where it is going to do the most good, but it is going to people who vote," he concludes.

In 1945, with family allowance as part of his platform, Mackenzie King won re-election.

In 1993, after being accused of gutting social programs, Mulroney's former party was reduced to just two seats in the House of Commons.

Harper is seeking re-election this October, and in July, nearly every Canadian family with children under 18 years of age will receive \$420 to help "Johnny Canuck's juniors!"

It really is worth watching that newsreel from 1945...

The original article can be retrieved online at

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/harper-reincarnates-family-allowance-with-universal-child-care-benefit-1.3018557>

What Tories are debating in Vancouver: Key policy proposals at #cpc16

Conservative delegates will kick off the work they came to Vancouver to do Friday, as they consider 60 proposed party policy changes and dozens of possible amendments to the party's constitution.

Three breakout sessions will prioritize which 30 policy proposals will advance to the final plenary session and be voted on by all delegates on Saturday.

Proposals have been grouped under three categories, with up to 10 eligible to advance from each, based on the level of support they receive.

A fourth session will work through some 24 pages of proposed constitutional amendments, as the party considers ideas for changing the way it governs itself. Here are a few highlights:

Government, environment and economic development

- Separate motions call for a national referendum prior to the implementation of any electoral reforms, as well as calling on the government "not to endorse any new electoral system that will weaken the link between members of Parliament and their constituents, create unmanageably large ridings, or strengthen the control of party machinery" over MPs.
- A riding association from Southwestern Ontario proposes the party aim for broad-based tax relief instead of targeted tax credits.
- A Quebec riding association proposes an end to mandatory union membership and forced financial contributions because it "limits economic freedom" and stifles growth.

Criminal justice and social policy

- Two riding associations are advancing a proposal to recognize civilian gun ownership as a "Canadian Heritage."

- Three ridings are moving to strike the current policy position defining marriage as between one man and one woman.
- A Quebec riding proposes allowing peace officers to ticket, rather than arrest, those found in possession of small quantities of marijuana.
- A B.C. riding proposes to strike a line saying the party will not support any legislation legalizing euthanasia or assisted suicide.

Foreign policy, Canadian culture and diversity

- A Toronto riding supports legislation to revoke citizenship from dual citizens convicted of terrorism offences. (A law passed during the previous Conservative government, but was then repealed when the Liberals took power.)
- An Edmonton riding proposes deleting the party policy in support of giving farmers the right to market their own grain. (Now redundant, following the dismantling of the former Canadian Wheat Board's monopoly during Harper's tenure.)

Constitutional amendments

- A Southwestern Ontario riding wants to give riding associations more control over, and benefit from, telephone fundraising campaigns using the party's centralized membership database.
- A B.C. riding wants to revive a previously-debated and rejected push to create a youth wing.
- Separate motions would change the election of the party president to a secret ballot vote at the party's convention (rather than have he or she selected by the elected national council), impose term limits on the party executive, and no longer allow the party leader to nominate the executive director following what one proposal calls the "absolute disaster" of Harper's sudden pick of longtime loyalist staffer Dimitri Soudas, who was later fired after interfering in a nomination for his then-girlfriend.
- Other motions aim to improve the monitoring of and accountability for how party money is spent, with a separate motion calling for more oversight of party spending on IT services following the failed implementation of the C-Vote membership system.
- A move to set up steering committees in the urban centres of Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver, where the party was not electorally successful in 2015. Another motion, however, calls for "equal treatment for all ridings," suggesting rural ridings feel neglected.
- Separate motions ask delegates to clarify who selects the party's interim leader and who sets up the leadership selection committee. Others seek to change the party's rules for triggering a leadership review, including one motion required by the passage into law of MP Michael Chong's Reform Act.

The original article can be retrieved online at <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/conservative-convention-policy-change-proposals-constitutional-amendments-1.3602572>.

Comparing Brokerage and Ideological Political Parties

	Brokerage Party	Ideological Party
Examples	Liberal, Conservative, NDP	Green, CHP, Marxist-Leninist
Purpose	To win an election and govern	To advance an ideology
Size	Large – diverse composition	Smaller – more united on policy
Popularity	Almost always form governments or form balance of power. Gain the vast majority of votes.	Generally the smaller parties. They tend to attract support but it often does not materialize into large numbers of votes or seats.
Benefits	More likely to achieve power and have influence.	More committed to the values of the membership base, uncompromising in beliefs.
Drawbacks	Provides little leadership because it tends to follow public opinion. Policies change quickly.	Canada's "first-past-the-post" electoral system leaves most small ideological parties in the dust. They don't elect MP's and therefore don't have an opportunity to advance their agenda within government.

Comparing Child-Care Policies

The information on the different parties is current as of their 2015 federal election platform.

Conservative	Liberal	New Democratic Party	Christian Heritage Party
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Income splitting for families (meaning single wage earner for a family can split his/her income with a spouse who is not working) Universal Child Care Benefit which gives \$160/month for 0-5 year olds and \$60/month for 6-18 year olds The UCCB payments are taxable Has a Child Care Expense Deduction increase of \$1000 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Replace the UCCB with a revamped Canada Child Tax Benefit that is prorated based on a family's income. Lower income families under the revised program would receive more than higher income families. CIBC estimated that 90% of families would receive more money through this program than under the Conservative program. The CCTB benefits are tax-free. Want parents to be able to use parental leave more flexibly and support a longer parental leave (support payments would be stretched over longer period of time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep the UCCB as the Conservatives have implemented Additional 5 week dedicated parental leave for a second parent in the case of new child. Eliminate income splitting Create a nationally funded and governed child care program that provides universal access for no more than \$15/day. Will create 1 million spaces in 8 years with an annual funding target of \$5 billion. Enshrine this program into Canadian law making it difficult to repeal or water down by future governments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family Care Allowance of \$1000/month for any family that has children under the age of 18. This is contingent on having one parent at home to raise these children. (Plan also applies to Elder Care or the care for a disabled dependent family member.)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents should have the support to raise children as they desire. Government also has a role in providing child care spaces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Families should be able to bring their children to government-funded child care centres so that parents can work if they want 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> State has the responsibility to provide affordable government-funded child care for families. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognizes that a married two-parent family is the most important foundational building block of society. Sees institutional daycare as weakening the family unit rather than strengthening it. Families should care for their children; it is not the responsibility of the state.

Task: Comparing Party Positions

For this task, you are required to select an issue that is important to you and to conduct some research comparing how different parties view this topic.

Connect with your local candidates (via email or telephone) who ran in the last election (federal or provincial) and speak with them about their position and their party's position after you have done some research on the party websites and elsewhere.

Students should submit a report that outlines if they found evidences of similarities and differences between the brokerage and ideological parties. This report should answer key questions like:

1. What are five key similarities and/or differences between the parties on your issue?
2. Provide a justification why you have identified each of these as important?
3. What does this reveal about the nature of the brokerage and ideological party on this issue?
4. Based solely on this issue, for which candidate would you recommend casting your vote?
5. Is this issue urgent enough that it would become a deciding factor for you in casting your vote? (i.e. The candidate's position on this issue might be so important that all other issues are secondary.)

What Should I Do?

John has just turned 18 and in a few short weeks there will be an opportunity for him to vote in his first federal election. He's learned in high-school that the opportunity to vote needs to be taken seriously.

His older sister has volunteered for a local Conservative party candidate who is a pretty nice guy. There's nothing objectionable or offensive about him, in fact he has helped bring jobs and economic development into the riding. John has not heard anything from this candidate on moral and social issues in the past.

But, a member of John's local church community is running in the upcoming election as a representative for the Christian Heritage Party. He knows the CHP candidate stands for a platform that has respect for biblical values.

The election results in the last election were a pretty narrow win for the Conservative candidate and that was when there was no CHP candidate. John feels a tug to vote for the candidate that most closely aligns with his conscience views. On the other hand, John feels like his vote carries a lot of weight and

doesn't want it to contribute to the election of a Liberal candidate.

Further, John wonders which issues he should be most concerned about. He has spoken to both the conservative and Christian party candidate and both have assured him they are pro-life.

Should the economy or euthanasia be a more important voting issue? What about same-sex marriage? That issue seems to no longer be discussed as much as it used to be and John is wondering whether he should even bother thinking about it. Should he vote for the party name or should he vote for the person? What if he differs from the candidate in other areas like the economy, education, and immigration policies? Are there more urgent issues in one election than in others?

John's friend argues that he should vote with his conscience while John feels like he has to make sure his vote is cast to ensure that he doesn't contribute to a liberal candidate winning in a tight riding.

John turns to you for advice: What should I do? How should I cast my vote? Any advice on these issues?

Writing Task on “What Should I Do?”

In this assignment you are presented with a fictional account of John who is facing a problem. He thinks that a vote for the Christian candidate is the right thing but then he thinks it might contribute to vote-splitting. The purpose of this assignment is to try and discover the underlying issues and not necessarily come to a definitive answer on the question. Understand that this situation is complicated and can involve more than one correct answer.

- Read through the account and highlight the different facts (verifiable truths).
- For each fact, outline who the different affected groups and parties are. Further describe what interests they have in this problem as it relates to that particular fact.
- Once you have searched all the facts and outlined the different parties and interests, discuss the important issues that are underlying these competing interests?
- You will know if you have correctly outlined the underlying issue if:
 - The issue is relevant for more people than just John.
 - The issue should gather opinions from others about an appropriate course of action.
 - The issue should allow for disagreement on the solution.
- Now write a recommendation for John.