

Ignatieff pitches \$1-billion family care plan

BY JAN RAVENSBERGEN, THE GAZETTE JANUARY 28, 2011 1:02 PM



Liberal leader Michael Ignatieff says his family care plan would be a much more fruitful alternative to the "fighter jets, jails and corporate tax cuts" offered by the Conservative government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

Photograph by: John Mahoney, Gazette file photo

MONTREAL - A brutal daily reality underscores the gravity of Canada's crisis in home care, Maritza Ferrada said Thursday.

"It's a terrible thing to have to say," the caregiver confessed, referring to her 26-year-old, handicapped son, "but I hope he dies before I do."

Ferrada and two dozen other home-care veterans and activists had just heard Michael Ignatieff pitch his new, \$1-billion-a-year family care plan.

It would, the federal Liberal leader said, prove a much more fruitful alternative to the "fighter jets, jails and corporate tax cuts" proffered by the government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

Ignatieff wants to defray the costs of home care with a new, six-month family care employment-insurance benefit-vs. sixweeksof parental leave now available to some -in addition to a new family care benefit of up to \$1,350 a year, tax-free.

That \$1 billion "is a gesture," he said, to support family caregivers like Ferrada. Given an aging population -and the current piecemeal, fragmented system -he summarized his prescription as "compassion, imagination and lots of cash."

Unsupported home care instils "social poverty as well as financial poverty, something that saddens me the most," Ferrada told Ignatieff, who took careful notes throughout a wide-ranging afternoon roundtable session at an Ahuntsic church.

He seized on the experience of another frustrated home caregiver, Chloe Sainte-Marie, a folksinger and actor who, at the end of her rope, appealed for a break to a CLSC, only to be told: "Park him in an Emergency."

Until the death of Gilles Carle, her partner of 27 years, at 80 in late 2009, Sainte-Marie had nursed him at home through the ravages of Parkinson's disease. The celebrated filmmaker received a state funeral in Notre Dame Basilica.

Ferrada, by contrast, has lived out of the spotlight. She told Ignatieff that "80 per cent of the families that use the Maison de Repit la Ressource" -which she founded and where she is coordinator -are low-income.

"They have very limited access to any sitting services, to leisure activities, to home services. They hardly ever get a break" and show "a very large physical fatigue and especially emotional fatigue."

The roundtable was among the last of 11 such events coast to coast, as Liberals focus on their family plan while targeting 23 federal ridings held by other parties.

"Harper's priorities of \$21 billion in untendered jet fighters, super prisons and more tax breaks for the largest corporations are out of touch with the real needs of Quebec families," said Noushig Eloyan, who accompanied Ignatieff. Eloyan, chairperson of the city of Montreal executive committee from 1994 to 98, is the Liberal candidate trying to wrest the federal Ahuntsic riding from the Bloc Québécois.

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