

BULLETIN

## Critics rail on autism cutback at rally

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### Penticton Herald

By Don Plant

The B.C. Liberals are more interested in building monuments to themselves than helping the people, a rally for autistic children heard in Kelowna on Sunday.

NDP MLA Harry Lali (Fraser-Nicola) blasted the governing Liberals for placing profits for big corporations above the needs of disabled kids and homeless people.

"Gordon Campbell would rather spend \$250 million of tax dollars to build a retractable sun roof on B.C. Place in Vancouver than put a roof over all the homeless in B.C.," he said at Kerry Park.

"They can't find \$70,000 for an autistic child, but they can find \$500 million worth of cost overruns for the convention centre in Vancouver. Gordon Campbell and all these petty dictators around the world build monuments in their name so they can be remembered."

Parents of autistic children held the rally to protest the government's plan to kill an early-intervention program they say benefits their kids.

B.C. Children's Minister Mary Polak announced in September her government is scrapping the early intensive behavioural intervention (EIBI) program because of fairness. She said the program costs \$70,000 per child each year and served only 70 children in seven communities. The other 800-plus young kids with autism in B.C. get about \$20,000 worth of services a year.

By terminating the \$5 million EIBI program in January, the ministry plans to enhance service funding to \$22,000 per autistic child from \$20,000 by next spring. It will spend \$1 million on an outreach program to train professionals and attract them to rural regions, Polak said.

Behavioural interventionists, speech therapists and other professionals who work with the EIBI kids will lose their jobs, said Reid Johnson, president of the Health Sciences Association.

More important is that the government is "at war" with vulnerable children and seniors, he told the rally.

"Minister Polak says if not every child has access to EIBI, no one should have access to it," he said. "It's divide and conquer."

"We need long-term planning, not short-sighted budget cuts . . . Stop picking on our kids and start supporting our families."

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