

NORTHWEST

Affordable child care needed, many agree

SURVEY | Parents of all political leanings say they want lawmakers to take action.

By CLAIRE WITHYCOMBE
Seattle Times staff reporter

At a time when partisan divisions seem to be at a fever pitch, a recent survey suggests there's something many people can agree on: the need for more child care — and for the government to step in to help.

Parents on the right, left and in between want lawmakers to prioritize broadening access to quality

child care that people can afford, according to a national survey of 600 parents released last month, commissioned by Child Care Aware of America.

Eighty-one percent of parents said expanding access to quality and affordable child care should be a top or high priority for state and national policymakers.

"Child care is a priority, and they

want action," said Anne Hedgepeth, chief of policy and advocacy at Child Care Aware of America.

Child care can be a frustrating puzzle for providers and parents alike. The former are commonly underpaid compared with K-12 teachers. And the latter are paying a high share of their income toward child care.

The survey's results may speak to the pervasiveness of child care issues in the United States. Pretty much everywhere you look, it's

tough to find and tough to pay for.

In general, there's significant variation in price across the U.S. and the cost is higher for younger kids and in counties with bigger populations, according to the Pew Research Center.

Prices for care have risen significantly since the pandemic. The average annual price of child care rose 29% between 2020 and 2024, from \$10,174 to \$13,128, according to Child Care Aware of America. That's higher than the overall inflation rate

in that period, 22%.

Washington's average annual price in 2024 ranged from \$16,200 a year for a toddler in a family home child care to \$21,348 for an infant in center-based care.

In that context, the poll's results aren't shocking anyone.

"It's no surprise that parents want to see policy that makes child care more affordable," said state Rep. Josh Penner, R-Orting, a father of four.

Lauren Hipp, national director

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EDUCATION LAB

Fear swells amid rumored return of ICE to courthouse

DOWNTOWN | Weeks earlier, immigrants detained after dismissed deportation cases.



IVY CEBALLO / THE SEATTLE TIMES

An official portrait of President Donald Trump overlooks volunteers with Northwest Immigrant Rights Project assisting people reporting to immigration court in a lobby of the Henry M. Jackson Federal Building in Seattle on Wednesday.

By CATALINA GAITÁN

Seattle Times staff reporter
Relief washed over the face of attorney Brittan Schwartz's client as he left his immigration court hearing Wednesday morning at the Henry M. Jackson Federal Building in downtown Seattle.

Hours earlier, rumors spread on social media and over encrypted messaging apps that ICE agents were expected to resume detaining people at Seattle immigration hearings. Schwartz said she prepared her client for the worst.

But the client, who is from Honduras and lives in Burien, was not taken into custody. In late May, federal attorneys began moving to dismiss deporta-

tion cases against some immigrants without warning, leading ICE agents to detain immigrants immediately after court hearings. ICE has not reappeared at immigration court since protests in mid-June.

Immigrants and their attorneys braced for ICE to resume arrests inside the building Wednesday, with about 10 activists gathered on the sixth floor ready to capture video and demand agents' badge numbers. Dozens of demonstrators also gathered outside the building around noon for an anti-ICE protest, at least twice yelling at Department of Homeland Security officers who emerged. As of the early afternoon, there were

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IVY CEBALLO / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Protesters interact with Department of Homeland Security police officers at the Henry M. Jackson Federal Building on Wednesday.

CLIMATE LAB

Oregon forest research hub could soon be axed by feds

By LYNDIA V. MAPES

Seattle Times environment reporter

Budget cuts proposed by the Trump administration could lead to the closure of 26 long-term ecological research, or LTER, facilities across the United States, including the H.J. Andrews Experimental Forest in Oregon.

President Donald Trump has pitched these cuts to the National Science Foundation for the next budget year, which starts in October.

Congress will debate these proposed budget cuts this summer, with a House committee considering impacts on the National Science Foundation on July 7.

A lot is at stake. The National Science Foundation funds the LTER network, which includes 2,000 scientists at the 26 sites across the country, dedicated to long-term ecological research across a range of landscapes, from tropical rainforests to arctic tundra, seascapes and everything in between.

At the H.J. Andrews Experimental Forest, researchers are revving up new work since the Lookout fire in 2023 burned three-quarters of the forest.

"People are rushing in to collect as much data as they possibly can," said Matt Betts, lead principal investigator of the LTER site at the Andrews. Scientists are looking into everything from changes in stream chemistry to

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Barbara Brotherton, SAM curator of Native art

OBITUARY

By LYNDIA V. MAPES

Seattle Times environment reporter

Barbara Brotherton, curator of Native American art at the Seattle Art Museum for more than two decades, died in late May from pancreatic cancer. She was 72.

Brotherton championed the work of Native artists and was at the forefront of a movement to change the stance of museum curation, from a top-down approach to one of building trust with Native communities and artists.

Hers was a special mastery that combined both her curatorial chops with ties to Native people across the Puget Sound region and beyond, which she developed and cherished in visits to artists in their communities and homes. For Brotherton her work as a curator was not just a job, it was a way of connecting people, and to live her stance in the world as an open door, eager to listen.

"Barb was a fierce supporter of Native artists, especially Coast Salish creatives," Suquamish weaver Danielle Morsette wrote

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KEN LAMBERT / THE SEATTLE TIMES

The U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Eagle is docked at Pier 66 along Seattle's waterfront Wednesday. It will be open for tours again Thursday.

'America's Tall Ship,' seized from Nazis, sails into Seattle

By KAI UYEHARA
Seattle Times staff reporter

"America's Tall Ship," a historical U.S. Coast Guard vessel, is visiting Seattle this week with a chance to take a tour.

The vessel, moored at Pier 66, offered free public tours on Wednesday and will again from 10:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. Thursday.

The U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Eagle, known as "America's Tall Ship," is the country's largest tall ship and only active square-rigger in the U.S. government service, the Coast Guard said in a news release.

Farther north along the waterfront, the Mexican navy vessel ARM

Benito Juárez is moored at Pier 90, according to the Mexican Consulate in Seattle. The vessel opened for public tours Tuesday and Wednesday. The ship had appeared at the Royal Canadian navy's Fleet Week in Vancouver, B.C., last

week. Eagle is slightly shorter than a football field at 295 feet long, and about as tall as a 15-story building, with its tallest mast standing at 150 feet. Its 23 sails total over 22,200 square feet.

The steel-hulled ship was built in Hamburg, Germany, in 1936 and originally named after Horst West-

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NORTHWEST

Toonerville fire reaches 100 acres; dozens are told to evacuate

By KAI UYEHARA
Seattle Times staff reporter

Residents in dozens of homes along Northeast Toonerville Drive north of Belfair, Mason County, are being told to "go now" under a Level 3 evacuation order, as the Toonerville fire burns on Kitsap Peninsula.

At least 50 homes are

threatened, the North Mason Fire Authority said.

The Toonerville fire was 100 acres and 0% contained, according to Watch Duty reports around 1 a.m. Wednesday.

The American Red Cross has established an evacuation shelter at Belfair Com-

munity Church, the North Mason fire authority said. The wildfire began at about 4:30 p.m. Tuesday and has been burning timber, logging slash and brush, the State Fire Marshal's Office said.

By around 6:20 p.m. Tuesday, the wildfire had burned about 20 acres, said Central

Mason County Fire and Emergency Medical Services. The Level 3 evacuation order was issued at that point.

The fire had grown to 70 acres by 10 p.m., the Central Mason Fire and EMS reported later Tuesday. Fire crews were "making good progress," building lines around the fire with a bulldozer.

Helicopters and fixed-wing air tankers "significantly slowed the fire's progress," and fire engines were staged outside homes most threatened by the fire, the North Mason fire authority said.

State firefighting resources had been mobilized Tuesday night, the State Fire Marshal's Office said.

The cause of the fire is under investigation.

Much of the east side of Washington was under a red flag warning until 8 p.m. Wednesday. Kitsap Peninsula was not under the warning as of Wednesday morning.

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of early childhood and Washington state at MomsRising, an advocacy group for parents, said the poll's results highlight what the group hears from parents and families in communities across the state.

"They want their kids all to be safe, loved and learning, and they're all having a hard time finding and affording care that matches their family's needs," she said.

Not only do parents support elected leaders making child care a top or high priority, but nearly three-quarters believe government funding for child care and early learning should be increased, according to the poll. Broken down by party, 68% of Republicans, 72% of independents and 82% of Democrats agreed.

High shares of parents agreed that balancing child care and work responsibilities, low wages for child care workers, cost and a lack of high-quality programs were problems (between 85 and 90% in each category).

The parents and guardians surveyed all had kids 18 or younger and were registered voters. Thirty-four percent had children age 5 and younger. The survey was conducted March 28 to April 15 and had a confidence



Ivonne Turner checks in on nap time at ABC Care Company in Everett in April.

About the project

Education Lab is a Seattle Times project that spotlights promising approaches to persistent challenges in public education. The Seattle Foundation serves as fiscal sponsor for Education Lab, which is supported by a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Ballmer Group. For more, go to seattletimes.com/education-lab

interval — akin to a margin of error — of 4.56% for the overall sample. The survey was conducted by New Bridge Strategy and Hart Research.

Respondents were asked about demographic information, the age of their children, and their perspectives on child care in their community

and on brain development during specific ages before they were asked about whether elected leaders in their state and at the federal level should make expanding access to affordable and

quality child care a priority. The survey didn't ask those who didn't support additional funding what other solutions they would support, though. Pollsters focused on funding because that's something both state and federal governments can do, Hedgepeth said.

"We wanted to understand how strong the support was for investments, because we knew that would be actionable by policymakers at both levels of government," she said.

While there are other

things policymakers can do around the edges, Hipp said, she maintains "robust" public investment is the only way to solve the child care crisis.

It's a broken market, she said. Families can't afford to pay more and providers can't afford to earn less.

"There's no way out of this unless we address it head on," Hipp said. "We have to have robust public investment that addresses the core pieces of the pie."

Penner worries that the state setting a "price floor" could cause child care costs to balloon further, and believes policymakers can do more to make it easier for private providers to enter the market.

"I think the big, critical issue here is a lack of capacity in the child care system, and there's not really been any fundamental policy to enable that capacity to increase," Penner said.

He points to legislation he introduced this year that would have offered a tax break to employers who help their employees with child care, House Bill 1564.

But the bill, expected to reduce the state's tax collections by \$137.45 million over the next two years, didn't make it through the session as lawmakers stared down a budget deficit.

There are, however, areas of bipartisan agreement.

Lawmakers pushed back deadlines on qualification

requirements for child care providers through House Bill 1648. And they loosened zoning restrictions, allowing providers to be permitted outright in most areas, through Senate Bill 5509.

The pandemic shone a bright spotlight on the nation's deep-seated child care problems. The federal government, and states including Washington, poured money into relief.

But that spotlight is fading both at the state and national level, even though the issue isn't going anywhere. Just this week, AP-NORC released a poll finding that 76% of U.S. adults say that the cost of child care is a major problem.

This year, Washington lawmakers voted to cut some child care programs and delayed future expansions that had been laid out in the Fair Start for Kids Act, sweeping \$1.1 billion child care legislation they passed in 2021.

The state isn't alone in facing financial headwinds, though Democrats control the Legislature and can set the agenda. The Trump administration has proposed reducing funding for certain federal child care programs, broader cuts to social safety net programs are poised to upend state budgets.

The spending bill Congress passed last week increases the child tax credit to \$2,000 per child, up from \$2,000.

But parents who don't earn enough to pay income tax will still not see the benefit, and many will see only a partial benefit.

The measure also contains two provisions intended to help families pay for child care: It boosts the tax credit parents receive for spending money on child care. It also expands a program that gives companies tax credits for providing child care for their employees.

Dana Guy, executive director of PEPS, which runs support groups for parents in the Puget Sound region, says that when the group asked families several years ago to rank the most urgent issues affecting them, child care was one of the highest.

Employers have a role here, too, she pointed out. As more employers mandate a return to the office, losing that flexibility puts additional strain on parents, she said.

Increasing child care costs not only stretch wallets, but also cause stress, Guy said. Last year, the then-U.S. surgeon general warned that parental stress was a public health problem.

"Ultimately, we need parents to have better support systems around them, and child care is absolutely one of them," Guy said.

Material from The Associated Press was included in this report.

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A burned forest, consisting of a mix of Pacific silver fir with some Douglas fir on Lookout Mountain in the HJ Andrews Experimental Forest in Blue River, Ore., is seen in June.

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bird populations to forest regeneration and burn patterns, and much more.

Yet as things are getting interesting, the Andrews is facing multiple threats in cuts to the National Science Foundation and proposals to eliminate the research arm of the forest service.

Sen. Patty Murray, the top Democrat on the Appropriations Committee, says she is determined to protect federal funding for long-term research.

"President Trump's budget proposal is unacceptable, drastic cuts to the National Science Foundation that would jeopardize countless important research efforts, including irreplaceable long-term research happening at places like the HJ Andrews Experimental Forest," Murray, D-Wash., said in an email. "His budget request is yet another sign this administration couldn't care less about science and doesn't understand the immense value of long-term research."

In the budget request sent

to Congress, Russell Vought, Trump's director of the Office of Management and Budget, argued the existing federal spending plan is "laden with spending contrary to the needs of ordinary working Americans and tilted toward funding niche non-governmental organizations and institutions of higher education committed to radical gender and climate ideologies antithetical to the American way of life."

Trump's recommended cuts to the National Science Foundation target a research network that got its start back in 1980.

Jerry Franklin, a leading forest ecologist, described the creation of the LTER network as a "revolution" in scientific work among teams of people. Most scientific grants are for just a few years, but grants at these 26 sites last six years, and can be renewed. That has enabled scientists to get answers that have led to key policy decisions, from amending the Clean Air Act to prevent acid rain to preserving old-growth forests.

In his work at the Andrews, Franklin and his col-

laborators revealed much of what we know about old-growth forests — as well as ecological principals for better logging practices to produce wood products, while retaining the ability of forests to regenerate.

Short-term inquiry can't capture something as basic as whether a forest or species is declining, Betts said. Scientists also can formulate questions that wouldn't occur to them without being in one place over time — and wondering how it works.

For instance, work in watersheds at the Andrews has explored and explained the impact of industrial forestry on stream flows, which increase right after cutting but diminish as the replanted forest takes hold — findings that have been replicated by a new generation of scientists, as the understanding of forest and stream dynamics grows over time.

Peter Groffman, a professor at the City University of New York Advanced Science Research Center and Brooklyn College, is co-principal investigator at the Hubbard Brook LTER. Scientists there did the work resulting in

Cuts looming over nation's research network

The Long Term Ecological Research Network includes sites in 26 locations that are at risk of losing funding under Trump administration budget proposals.



Sources: LTER Network, Esri

About the project

Climate Lab is a Seattle Times initiative that explores the effects of climate change in the Pacific Northwest and beyond. The project is funded in part by The Bullitt Foundation, CO2 Foundation, Jim and Birte Falconer, Mike and Becky Hughes, Henry M. Jackson Foundation, Martin-Fabert Foundation, University of Washington and Walker Family Foundation, and its fiscal sponsor is the Seattle Foundation.

amendments to the Clean Air Act to address the pollution of acid rain. He remembers prior presidential budget proposals to defund the National Science Foundation. "Society was asking this question, do we need science?" Groffman said. "Ultimately they didn't cut science because it wasn't important."

It isn't just the scientific findings that are so valuable, it is the system of inquiry itself. Other countries just don't do what we do here, in terms of empowering young scientists to ask tough questions and build a career doing independent work,

Groffman said. "This is something we do really well in America," Groffman said. "If the government is really going to back off the funding of science, we are losing something that is really unique."

Some of the data at the Andrews dates back 80 years, noted Brooke Penaluna, lead scientist for the U.S. Forest Service Pacific Northwest Research Station, which hosts the Andrews. "And to say there is no value in that? It feels surreal," she said of the proposed cuts. "And it also feels like ... people must not know, because how could you actually want to

give this up?"

Management at the Andrews right now is day to day, she said. So much uncertainty is hard to manage, administratively and emotionally. "There is a lot of compartmentalization," Penaluna said. "And, I think, trust in the democratic process, and hope that it will work out."

Congress often changes or even ignores a president's budget requests. The fight for the next budget will start soon. "I'll be tearing up Trump's budget," Murray said, "and working with my colleagues on the appropriations committee to write a new, bipartisan bill that will make the strongest possible investments in NSF and the Long Term Ecological Research Network under challenging fiscal circumstances."

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