

# Opinion: There are no losers when we invest in early child care <sup>[1]</sup>

Americans know what's at stake and are prepared to support bold action

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## EXCERPTS

Sixty percent of Americans say they expect the next generation will be “worse off” than their own.

That profound sense of pessimism was perhaps the most startling finding of a recent national survey on views about early childhood development.

The reasons for this loss of confidence in a brighter future are complex. For one, changes in the workplace and society as a whole have created new and often difficult trade-offs for working families. Forty percent of American children under the age of five today grow up in families that earn less than \$50,000 per year, and 70 percent live in households where all resident adults work.

For millions of parents juggling low-wage jobs, it's a daily struggle to provide the basics, from housing and food to adequate medical care, let alone to afford high-quality child care. In many cases, these pressures and stresses are most acute just at the time when children are going through critical periods of cognitive and emotional development — years that lay the foundation for later learning and career success.

The good news is that the survey, conducted for the Bipartisan Policy Center, also found broad support for efforts to ensure that all children get a strong start in life.

By wide margins, liberal and conservative respondents alike expressed concern about the high cost of quality child care; agreed that many parents have too little time to spend with their children; felt that all children should be guaranteed the shelter, food, education and care needed to thrive; and supported programs to help child care workers earn a living wage. Importantly, a majority (54 percent) said they would be willing to pay higher taxes for programs that help children, even if those programs don't directly benefit them.

Of course, conservative and liberal views on these topics differ. For example, conservatives are less likely to say that government has a primary responsibility to support early childhood development, are more concerned that government will overstep its role, and place a greater emphasis on parental involvement and teaching values in early childhood programs. Liberals, by contrast, see a greater role for government but are concerned that public programs will be ineffective or inefficient, and tend to prioritize academic and developmental foundations.

Beneath these differences, however, lies remarkable agreement about both the challenges that confront working families and the long-term wisdom of supporting healthy early childhood development for the good of the country.

Political leaders have begun to respond. Congress recently acted to strengthen several child- and family-friendly policies, including expanding the federal child tax credit, reauthorizing a program that provides home visits by a health professional to families with newborns or young children, and increasing funding for the Child Care and Development Block Grant program, which funds state efforts to increase access to quality child care.

We're proud to have come together last year with the BPC to build support for these measures. But there's more to be done to support families with young children, and ensure that new investments in early childhood are well-designed and deliver the most bang for the buck. More progress is needed toward improving quality in child care and expanding access to high-quality child care options for working families.

Early childhood development is the kind of issue that will require sustained attention from both citizens and politicians. The social and economic trends that have contributed to the current challenges for working families did not emerge overnight, and no single program or appropriation can respond to them all.

But we believe that Americans understand what's at stake and are prepared to support a concerted national effort aimed at helping all children realize their full potential.

Over generations, bold action at crucial moments has re-energized the American project. Few issues are more consequential than the success of families with young children, and few are more likely to command the kind of bipartisan support that would make such action

possible again.

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**Region:** United States <sup>[3]</sup>

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