

Column: What Donald Trump's incomprehensible word salad about child care revealed ^[1]

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Excerpts

In the United States, most parents of young children work, most need help caring for their children, and most cannot depend on family members to pitch in.

So wouldn't you think that providing affordable, high-quality child care to American families is a no-brainer? I mean, we've done it before. Why can't we do it again?

Indulge me for a brief history lesson:

Eighty years ago, when American GIs were fighting fascism overseas, women were recruited in droves to work in shipyards and factories, where they filled all sorts of jobs traditionally held by men. More than 6 million women worked as welders, operated heavy machinery and did other factory work. They made tanks, ships and planes. Three million women volunteered with the Red Cross. More than 200,000 served in the military.

And who took care of their babies and toddlers? For the first and only time in American history, Congress spent tens of millions of dollars to fund universal child care, enabling state governments and private companies to create hundreds of workplace "war nurseries." An estimated 550,000 young children were enrolled in them, allowing their mothers to become full-fledged citizens.

On the West Coast, the industrialist and healthcare visionary Henry J. Kaiser hired child development experts to set up what became model versions of child-care centers at his shipyards. The experts tested theories that helped inform and expand the field of early-childhood education.

When the war ended, however, the federal money dried up. All those Rosie the Riveters were banished back to their kitchens, even though a majority wanted to keep their jobs.

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And here we are today, mired in a patchwork system of child care that is sometimes affordable or high-quality but is almost never both.

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