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Finally, a debate question on child care: Here's how candidates (and Twitter) responded



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November 21, 2019



Despite the fact that there's a child care crisis facing many families around the country, four presidential debates have been held in which moderators [failed to broach the topic of child care](#) and paid family leave.

Like health care and [climate change](#), it's an issue that continues to create undue stress for Americans. Most parents with children under 5 — a whopping 83% — say it's a problem to find quality, affordable child care in their area, according to a 2018 study from the [Center for American Progress](#). And when families do find that quality care, it's taking far too high a toll on their financial stability. Seventy percent of families are paying child care rates the government defines as unaffordable, and nearly half of families spend 15% or more of their household income on care, according to the [Care.com 2019 Cost](#)

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In the lead-up to the debate — hosted by MSNBC and The Washington Post, held in Atlanta, Georgia and moderated by an all-women panel of journalists (Rachel Maddow, Kristen Welker, Ashley Parker, and Andrea Mitchell) — progressive groups pushed for attention to the issue. Fatima Goss Graves of the [National Women's Law Center](#) noted that the all-female panel needs to live up to its promise by dedicating time to the questions and discussion to the issues that disproportionately impact women, like child care.

Finally, at tonight's debate, candidates were given the chance to speak to the child care crisis.

What the Democratic presidential candidates said about child care and paid family leave

Setting up a question for Andrew Yang, Washington Post White House correspondent Parker stated, "Here in Georgia, the average price of infant day care can be as much as \$8,500 per child per year. That's more than in-state tuition at a four-year public college in Georgia." She then asked, "What would you do as president to ease that burden?"

Yang responded by noting that [Papua New Guinea](#) and the U.S. are the only two countries in the world that don't have mandated paid family leave. He stated that it's time to change how we as a country push new parents to get back to the workforce ASAP, explaining that the trade-off of leaving the home isn't even worth it in some cases, as families just end up putting that paycheck toward child care. "In many cases, it would be better if the parent stayed home with the child," Yang said.

Parker then elaborated on the subject for other candidates, pointing out that, "No parent is federally guaranteed a single day of paid leave when they have a baby," and she asked Senators Amy Klobuchar and Kamala Harris to explain their paid leave plans.

Klobuchar, who is proposing a guaranteed three months of paid leave, responded by saying, "We are way behind the curve — our country is — when it comes to providing paid family leave and child care. We must do this."

Harris then shared her case for a [six-month policy](#): "It is no longer the case in America that people are having children in their 20s. People are having children in their 30s, often in their 40s, which means that these families and parents are often raising young children and taking care of their parents, which requires a lot of work." She illustrated her point by sharing how the average parent might be taking their aging parent to a hospital, then rushing to pick their child up and simultaneously looking out for both their parent and their child's health care.

The California senator continued, "What we are seeing is the burden principally falls on women to do that work," referring to the [mental and physical load](#) female partners tend to carry when it comes to domestic duties. Harris noted that women must then make a choice: "... Whether they're going to leave a profession for which they have a passion to care for their family or whether they are going to give up a paycheck that family relies on. So, six months paid family leave is meant to and is designed to adjust to the reality of women's lives today."

While Yang, Klobuchar and Harris were the only candidates asked to directly speak to the child care and paid family leave question, Senator Elizabeth Warren touched on the subject in response to an earlier question about her wealth tax, asserting that by taxing “two cents on the top 1/10 of 1% in this country,” we would be able to “provide universal child care for every baby in this country age 0-5,” as well as “universal pre-K for every 3-year-old and 4-year-old in America.” Warren continued, “We can stop exploiting the women, largely black and brown women who do this work, and we can raise the wages of every child care worker and preschool teacher in America.”

How Twitter reacted in response to the topic being raised on the stage

Heartened that the highly relevant question was finally raised by moderators and candidates, Twitter exploded with an array of fired-up responses.



Every Child Matters
@VotingforKids · Follow

.@AndrewYang responds to childcare question, saying he would provide a "freedom dividend" of \$2000 for families with children so they could afford child care.
#WeCareDebate


6:48 PM · Nov 20, 2019

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<https://twitter.com/dchammslice/status/1197345405626978304?s=21>

Some pointed out that the government needs to do better to ensure that families benefit from from existing policies.



Dr. Kate Gallagher Robbins
@kfgrobbins · Follow

Finally a question on **#childcare** at the debate! DYK only 1 in 6 children who is eligible for federal child care help receives it?

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Others called for a “litmus test,” based on the candidates’ universal child care and universal pre-K proposals.

<https://twitter.com/topherspiro/status/1197345932997799936?s=21>

Some pointed to the senior care piece of the puzzle, which Harris touched on.



Melissa Boteach
@mboteach · Follow

Paid leave is not only for parents caring for children. It's critically important we have **#paidleave** for people caring

critically important we have ~~paid~~ leave for people caring for themselves, aging parents, people with disabilities, and chosen family. **#wecaredebate**

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There was also some enthusiastic discussion about how the conversation about child care and paid family leave must be gender neutral, as this is an issue that doesn't exclusively affect moms.



Liz Plank ✓
@feministabulous · [Follow](#)



please let's stop equating parental leave with "moms" we need to have gender neutral language when discussing parenthood! **#demdebate**

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Jessica Valenti ✓ · Nov 20, 2019
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Yang mentions that we're don't have paid family leave for new "moms" which is true and horrible but also it's not just women who need parental leave. **#DemDebate**



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The more we talk about child care as a "women's issue" the longer we'll see a gender gap at home

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Love love love that Andrew Yang talked about childcare and PARENTS staying home, not mom's.

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The bottom line

When we talk about creating change on child care and paid family leave, we're

when we talk about creating change on child care and paid family leave, we're touching on themes that are even more global. Child care is innately linked to the economy. As Klobuchar has said, "It's about making it easier for individual families and workers, but it is also about having a strong economy. It's impossible to have a strong economy when it's too expensive to work because of child care."

It's also tied to gender equality. As Senator Cory Booker has put it, we need to take on "systemic challenges that disproportionately affect women and hold our entire country back" by establishing affordable child care and national paid family leave.

That said, the question of what we're going to do to address our child care and paid family leave crisis was one that was long overdue. Here's hoping this is only the beginning of an ongoing, vibrant discourse on the subject that will lead to much-needed change.

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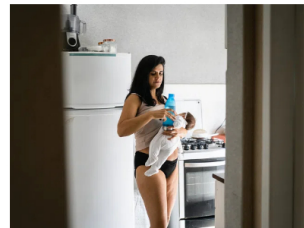
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