

**U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell**  
**Cantwell Celebrates New Affordable Childcare Facility**  
**Northwest Community Center, Spokane WA**  
**February 17, 2026**

**Sen. Cantwell Remarks**

[\[VIDEO\]](#)

**Sen. Cantwell:** Thank you Amber and thank you to Luc and Adam and Michael and Jene. Thank you to everybody.

Today is a celebration. We're here today to thank the community for their hard work and putting a proposal before the US Congress to say, let's expand capacity for childcare in the northeast part of Spokane. Jene, you've done a great job here at The ZONE, and I love the incredible artwork I've seen all around and some of the talented children and certainly some of the beneficiaries of this great work. So, thank you for that.

We're here today because we know that childcare is a crisis in America, and we know parents need better options. They need to be able to go to work and know that their children have access to reliable childcare. It goes hand in hand if we want to increase workforce infrastructure.

When families can't get affordable childcare, and hospitals can't find nurses to treat patients, and small businesses can't find service workers, how do these businesses or facilities deliver great services? As you heard from Adam, a lack of affordable childcare is no longer just a problem for families in Hillyard; it's a workforce constraint.

For a Spokane family with two children, the average monthly childcare bill is nearly \$3,000 but the median household income is only about \$7,200 a month. That means childcare alone can be 40% of your family's income – 40%. That's before they paid for groceries, housing or health care.

So parents who can't afford childcare work fewer hours and leave the workforce, really, all together. And we're hearing this all across the state of Washington. This leaves employers without [a] reliable, high-quality workforce and families with less income. This comes at a real cost, and so that is why we're so grateful for what this consortium has put together.

According to one recent analysis [by] Spokane County, 5500 workers with children under the age of six quit their jobs due to childcare issues, and another 2800 workers were fired from their jobs due to childcare issues. So you can see: thousands of people in Spokane are desperate for this level of service.

The report also found that every year, a lack of childcare costs Spokane County's employers \$178.3 million and statewide, the lack of affordability of childcare is costing employers over \$2 billion. So, we know that here, this problem is going to get some attention. In Spokane, the child wait list for affordable day care centers can stretch [to a] month. In Hillyard, it was five months.

What we're talking about today will answer that need for so many families in this particular region. A few childcare centers, as was mentioned, offered extended hours to parents who have atypical shifts,

but in many cases, centers charge steep pick-up fees, sometimes calculated by the minute, and quickly drive up the already [high] cost for the family workforce.

There is only one other center offering flexible hours in this area. It alone cannot meet the demand. So, that is why, listening to the local community here, the Northeast [Public] Development Authority, we were so excited to push a housing and urban development economic development initiative to help fund a new childcare capacity, adding over 100 children's slots here, and lowering the cost, as Luc just mentioned, to below the local average.

So, we're talking about less expensive childcare, and we're talking about more flexible shifts so that families can work different hours. 85% of the parents here [in Hillyard] said they could find more work or a better job if they had the right childcare.

That childcare is what we're talking about today. By lowering these costs, we're not only easing the burden on families, we're giving them opportunities to go seek those jobs. The cost of health care, as I mentioned, is a barrier, but today, the action that's being taken is helping us address this action right here in this part of our state.

I agree with Michael: this will become a model, because you're providing not just childcare, but you're also providing affordable housing slots and that flexibility. So we hope that Spokane continues to show what it takes to deliver on these kinds of services, and hope that it will become a big landmark of why we should do this in other parts of Washington State.

So again, thank you to everybody involved in this Northeast Community Center and the planning agency and Luc and Amber – she's going to do her job. Jubilant Hollister, thank you for what you're doing. So we're really, really excited about the capacity to build more affordable childcare in Spokane, and what that's going to mean for the city overall. Thank you.