

EPISODE 1600

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FT: So Money episode 1600, solving for the child care crisis, with Danielle Weisberg, Co-Founder of theSkimm.

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[INTRO]

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FT: Welcome to So Money, everybody. I'm Farnoosh Torabi. December 4th, 2023. Quick announcement, if you would like to enter to win a free copy signed of *A Healthy State of Panic*, my new book, I have a link in our show notes which sends you to a survey. I'm surveying as many of you as possible to learn what you want to learn more from me in 2024. You fill out that really quick survey. Enter your information at the bottom. I'll be selecting five audience members to receive a free copy of *A Healthy State of Panic*. So if you haven't gotten your copy yet or you want to gift one to a friend for the holidays, be sure to fill out the survey.

Today's show is about solving for the child care crisis, and our guest coming up is Danielle Weisberg, Co-Founder of theSkimm. I don't have to tell you how serious this issue is, but get this. As many as 100,000 Americans have been forced to stay home from work each month because of child care problems. That's the most recent data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The economic toll is \$122 billion every year in loss earnings, productivity, and revenue.

TheSkimm has also done its own research on this. They recently issued a report called the State of Women, which examines the realities and the challenges that women face today with resources, primarily child care. As a result of this, theSkimm also launched the

#ShowUsYourChildCare campaign. It's an effort to inspire companies to show how they're supporting working parents.

Our guest today, Danielle Weisberg, is Co-Founder of theSkimm, which if you haven't heard of theSkimm before, it's a woman-centric mission-driven media company. She and her co-founder, Carly Zakin, launched theSkimm more than a decade ago out of their shared apartment. We had them both on the show years ago talking about those beginnings.

Today, the company has a finger pulse on millennial women, and Danielle is here to share some of the findings in the State of Women report. She's going to dive into the child care crisis and how it's impacting families, specifically women workers. Stay tuned to learn about resources on how you can initiate or support a campaign at your job or encourage your employer to offer more benefits for families. I'm curious to know. Is 2024 a better year, a more strategic year than others to advocate for yourself for child care at work? Here's Danielle Weisberg.

[INTERVIEW]

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FT: Danielle Weisberg, welcome back to So Money. It's always nice to sit down with you. I admire you so much.

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DW: Thank you so much. It's so nice to be here. It's nice to be with you. I feel like every time I hear your name, I know it's going to be an insightful and thoughtful conversation. So I really appreciate you having me on.

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FT: Thank you and theSkimm for all these years, providing me with your platform. I've been invited many times to come and share financial insights. We've collaborated a bunch. So now, I want to invite you on to kind of catch up, first of all. Because last time you and Carly Zakin, your

co-founder, were on the show before the pandemic, I think, we were discussing the journey to building theSkimm, when you two were both just working at the news desk at MSNBC, started the company with credit cards.

Now, of course, theSkimm is this massive digital media company. You've got so many platforms, newsletters, podcasts, campaigns. TheSkimm covers news, trends, policies, politics, so much that impacts women. You and your team have put together recently a very important report that has informed an entire campaign supporting women in the post-pandemic world. We know, of course, during the pandemic, women suffered immensely and disproportionately. We were at the forefront of working and caregiving, taking care of maybe children and adults in our lives.

Let's start there. It's this – your report is called the State of Women. You and your team launched this earlier this year and have found some pretty vulnerable truths and challenges that women continue to face, even as they're moving back into the workforce. We're struggling with resources, child care. What were some of the truths that you uncovered?

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DW: Yes. First of all, we started the business 11 years ago from our living room couch with about \$2,000 saved up. Over a decade, theSkimm has become the go-to resource for this audience. Our audience, I like to say, they're in it, right? Like we are all about at theSkimm making it easier to live smarter for women who are in the thick of it. We're trying to navigate our careers. We're trying to figure out our financial health. We're thinking about or potentially having children. We are looking at some of those markers of adulthood, whether it is dealing with student loans, trying to buy a first house, thinking about how to save for a first car or a second car, all of these real-life markers.

At the same time, so much has changed, even since we started the company. When we look at this demographic of women, they are so impressive. They're leading in so many ways. They're controlling householding and spending and purchasing decisions. Yet they are not necessarily better off than their parents' generation. There's something that feels very odd about that and very disconcerting when you think about she is tasked with taking care of her kids and her parents at the same life stage. Because her parents are living longer, and we are seeing that

with that, it comes with extra care, and there really isn't a plan to help her through that. So we anticipate her needs, and we've been able to grow up with her.

What that means for us is that we are here to support this generational shift as people who have been there and as people who are going through it. So getting to the State of Women report, I think we all know kind of like inherently that the state of women in this country is like not good. I think it's pretty safe to say that without needing to do a report. What we had heard throughout the pandemic was, anecdotally, this is a really hard time. Then when you look at the data, it was really about how women are doing compared to men, compared to other generations.

So what we wanted to do, and we teamed up with Harris to do that, is really to understand where this audience of influential women who represent the key to their families, like how are they actually doing, and what do they actually need? What we found is it's something that you can't ignore. So that was our goal with the study and then with the campaign that we created was to basically say like, "Hey, this is a problem, and it's not just a women's problem because it really has the ability to impact our economy and our workforce." So it is something that we need to make sure is known.

Specifically, when we talk about pandemic, millions of women were forced out of the workforce, right? Or they opted out because it was just way too much to try to support kids and parents and everything. We're finally seeing that the numbers are coming back to pre-pandemic levels, right? So women are going back. Women with young children in the workforce is significantly higher than it's been, and that's fantastic. But I think as we talk through that, it's really important to think about what she's going to need to be able to stay there.

That's what we talk about. We think about, with the State of Women report, what is she thinking? What is stressing her out, her health? She's feeling like she needs to take up a side hustle, really taking her initiative into her own hands. There's no longer kind of this sense that it's going to be on government, or it's going to be on a partner, or it's going to be on my company to figure something out for myself. That is both kind of a real sense of like empowerment and also a sense of like just this is where we are. I think that that – what we struggle with is trying to help with the path forward instead of getting bogged down in where we're at.

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FT: Frankly, it's not theSkimm's responsibility.

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DW: No.

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FT: To come up with the path forward, right? I mean, it's like, obviously, the employers have to do this. Of course, kudos to theSkimm for bringing this to the forefront, not letting this be a quiet issue. Your campaign hashtag is #ShowUsYourChildCare, which is instrumental. You've partnered with Care.com, Etsy, Verizon encouraging these really massive employers to show how they are supporting working parents and in doing so, hopefully, putting pressure/ encouragement upon other employers to follow suit. What are you seeing happening as a result of this campaign?

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DW: So I think the first thing is to say that with these campaigns that we've done from the data, this is not about putting the onus on one part, right? Ideally, we would love to have a government that was coming in and helping us. But that hasn't been done from a republican standpoint or a democrat standpoint. So moving past that, it's kind of like where can we look.

I also want to say our other path here is like CEOs and business owners. I know firsthand how hard it is right now to be running a business at a time of a lot of change. We've seen strikes. We've seen labor shortages. We've seen inflation. Like none of this is easy to figure out. So our role is to share what has worked, to share where you're at. Not to shame but to really make it more transparent.

We did team up with both Moms First to launch our #ShowUsYourChildCare initiative, and it's a call to the private sector to step up. I say that with empathy, and I also say it as that's where we are, right? We need women to participate in this economy and the effect of them not doing so, especially when, and I want to stress this, the good news is that women are back in the workforce, right?

COVID kind of forced us out. It's been a bit. We're back. So now, how do we stay there, and how do we afford child care? When I say afford child care, I think what is sometime misconstrued in that is we need affordable, accessible child care, right? There might be child care available, but there's a waitlist. Or it's just out of the – especially with inflation. We've seen child care costs outpace inflation by 30%. Like that is insane or the cost of living by 30%. So these things need to go hand in hand. We need women to stay in the workforce if we want nice things like Social Security for all of us, which is already in question. We also need women to be able to contribute to their savings accounts, right?

The idea that this person is going to have to opt out of the workforce and it doesn't – in one way, yes, it affects their household in the moment. But it also has long-term reverberations for how are we then going to have to support that person and their family for those lost wages that they could have been saving. So all of that is the reason why we got into it, and I think there's a broad spectrum of options employers can consider, right, whether it's on-site child care centers, access to backup care, cash stipends to put towards child care costs, flexible work hours to accommodate caregiving.

All of these things have different costs associated with it, and I think the big thing here is showing that as an employer this is important to you, that you understand it is not just a women's issue that is key to supporting a healthy economy and supporting parents and families. I would hope that everyone would want to create this great solution. But the reality is that most of us can't afford what that A+ looks like. So let's start off by doing something, and let's start off by talking about it, right? So we can see what's working and what's not working. That's why we asked our audience to continue to share what child care looks like for them to highlight why we need more companies to adopt care benefits.

It's also why theSkimm and Moms First launched the ShowUsYourChildCare hashtag. We now have over 80 companies who have already joined us; Pinterest, Chobani, WW, Etsy, Verizon, DoorDash, Theory. We've also – the phase two of this was to kick off our database internally that we started internally. It's, obviously, being shared so that we can highlight it's a free public-facing database of the companies who have already joined us so that as you're looking for a potential new job, you don't have to necessarily ask.

Or if you're going to your HR or human resources with a pitch, you can actually say like, “Here are what other similarly sized companies have done.” There's a model, and there's actually a pitch deck, too, that we've given people and a worksheet. Because, unfortunately, a lot of this is falling on the individual employees to go advocate So we try to make that as easy as possible.

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FT: I thought this was interesting in your State of Women report is another thing is that the mental load that this generation of women is carrying exceeds previous generations. It's the number one issue that they're struggling with. So how is that influencing the way that it's showing up in their financial lives, in their careers? What did you find? Is it – I know we're kind of getting back to pre-pandemic levels in terms of women employment. But what are we seeing in terms of how this mental load is affecting things like burnout or needing to take time off?

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DW: I think that there is an exhaustion that we all feel. I also think when we talk about how do you quantify that mental load, we see it when it comes to anxiety, feelings of isolation, depression. All of these things are things that are kind of like regularly talked about for women and particularly in this stage of life, and it makes sense. I speak to it from experience. It feels like there's a lot of pressure because there is a lot of pressure.

So what we seek to do is to make sure that you feel like you're not alone. We are all for women in executive-level positions. But from our State of Women report, the role that they feel like they are most akin to is a chief worry officer. That anything that could go wrong is something that

they are thinking of. How do you support yourself? How do you support members of your family? I think that that takes a real toll on your mental health.

I think, also, that gets you to think about your financial health because the two a lot of times go hand in hand. So we've seen that 87% of women have or want to create more sources of financial stability in their life. Along with what I said before, they're not waiting for someone to come in and like hand them a solution. They are taking action to make sure they're setting themselves up for the future.

So we see 60% of women are taking on side hustles or advocating for promotions. One in five have started their own businesses or are considering do so. This is most notably true among black women who were hit especially hard by pandemic job loss that we've talked about. 80% of them are taking on a second job or starting a side hustle. They are – also, 73 of them are investing in furthering their education.

I think all of that is great. I also think when we go back to the mental load, we've had heard stories of women who have used like their at-work project management systems to use that in their families and telling their partners or their children like, “Here's how we're managing the household going forward.” I love that, and I'm also a big fan of Eve Rodsky with the idea of fair play and how do you really diversify. Not just between you and a partner but getting the whole family involved because it's not sustainable to have this much beyond on one part of our economy.

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FT: You mentioned that you have resources for employees to help them navigate their companies and advocate for themselves and their families at work and, hopefully, get their companies to support them and provide new policies. Can you share some of those action items for people listening who are like, “Yes, I want to do this. I want to take the lead at my company, or I want to be part of this movement at my company, and I want to encourage my boss, my employers to provide support.”?

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DW: So I think the first move is get informed, right? We're theSkimm. We believe information is key to what you do. Clearly, if you follow at theSkimm or sign up for the Daily Skimm daily email newsletter, we definitely keep you involved on what's going on with the child care cliff, right? So there was, actually, since World War II the biggest investment that we had in child care which was during the pandemic. It expired on September 30th. Since then, it's forced a lot of child care providers to close or to lose access to funding going forward.

It's putting really this time crunch on all of these women have come back to work and how can we get them to stay back. So I think this is the perfect time to advocate for yourself if this is what you need or this is what your families need in your workforce because it's not just about you as the individual. It's about the entire employee base. I can tell you as a business owner, that's when it resonates.

So use our – go to theSkimm.com. We have tools and resources there. Go to showusyourchildcare.org. What we've put together is our #ShowUsYourChildCare database. Again, that's a free public-facing database of the companies who have joined us. What you can do with that is show your people team or your boss, “Hey, we're not alone, right? Like these are all of these companies who are figuring it out.” There's not an example of someone who has like cracked the code and gotten it completely right because our needs are changing. We're all getting back to new ways of working. But I think it does encourage more businesses to join the conversation, and that's really what we want.

We also, again, have a pitch deck that is a step-by-step guide on how to advocate for child care within your own organization. Then we have a worksheet, which is how to advocate for child care at your work. So we'll do step by step what do you need to prepare yourself for pitching that. What should the expectations be? How do you present the research and the data to support it?

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FT: We will certainly put those links in our show notes and make them accessible because you're right. I think there's nothing like showing your employer, “Hey, here's what our peers are

doing.” I don't know if theSkimm has done any forecasting or looking ahead at 2024 in terms of things like employability, job availability. Do you think that there is room for more leverage in the New Year for workers to want for things like this and ask for things like this from their employers?

I think during the pandemic, it was a little easier because there was – we saw more job mobility. But, of course, now, we've been hearing all about layoffs. I don't know. I'm just curious. Is 2024 the year to really push for this because maybe you do have some unique leverage?

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DW: Well, I think it's two things, right? So we do see, depending on the industry that you're in, what's happened as far as auto workers, as far as entertainment strikes. There is some leverage for labor and workforces right now. So if you fall into a place where you feel like you've got it, go ahead. I think that this is something that is akin in my mind to building the new idea of a benefits package. We need things like this to be able to stay in the workforce.

Maybe if you are part of an organization that is no longer in person, look at the commuting benefits. Like is there a different way to allocate some of the benefits that you have previously given a workforce that can be better used in ways to support how you work today? I think that's the message, right? That I definitely understand, and I am not saying that this can be done by putting unlimited dollars because it's just not there right now, right?

We're in an environment where many companies are dealing with layoffs. I get it. So it is about starting the conversation and looking where you can. Is it about just accommodating flexible pickup and drop-off schedules? Is it about providing backup care? We teamed up with Vivy to do that at theSkimm, and that's been something where we actually have a bank of ours in case your regular child care is inaccessible that day.

I think it's starting with showing your intent, looking at your existing budget, looking at how your workforce has changed, and what do you need to do to support them. I think, also, for employees, be a partner in that. Be a partner in trying to figure out what you can do with the existing pool you have or show the return of, okay, if we put two percent more in this budget a

year, that could take away from recruiting fees because we think it will have this impact on retention. I think those are the arguments that you really have to have in order to make the case at the end of the day.

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FT: Show the financial case.

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DW: Yes.

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FT: Tell us about some of theSkimm's initiatives internally on this front and how you've been working with your own employees to create a more feasible work environment for parent employees.

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DW: Yes. So as I said, we teamed up with Vivy to give access to a bank of child care provider hours if your regular child care is inaccessible. We definitely have hybrid and flexible work policies. We did increase our family leave plan as a result of our #ShowUsYourLeave policy, which had a similar eye on using data around parental leave.

I can tell you, as a working mom myself, the biggest thing that I appreciate about our workforce is that these are things that are openly discussed and talked about, and it is always a conversation about how we can best support each other. That has looked different in different times. When I think back to what our workforce looked like five days in person before the pandemic, I find immense value in working together in the same place, in seeing each other.

At the same time, as someone who has two little kids and I'm lucky enough to have consistent child care and be able to afford it, I still feel pulled. So how can we make sure to look at how we

work provide an understanding that there is going to be flexibility because everyone's going to need it at some point in time?

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FT: Switching gears a little to the 2024 election year, I know theSkimm has done a lot of work in previous years, looking at the policy issues that women primarily care about. What is on, you think, women voters' minds in 2024? What are they going to prioritizing as they head to the polls?

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DW: It's a great question, and I really can't wait to dive more into it. I think as we saw in the midterms, clearly, the jobs decision has had residual effects. We've seen that at the state level, and I think that that is going to continue to be part of the conversation. I also think that inflation is something that our audience, as I said, like they're trying to afford things like child care, things like having a family. So as these things outpace what their cost of living is, I think that is certainly also going to be in the equation.

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FT: Danielle Weisberg, thank you so much. Again, we'll put the links to all of the important resources you talked about in our show notes. I hope you have a great rest of your year and looking forward to more collaborations with theSkimm in 2024.

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DW: Farnoosh, thank you so much.

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FT: Thanks so much to Danielle for joining us. Be sure to check our show notes, one, for the link to take the survey about what you want to learn more about in 2024 and how I can help you. At the end, be sure to leave your name and address if you'd like to enter to win a free copy of *A Healthy State of Panic*. We've got all the links to those useful resources Danielle and her team have created at theSkimm to help you convince your employers to support you and so many people, and in the process, probably make more money. You being able to stay at your job is not just good for you. It's good for everybody. Let's not forget that. I'll see you back here on Wednesday. I hope your day is So Money.

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