



MELISSA MAHONEY AND MOLLIE GORDON

THE NEXT GENERATION

Meanwhile, Melissa Mahoney, an associate professor of economics at UNC Asheville, and Mollie Gordon, a UNCA graduate, zeroed in on the lack of affordable child care and low pay for child care workers in a July 12 commentary.

“It’s no secret that child care has long been too expensive and hard to find, and without policy intervention, this situation will only continue to worsen,” they wrote. “To give Asheville families the support they need, the state legislature must prioritize tackling the multifaceted weaknesses in the child care labor market.”

Concerns around public education also rallied readers. In an Aug. 30 letter, Asheville reader Peggy Crowe commented on an *Xpress* article about the legislature’s intent (later carried out) to expand eligibility for school vouchers. “I am exceedingly concerned about the national trend toward school vouchers,” wrote Crowe. “While the playing field appears to be leveled, it is actually subsidizing students already enrolled in expensive private schools, while draining the funding of public schools.”



KARIM OLEACHEA

TAKING STOCK OF PLASTICS

Readers also took up the topic of how best to reduce plastic pollution. As Asheville considered banning single-use plastics, letter writer Meiling Dai of Asheville urged another tack in a May 17 letter: “The solution, to my

mind, is to educate the public about the harm that single-use plastic bags can inflict on the environment, not to ban the use of these bags through legislation.”

Meanwhile, Karim Oleachea, deputy director of strategy and communications for MountainTrue, laid out the nonprofit’s proposed plastic-bag ban in a Sept. 13 commentary prior to a Buncombe County Board of Commissioners meeting.

“Buncombe County residents use approximately 132.4 million plastic shopping bags annually,” wrote Oleachea. “On balance, our ordinance would significantly reduce the amount of pollution, waste and greenhouse gases created to help county residents carry their groceries out of the store.”

Yet before the commissioners could even consider a ban, the state legislature took the option off the table by adding language to the state budget barring cities and counties from regulating plastic bags.



RICHARD KOWNACKI

GIVE KINDNESS A CHANCE

Along with political discourse, readers also contributed illuminating personal accounts, including an Oct. 4 My Story essay from reader Richard Kownacki. In it, the Asheville resident recalled a series of events that started when he took a spill on his mountain bike at The N.C. Arboretum.

“So, it looks like I’m now committed to acts of kindness toward strangers,” wrote Kownacki. “I encourage everyone to give it a try.” ☘



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