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## Opinion: Kamala Harris' pro-family agenda should resonate with anxious Iowans

*This care agenda will not do everything to value and preserve Iowa's rural families, but each makes it easier for those families to maintain their way of life.*

Charles Bruner, Guest columnist

Between 2012 and 2016, Iowa ranked second among states in the percentage of voters who switched from voting for Barack Obama to voting for Donald Trump. Almost all this shift came in Iowa's rural and small-town counties, where one in five voters changed their vote. That change persisted in 2020 and extended down ballot to Iowa legislative and county races.

Many of these voters represent white, working-class, husband-and-wife families. They may think of themselves as traditional families, where the husband is the primary breadwinner and the wife the household manager and caregiver to their children. For many, economics has required that the wife work to supplement the family's income. Many value family, faith, and love of country as American values they want politicians to recognize and uphold.

It is easy to see why these families feel stressed about the pressures upon them and anxious about what the future holds for their children and way of life. When Donald Trump says, "Make America great again," he also is saying to them, "Make my way of life valued again." Gov. Kim Reynolds speaks of the Republican Party as the party that believes "parents matter" and is leading a "pro-family" revolution to do so — implying that Democrats attack these very values.

While these rural families may feel that government hasn't recognized and is abandoning them, they at least feel Republicans speak to and value them. Behind the rhetoric, however, the specific agenda Trump and MAGA Republicans promote largely is one that stirs culture wars and divides the country into deserving and underserving families.

Although it has not yet received much press attention, Kamala Harris is championing what I see as a pro-child, pro-family, and [pro-caregiving agenda](#) that truly supports these families. Its four elements — expanding the child tax credit, establishing paid family and medical leave, making child care more affordable, and providing home and community-based services to loved ones needing extra care — have broad bipartisan voter support.

This care agenda will not do everything to value and preserve Iowa's rural families, but each makes it easier for those families to maintain their way of life. Expanding the child tax credit means an extra \$170 per month in the bank account for a family with two children, real help to managing the family budget and dealing with inflation. Paid family and medical leave allows parents more opportunities to nurture a newborn or care for a sick family member without jeopardizing their jobs or experiencing financial hardship. Particularly for "sandwich" parents caring for both their children and an aging parent, home- and community-based services provide needed health services and take some of that extra burden and

stress off them. The reality is most families today require two incomes to raise their children; making child care affordable and available ensures they can do that and their children are in good care.

These programs are not exclusively for white, rural, working class families, but that also is their strength. Barack Obama spoke at the Democratic National Convention about having conversations with that uncle or adult sibling with whom one may seem at complete odds in the political realm and working to find more common ground. It may not be easy, but talking about what the care agenda and what it does can be one way to start. After all, it is pro-child and pro-family and reflects American values of faith, family, and love of country and one another.

*Charles Bruner was an Iowa state legislator from 1978 to 1990 and founded and directed the Child and Family Policy Center (now Common Good Iowa) from 1990 to 2015. He is now proprietor of BrunerChildEquity, LLC, consulting with foundations on child and family policy and managing the [www.2020visionforchildren.com](http://www.2020visionforchildren.com) website for VoteKids2024.*

