
Children and the 2026 Congressional Mid-Terms
What Only Grassroots Activists Can Do
Share stories. Connect values. Inform votes.
Wednesday, October 14 • 3:00 p.m. Eastern

Children and the 2026 Congressional Mid-Terms: What Only Grassroots Activists Can Do

FROM SHARED VALUES TO INFORMED VOTES

Diana "Denni" Fishbein, PhD

- Nova Scholar
- Senior Scientist, University of North Carolina
- Part-Time Research Faculty, Penn State University
- President, National Prevention Science Coalition to Improve Lives: **www.npscoalition.org**

2026 Values to Votes Initiative



Begin with what families need to thrive

1 Shared values



Care, opportunity, responsibility, belonging and a fair chance for every child.

2 Public choices



Policies can make it easier, or harder, for families to provide what children need.

3 Trusted voices



Neighbors and colleagues listen when we speak with respect, clarity and credibility.

The aim: inform and invite dialogue, never pressure.

FROM A CONVERSATION TO A DECADE OF ACTION

The Decade of the Child turns shared values into a sustained public agenda for whole-child health and wellbeing.

- **SEE THE WHOLE CHILD** — Connect health, learning, safety, family stability and community conditions.
- **USE WHAT WE KNOW** — Advance prevention science and evidence-informed policy and practice.
- **SUSTAIN THE COMMITMENT** — Make children's wellbeing a visible priority across elections and levels of government.

VALUES → INFORMED CHOICES → DURABLE POLICY



Use your credibility to open a door.

Then make room for conversation.



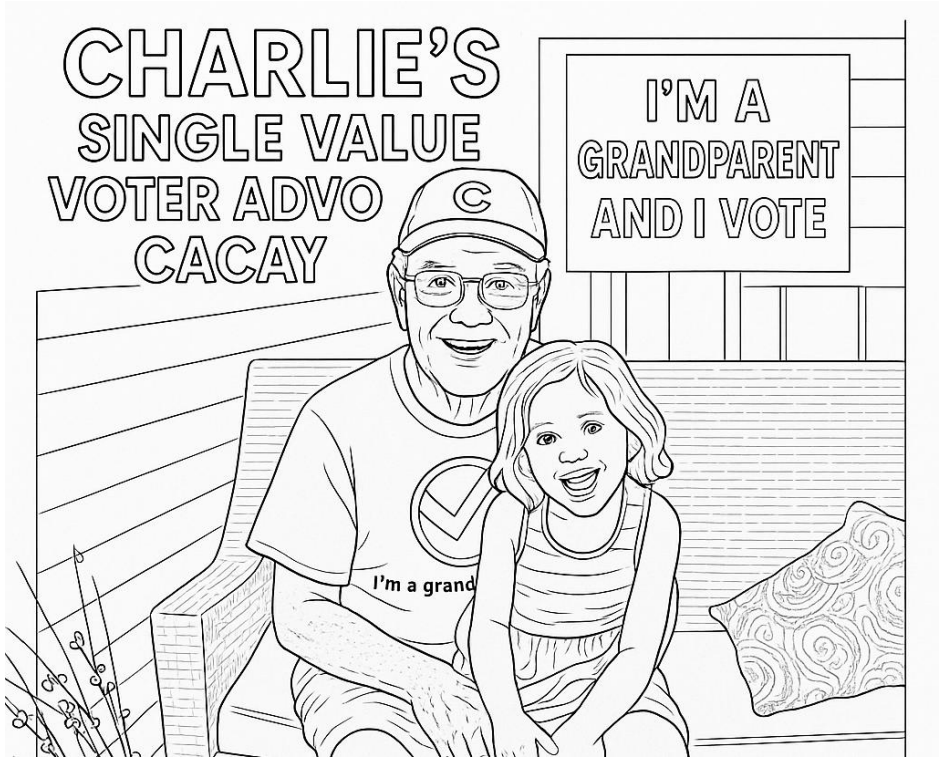
CHARLES BRUNER

Fifty years in child policy, electoral education and advocacy

with Kay Johnson moderating

What shared value will you help turn into an informed choice?

Value-Based Advocacy and Voting – Who I Am and What I Do – Charlie Bruner



HEART

My single value advocacy has a name – my granddaughter Eviana. I want her and all children's futures to be bright.

HEAD

(50 years – politician, academic, policy wonk)

Synthesize research and policy analysis on child and famil policy.

Provide resources and tools and tips for the field.

Encourage 501c3 child and family groups to do electoral education and community building as well as legislative advocacy.

Encourage independent groups doing electoral advocacy t incorporate child and family policy and use value-based narratives.

Encourage philanthropy and contributors to invest in value based child and family electoral advocacy.

Volunteer and speak out when I can contribute.

Rx for Election Anxiety



When I was a young boy and saw scary things in the news, my mother always said, "Look for the helpers. There are always helpers."





We are the electoral helpers!!!

Grassroots Electoral Advocacy Equation

Persuasive Messengers



Persuasive Messages

strong families

public supports

healthy children

Persuadable Voters



= Informed Votes

Good News



Congressional agenda advancing it



Policy narrative conveying it



Candidates who can make it happen



Voters who will elect them



Respected organizations to reinforce it

Congressional Agenda Good News

We have a concrete Congressional policy agenda for children and families.

- Expanded, refundable CTC
- Paid family and medical leave
- Affordable, quality child care
- Expanded health care, including for people with special health needs
- Financing through fair taxation of the wealthiest individuals and most profitable corporations

We have strong support for all elements of this policy agenda.

- Voters
- Respected nonpartisan organizations
- Progressive electoral groups
- Many members and candidates for Congress
- Us

Policy Narrative Good News: There's a Persuasive Family Narrative for this Agenda ... If We Use It.

Family is one of our deepest core values.

"A central value [is] encoded in our DNA: family. The best messaging usually refers to it or unconsciously invokes it."

The American Message Foundation. *How to Talk About Values* (September 2026).

Preserving Family Values

Protecting or promoting a specific family model with specific gender roles

(culture and morality)

Valuing All Families

Supporting all families in their dual breadwinning and childrearing roles

(economic support and caregiving)

Framing/Messaging Good News

This agenda is based upon deeply held values and simple truths

- Strong families are the foundation for a strong America.
- Parents need both income and time to care.
- Raising children costs money.
- Health care must work for the whole family.
- Families need affordable care and early learning.
- Jobs should pay at a level that enables families to raise a family.
- The wealthiest rely upon strong families and should pay their fair share to support them.

Values to Agenda Good News

The framing and narrative leads to the agenda (and how to vote)

- Strong families are our foundation (not about legislating what families should do but how to support them)
- Parents need income and time to care (paid family leave)
- Raising children costs money (expanded child tax credit)
- Health care must work for the whole family (restoring Medicaid and ACA premiums and expanding home and community care)
- Families need affordable child care (child care)
- Jobs should pay at a decent level (minimum wage and paying caregivers and educators better)
- The wealthiest should pay their fair share (ending excessive tax breaks for wealthy and enforcing tax code)

Candidate Good News

There are Congressional Candidates Who Will Vote to Make It Happen

1 . We can encourage voters to look for which Congressional candidates truly support the overall policy agenda (501C3)

2. We can identify specific candidates and endorse them (501c4)



Voter Good News

There are Key Persuadable Voters We Can Reach



Parents with Children

21 percent of electorate
43 percent most persuadable voters

Educators and Caregivers

18 percent of electorate
Most impacted and
Most connected to children and parents





Grandparents

24 percent of electorate
Grandchildren's future their overall top concern

+ Neighbors, colleagues, family, members of groups we belong to
And we might reach and persuade

Why It's a Winner

For parents and grandparents, it's the major part of who they are

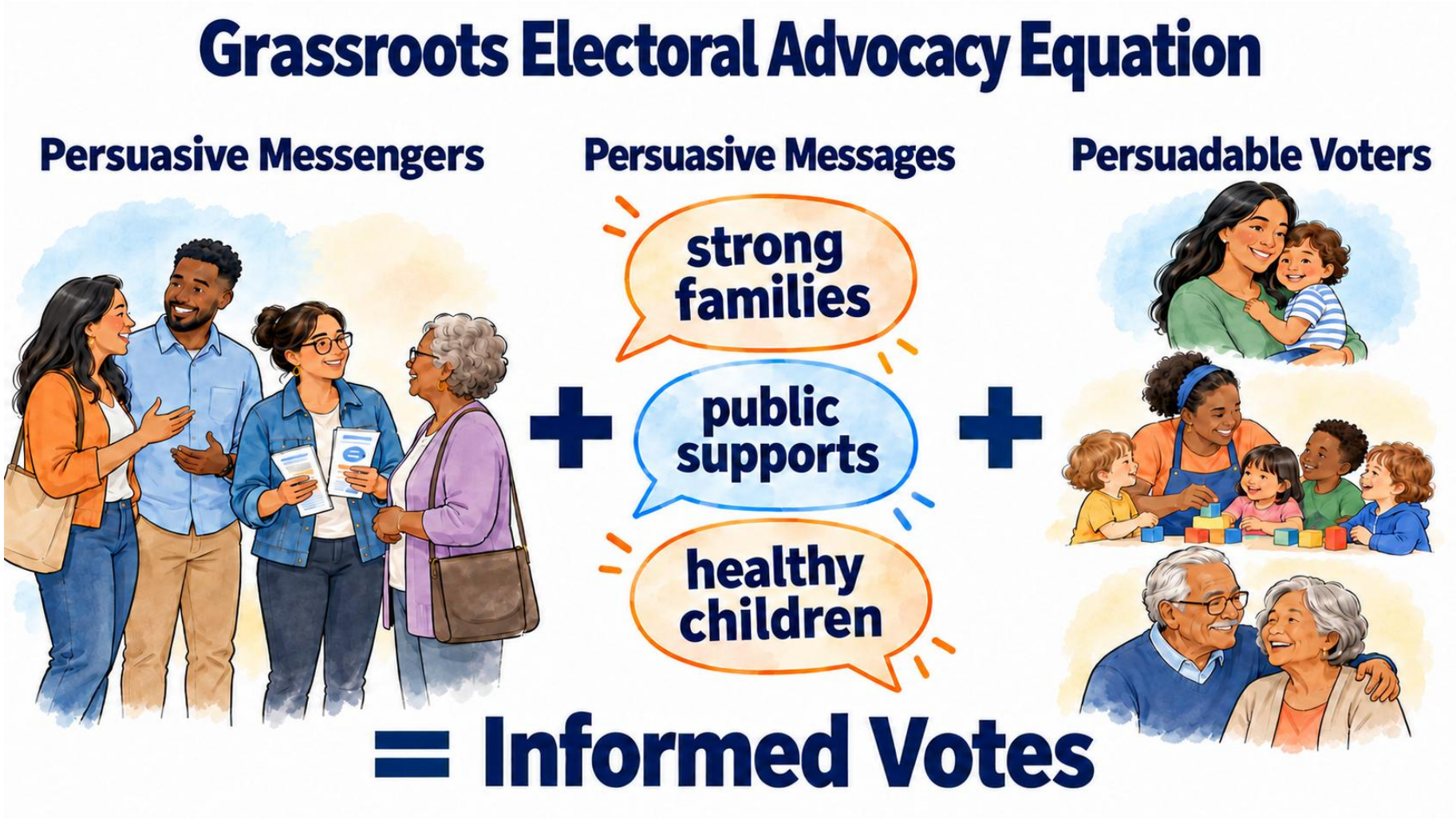
*To what extent are each of these a **BIG** part of your identity?*

	Parents	Grandparents
Being a parent	**88 %**	**73 %**
What you do for work	42 %	22 %
Your gender	37 %	38 %
Your religion	36 %	34 %
Your political views	34 %	56 %
Your race or ethnic background	26 %	28 %
Your economic class	17 %	19 %

•

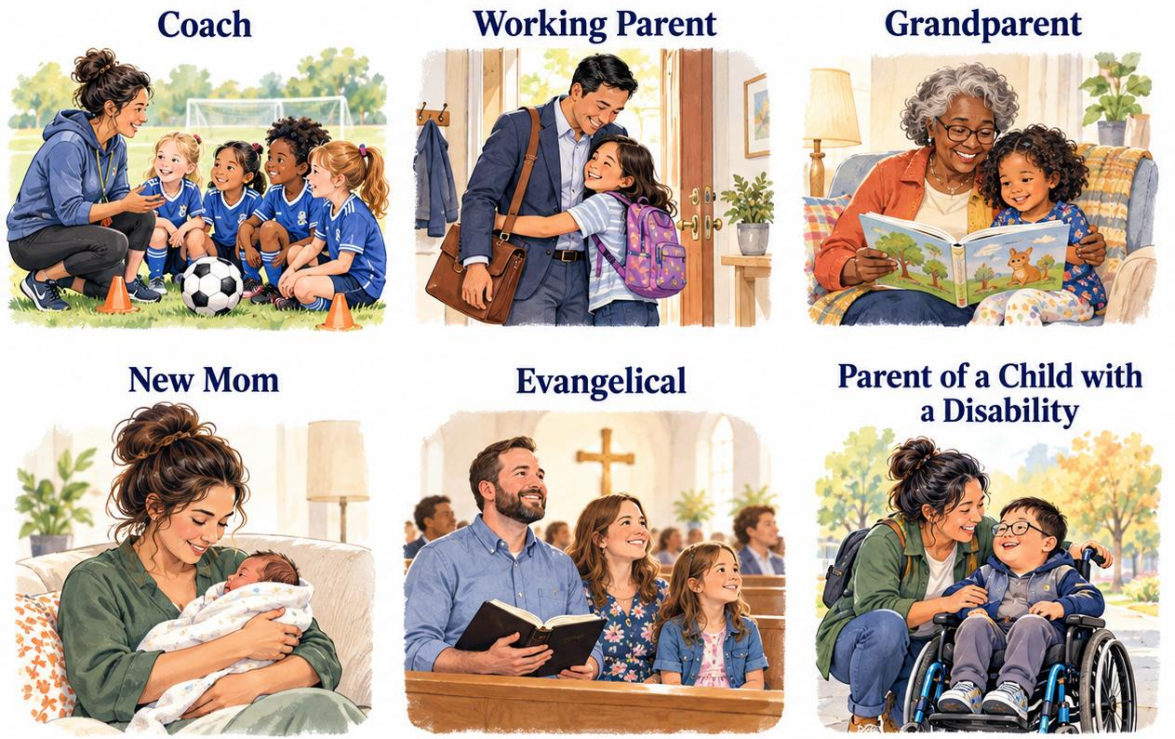
ParentsTogether ACTION

Using the Electoral Advocacy Equation



Persuasive Messenger Good News

We Have Natural Ways to Persuadable Voters



Personal Hat

Civic/Community Hat



Persuasive Messages Good News

We Have Authentic and Personal Messages to Provide

Storytelling and conversations – authentic, from the heart and head, positive and common sense (sometimes turning a current conversation which has turned to politics to a positive tone)

Candidate endorsements and testimony – describing why particular candidate is someone to feel good about and voting for enthusiastically

Social media and public statements – strategically using footprint and bandwidth with others (email posts, LTEs, facebook/social media posts, etc.)

Candidate-Specific Message & Meme

Create your own social media/ postcard/handout/ meme for a candidate you support. This is something I personalized for a candidate and sent with a short message to different people and facebook groups.



Organization Good News

Emphasis Varies But On Board with Entire Agenda

Nonpartisan Policy Advocacy Organizations and Coalitions

First Focus – Families USA – Partnership for America's Children

Respected Policy Organizations from A-Z (American Academy of Pediatrics to Zero-to-Three)

Decade of the Child

Networks Supporting Grassroots Advocacy

ParentsTogether -- MomsRising

501c4 Electoral Advocacy Groups and PACs

Campaign for a Family Friendly Economy – Families Over Billionaires

Charlie Bruner: My Personal Story Telling Message

I’m a single value voter and her name is Eviana. She’s not a Democrat or Republican. She’s much more important – my dance instructor, smile coach, and hiking partner. I’m not voting for candidates on whether they will protect social security and Medicare – but on whether they will ensure Eviana’s and her classmates’ futures are bright.







For More Information

valuestovotes.com

https://valuestovotes.com/October-14-webinar

resources and tools for progressive electoral activists

Bruner … ChildEquity substack

evidenced-based articles and research on advancing child equity and population health through a valuing families agenda

bruner@childequity.org

Information, brainstorming, typing out loud

Values to Votes Guide for Grassroots Champions



Takeaway Messages:

Democracy is not a spectator sport.

Persuadable voters decide elections.

Grassroots champions know who is persuadable.

Persuadable voters are reached through shared values and trusted messengers.

Parents, grandparents, and those in or serving families are most persuadable.