
# Developing a Valuing Families Narrative, Agenda, and Electoral Strategy for the 2026 Congressional Elections

**Charles Bruner, Three-Part Values to Votes Substack Series 2026**

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# WHY: FAMILY VALUES TO VOTES PART ONE: It's About the Economy… Which Means It's Especially About the Family

**Why Progressives Need Their Own "Family Values" Narrative**

Charles Bruner, Jul 02, 2026

> ***This three-part series explores the why, what, and who of developing a values-to-votes electoral strategy centered on families. (The when is now. The where is the 2026 Congressional election.) This first essay describes WHY developing a "valuing families" narrative can reshape the electoral dialogue.***

American politics and political campaigns have revolved around two powerful narratives.

One has been economic. It asks whether government is creating opportunity, prosperity, and security.

The other has been cultural. It asks whether government is protecting America and our values.

Both narratives are deeply connected to families – what they need economically and whether, and how, government values and protects them.

Progressives have generally fought elections on the first narrative and the role government should play in advancing opportunity, prosperity, and security for all ***individuals***. Conservatives have often succeeded with the second, speaking much more directly about ***families*** and family values than about individual voters.

After working for more than fifty years in child and family policy, I have come to believe that progressives must construct and emphasize their own family narrative – not to imitate the right, but to redefine what it means to value families and support those who are raising the next generation. It is a child agenda, but it also is a family agenda.

Children may not vote. Parents do. Grandparents do. Aunts and uncles do. Teachers, child care providers, pediatricians, and others who devote their lives to children do. There is a broad constituency that cares deeply about families and their particular rights, roles, and responsibilities in raising children – and personally recognizes the challenges they face in doing so.

Families are not a special interest. They are the heart of American life. The question is not whether families matter. **The question is what government should do if it truly values families.** *On this, progressives do not have a policy problem. They have a messaging problem.*

The right has answered that question largely through culture. Its “family values” agenda has emphasized protecting one particular vision of family life – a married mother and father, often explicitly Christian, with traditional gender roles – and shielding that family from perceived outside threats. Whether one agrees or disagrees with that vision, it has had tremendous political power because it speaks to something deeply important: People want their families to flourish.

Progressives have often responded by talking about individual policies – child care, paid leave, Medicaid, schools, nutrition assistance, and tax credits. Those policies matter enormously to families. Yet they have too seldom been presented as part of a larger story that speaks to families and how to value them. That larger story is needed to start the dialogue that can get from values to votes.

Families remain the foundation of American society. Government cannot replace families. But government can either help families succeed – or make their jobs much harder. Today’s greatest threats to families are not primarily cultural. They are economic. They are reflected in rising housing costs, health care costs, child care costs, absence of family-sustaining jobs and wages, and the additional demands – on time and on their budgets – families have when they are raising children.

Changes in the economy have placed increasing pressures on families in balancing both breadwinning and caregiving responsibilities. These pressures affect traditional families, blended families, military families, adoptive families, rural families, immigrant families, families headed by single parents, and families where a grandparent is raising a grandchild.

If our elections are to truly value families, people running for public office must address the straightforward question: **What will you do to help families raising the next generation succeed in both their breadwinning and caregiving roles?** That question deserves to become one of the defining questions of the 2026 Congressional elections.

# WHAT: [FAMILY VALUES TO VOTES PART TWO: A Valuing Families Narrative for the 2026 Congressional Elections]

**What Does It Mean to Value Families—and What Should We Insist Congress Do About It?**

Charles Bruner, Jul 08, 2026

Part One of this series made the case for progressives to develop a family values or a Valuing Families agenda.

Such a narrative, however, must do more than appeal to shared values. Ultimately, it must answer a practical question: **If we truly value families, what should we hold Congress and our elected officials accountable for doing, particularly as they write the federal budget?**

Communications research consistently shows people are more open to discussing public policy after first connecting around shared values and a common story. Policies are more persuasive when they are seen as expressions of those values rather than as isolated government programs. The current emphasis upon relational campaigning and storytelling emphasizes the need to initiate discussions with persuadable voters around such shared values and through personal storytelling.

Yet the work does not stop there. At some point, these shared values and this storytelling must lead to defining and agreeing upon policies which support those shared values and voting for candidates who support them.

One useful way to organize that narrative is through the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF). It emphasizes four simple questions effective policy narratives must address:

- What do we value?
- What threatens it?
- What should we do?
- What happens when we succeed?

These four questions provide a natural bridge between values and votes. They also provide a useful framework for thinking about what a valuing families Congressional agenda should include and what voters should hold candidates for Congress accountable for addressing.

No single policy can fully value families. Families face interconnected challenges, and they therefore need a coherent policy agenda rather than a single legislative solution. The NPF provides one way to organize that broader agenda. The insert provides a brief description. Each is then the focus of a more extended discussion.

**A Valuing Families Narrative in Detail**

**What do we value – specifically about families and government's role in supporting them?** Families are the foundation of our society and economy. Nothing is more important to most parents and to society than their role in raising children who are healthy, safe, educated, and prepared to succeed.

Becoming a parent changes people's lives in three important ways.

First, they have new expenses to feed, clothe, house, and care for another family member. Families are a child's first and most important teacher, nurse, safety officer, provider, and guide to the world, but families cannot do these without supportive communities and public systems.

Second, they have additional time responsibilities in caring for the child and nurturing and supporting them. Particularly when their children are young and not yet in school, they simply don't have the same amount of time to devote to earning money or advancing their education and careers.

Third, their own priorities change. Neuroscience tells us that becoming a parent even changes the architecture of the brain. Parents increasingly think in terms of "we" rather than simply "me." Their children's future becomes inseparable from their own.

Government cannot replace families and their primary roles with their children, but families cannot do it alone and without a supportive community. This means a society and government that recognizes and fully supports families' dual roles of maintaining themselves and nurturing the next generation. Valuing families therefore means recognizing and supporting both of parents' essential responsibilities – earning a living and raising the next generation.

**What threatens it – specifically around enabling families to fulfill their dual breadwinning and caregiving roles?** The greatest threats confronting most families today are economic rather than cultural, ones related to changes in the economy that require a rebalancing of policy priorities.

We no longer live in an economy where a single wage (particularly when parents are young and at the beginning of their careers and earnings trajectories) can support them and their families. Most families require more work outside the home than ever before simply to meet basic household needs – but this comes at additional costs to their budgets and demands and stresses on their time.

Affordable, quality child care is highly problematic – there is a fundamental mismatch between what families can afford to pay and what it costs to provide safe and developmentally appropriate care, a disparity the private sector and marketplace won't address and requires government assistance. Housing and health care costs continue to rise while families with children require more of both. Key time with a newborn or young child is more problematic, with work responsibilities that often lack flexibility. The growth in America's economy over the last fifty years has been dramatically advanced by many more mothers coming into the workforce when their children are young, but this has not come without costs to their families.

Over this period and on a bipartisan basis, Congress has responded by expanding child health care coverage, increasing support for child care, and making modest changes in the tax code to recognize family needs. At the same time, these have not been sufficient for many families to meet the increasing demands upon them in their dual breadwinning and caregiving roles.

Further, recent federal tax and budget priorities have exacerbated this in favoring the nation's wealthiest individuals and largest corporations, while reducing investments that strengthen families and communities.

**What should we do – specifically in our roles as voters and Congress**? If the principal challenge facing families is balancing breadwinning and caregiving, public policy should make both easier rather than harder.

Much of that responsibility lies with Congress. Federal policy shapes family economic security through taxes, health coverage, nutrition assistance, child care, paid leave, and other investments that influence whether families can successfully raise children.

Those of us who care about children and families should advocate for Congress to rebalance national priorities toward America's families. While state and local governments play the primary role in financing primary and secondary education, the federal government plays the major role in contributing to economic security, supporting safe housing, providing affordable child health insurance and health care, addressing food and nutrition needs, and supporting child care and preschool.

Congress should make five commitments:

- Make the tax system fair to families with children, including a strengthened and fully refundable Child Tax Credit.
- Make paid family leave available so parents do not have to choose between caring for a new child and earning a paycheck.

- Ensure that child health care is affordable and available and meets both developmental and special health care needs, including preschool experiences so all children start school ready for success.
- Strengthen and expand the care workforce by providing those who deliver these services with compensation and training that reflect the value of their work and create good employment opportunities.
- Finance these investments by ensuring the wealthiest individuals and most profitable corporations pay their fair share.

Congress does not have to start from scratch in doing so; but it must build upon and strengthen the policies and investments that do so without burdening future generations with a debt they cannot pay. We need to insist that candidates for Congress spell out their positions on these issues and that these are presented to voters who most care about them.

**What happens when we succeed – for our families, the children they are raising, our communities and economy, and our future?** The impacts from these investments are multiple.

**Stronger families and healthier children.** Clearly, there are benefits to providing services that support families in both their breadwinning and caregiving roles – in terms of stronger families, families more able to be productive in the workforce, and children are healthier and better educated.

**More employment and a workforce behind the workforce.** The overall economy is based upon a robust private sector and its entrepreneurship in producing goods and services people want and need. Yet that is only part of the economy. Public investments do more than provide services. They also create jobs, strengthen local economies, and help the private sector succeed by producing a healthier and better educated workforce.

**An NPF Valuing Families Narrative—in Brief**

**What do we value?** Families are the foundation of America. Parents – not government – have the primary responsibility for raising children, but they cannot do it alone. They need supportive communities and public institutions and investments that help them succeed in their dual breadwinning and caregiving roles.

**What threatens it?** Today's greatest threats to families are economic and a result of changes in that economy. Rising housing, health care, child care, and food costs make it increasingly difficult to balance breadwinning and caregiving. While today's private sector economy is very productive, it does not provide the jobs and shared prosperity needed for families to fulfill their roles. For most families, it now requires two incomes to meet household budgets, with increased demands upon families that the private sector is not equipped to address. Federal priorities have too often favored concentrated wealth over investments in families.

**What should we do?** Congress should rebalance national priorities by making the tax system fairer for families, strengthening supports for raising children, and investing in the health, education, and care systems families rely upon. Congress can do so through financing such investments by ensuring the wealthiest individuals and most profitable corporations pay their fair share.

**What happens when we succeed?** Stronger families raise healthier, better educated children. Communities gain better jobs, a stronger workforce, broader prosperity, and a brighter future for the next generation.

All of these investments in families contribute to a good economy. In providing these goods and services, the public sector also is creating jobs and their levels of compensation. Too often, public expenditures are seen as a negative when it comes to economic development and good jobs – but they are actually a part of that economy themselves.

**Expanded economic opportunity.** In addition, these investments also expand economic opportunity through the employment they produce and, in the case of child care, how they represent a workforce behind the workforce. When well-financed and providing compensation at levels related to their value and the skills needed to perform them, communities gain millions of good jobs in education, health care, and caregiving.

**Broadly shared prosperity.** Financed by ensuring the wealthiest individuals and most profitable corporations pay their fair share also ensures that the costs of the infrastructure the private sector needs are in place and limits the concentration of wealth. Extreme concentrations of wealth do not contribute to broad economic growth nor greater employment and broad-based prosperity. Investments in families and their economic well-being do.

Simply put, making these investments strengthens families, improves children's opportunities, expands economic opportunity, and creates better jobs across America's communities.

**Conclusion.** None of the policy proposals in the agenda described above are new or pie-in-the-sky. The individual components have already been developed by respected nonpartisan policy organizations and many have been debated – or enacted or partially enacted – in recent Congresses. The appendix provides more detail on this agenda and what will be before the 2027 Congress.

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> The appendix below is intended for readers who want to look in greater depth on the major federal policy choices that underlie a valuing families agenda and their budgetary impacts. It has two parts. **Part A** summarizes the overall policy choices candidates should address. **Part B** drills deeper into the major federal tax and spending provisions involved, together with rough annual budget estimates.

## Appendix: Follow the Money: The Federal Budget Choices Behind a Congressional Valuing Families Budget

**Part A: The Question Congressional Candidates Need to Address.** This Valuing Families economic agenda and budget is not partisan (it is value-based and nonpartisan), even if support for it in Congress may not always be bipartisan. In effect, Congress is at a crossroads in whether to move forward or backward on realizing this family agenda – with Congress today almost evenly split on what to do. Fewer than a handful of races and/or votes in the House and Senate can determine whether there will be support for advancing it in 2027.

Most notably, and which will be discussed in more detail below, the Tax Cut and Jobs Act of 2017 and the One Big Beautiful Bill Act of 2025 redirected resources toward tax cuts for the wealthiest and cut specific services which many families use to support them and their children. The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 went in the other direction, but its provisions were time-limited and not extended. Reviewing and redoing these actions with a valuing families agenda is a core part of developing that agenda.

Ultimately, whether or not members of Congress voted for or against the bills that included such changes in the past, they should speak to what they would do to review and redo them in order to improve responses to families and their needs. The insert provides both the framing context and a basic question to start such a dialogue.

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**Framing Context.** Current policies and the Congressional budget are rigged to the wealthiest and most powerful and we need to change them, particularly in tax policy and enforcement. They don't reflect what voters want nor what families need to raise the next generation to succeed. We need to value families in their breadwinning and caregiving roles, ensuring the tax system is fair to them and paid family leave, affordable and quality child care, and affordable health care are available.

**Candidate Question.** As a member of Congress, what will you do to:

- Review and redo the Tax Cut and Jobs Act and One Big Beautiful Bill Act to take back a major share of the tax breaks directed to the wealthiest individuals and most profitable corporations, including robust tax and anti-trust enforcement to curtail abuse, and
- Use that revenue to increase and make refundable the child tax credit, invest in child care and value its workforce, provide for paid family leave, restore the Medicaid and ACA and SNAP cuts, and expand home and community care?

This obviously is a complex question, and fully addressing it requires getting into multiple issues. The second part of this appendix is for those who want to drill deeper into the specific budget issues before Congress that relate most to families and their children – based upon policies enacted since 2017. They ultimately boil down to whether Congress will make changes to the changes that have been made to the tax code during that period and make investments in both the tax code and in appropriations that specifically support families.

**Part B. Drilling Deeper on the Budget Issues Affecting American Families Before the 2027 Congress**

**Long-Term Trends in Congressional Tax Policy.** Over the last half century, Congress has enacted a number of bills to cut taxes – both to provide "tax relief" to working Americans and to stimulate economic growth through reducing taxes on those holding capital, often through bipartisan support and including both in the same legislation. While a greater share of the benefits of such actions has gone to those holding capital, these actions have been generally popular with voters and the public. The result, as has been emphasized by such nonpartisan organizations as the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, the Institute for Taxation and Economic Development, and Citizens for Tax Justice, has been to make the overall tax system more regressive – placing heavier relative burdens on low- and middle-income taxpayers and reduced ones to wealthier individuals and corporations. Economic growth (in significant measure due to the entry of more women into the workforce) has enabled such actions to be achieved without requiring corresponding cuts to the overall federal budget.

Under Congressional rules, bipartisanship has been important in enacting a federal budget – including requiring increased appropriations to be financed through tax or other offsets (PAYGO) – as sixty votes are needed in the Senate (due to the threat of filibusters) to enact such legislation. The exception is legislation enacted through a process known as "budget reconciliation," with its own rules (limiting what can be considered but also not requiring budget neutrality in taking action).

**Major Changes since 2015.** Over the last decade, the use of budget reconciliation has been dramatically expanded and employed at three separate times to push through legislation without any bipartisan support – twice by Republicans (the Tax Cut and Jobs Act of 2017 and the One Big Beautiful Bill Act of 2025) and once by Democrats (the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021). While the American Rescue Plan Act overall was popular with voters, the Tax Cut and Jobs Act and the One Big Beautiful Bill Ace were both unpopular with voters, the first because of its very large tax cuts to the wealthiest and the second both to expanding on those cuts and providing substantial cuts to government programs and services. In fact, those two pieces of legislation were enacted only with very significant arm-twisting of more moderate Republican members of Congress and majority Congressional opposition to at least some provisions in the legislation.

**Key Partisan Differences in Direction.** Taken together, the Tax Cut and Jobs Act and the One Big Beautiful Bill Act resulted in huge tax cuts for the wealthiest individuals and most profitable corporations, large spending cuts to income supports and safety net services for lower and middle-income households (many working but living paycheck to paycheck) and increases to the national debt. The American Rescue Plan Act largely did the opposite, providing significant tax relief to working families, increasing supports for health care, nutrition, education and other services (particularly to address the impacts of COVID), and offsetting these costs with increased enforcement of tax provisions on the wealthy. Most of the provisions in the American Rescue Plan Act were temporary and have ended, although Democrats came very close to extending them and designed them to be permanent. In the end, each of these omnibus Acts were enacted through a single "up or down" vote, with many members voting for them defending their overall vote while contending they opposed specific provisions.

When Congress convenes in 2027, it will continue to have a responsibility to enact future budgets but will be doing so with many provisions now in place that were essentially enacted on a strict partisan basis but now having a big impact on budgeting, if left as they are. Because of their size, and significance and absence of nonpartisan development, reviewing them and potentially redoing these budget reconciliation actions is important to determining the future direction Congress takes generally, but particularly on family economic policy.

**The Financial Stakes Involved for Families.** Taken together, the Tax Cut and Jobs Act and the One Big Beautiful Bill Act provided around $600 billion annually in tax and tax enforcement reductions, with around $400 billion going to the wealthiest individuals (over $400,000 in annual income or with personal wealth over $10 million) or the most profitable corporations. The latter are through a combination of reduced corporate income tax rates and a variety of new tax preferences and loopholes, often with esoteric names. The One Big Beautiful Bill Act partially offset its revenue reductions by cuts to Medicaid, SNAP, and Affordable Care Act tax credits ($200 billion) and therefore supports to families, while still increasing the federal debt.

Meanwhile, the American Rescue Plan Act financed its actions through increasing tax enforcement within the IRS for high income taxpayers (ended by DOGE and other Republican actions). Its actions included increased premium assistance under the Affordable Care Act (ended by the One Big Beautiful Bill Act), increased investments in child care and home and community-based services, and supports to education, particularly around the federal role in supporting Title I schools and IDEA. Its biggest provisions involved temporarily expanding the Child Tax Credit and making it refundable.

The provisions in these pieces of legislation have major family impacts, yet only a handful of Congressional votes produced then. Table One provides a short description and estimated annual budget impact when fully implemented of the most impactful (drawn from Congressional Budget Office estimates but approximated for annual costs and not as 10-year projections). These enable comparisons in considering financing changes and tradeoffs association in doing so.

**Table One: Estimated Annual Budgetary Impacts of Tax and Spending Changes Related to a Valuing Families Agenda**

| Tax or Spending Provision | Annual Size |
|---|---|
| Tax Provisions Raising Revenue | |
| Take back up to half of the corporate income tax rate cut from 35% to 18% | $60-$100 billion |
| End the 20 percent tax preference for pass-through income over $400,000 | $15-20 billion |
| Tax wealthiest estates ($10 million+), especially their unrealized capital gains | $15-20 billion |
| Reduce expanded tax breaks on corporate expensing and depreciation, R&D, stock options and other special exemption provisions | $60-120 billion |
| Restore tax enforcement provisions for high income and high wealth tax filers | $70-90 billion |
| Family Provisions Requiring Appropriations or Reducing Revenue | |
| Restore most/all of OBBBA cuts - Medicaid, ACA premium credits, and SNAP | $100-150 billion |
| Make refundable and increase the child tax credit to at least $3000 | $60-100 billion |
| Increase child care and preschool investments | $30–40 billion |
| Increase funding for home and community-based services | $20-40 billion |
| Subsidize paid family leave | $5-10 billion |

Everett Dirksen is often cited as saying, “A billion here, a billion there, and pretty soon it adds up to real money.” This table shows that, in terms of real money, these all more than meet that test and deserve debate. For most Americans, actions on these will be more impactful than those made on many of the issues upon which candidates run, particularly those related to family values and cultural issues.

Many of the items on the tax side are complex and the devil is in the details, but that does not make them less important to discuss. The same holds to how those are implemented on the appropriations side. At the same time – and while people and candidates may disagree on the value of each of these provisions – they also ultimately need to be weighed against one another, recognizing that budgets inevitably require trade-offs. There also are other items that could be added to this list as sources of revenue, including a surtax on highest income earners of a tax on billionaires, also with major revenue implications.

# WHO: FAMILY VALUES TO VOTES PART THREE: Actualizing a Valuing Families 2026 Congressional Electoral Campaign Agenda

**Reaching Persuadable Voters with a Chorus of Trusted Messengers**

Charles Bruner, Jul 13, 2026

The 2026 Congressional elections will be a referendum on the President and members of Congress. But the 2026 election also can and should be an election that develops public will and a forward-looking agenda for the country. Nowhere is this more important than what government should do to support families in raising the next generation to succeed. The opportunity exists; we simply have to organize to actualize it. The challenge is not inventing something new; it is connecting and strengthening what already exists.

Part One of this series argued that progressives need a Valuing Families narrative to build public will. Part Two described what that narrative looks like in policy terms. Government can never replace families, but it must support them in the 21st century economy to fulfill these essential roles and there are specific recognized Congressional policies to do so that are up for grabs and will be decided by who we elect.

Part Three addresses the practical question: **How do we make that narrative matter in the 2026 Congressional elections?**

The answer is surprisingly straightforward.

The public cares and voter concerns exist – both in terms of overall voter sentiment and in terms of a core and key constituency of persuadable voters with whom the narrative deeply resonates.

Organizations needed to present this narrative to voters exist. They generally are outside the partisan campaign realm but have credibility with voters and can both present the narrative and explain the importance of its policy components.

The policy agenda has been introduced and is before Congress. In fact, it is precisely in this policy area where Congress plays its primary Constitutional role – establishing the federal budget.

What is missing is the intentional and concerted effort to connect them. Again, the opportunity exists; we have to organize to actualize it.

The following sections provide my iteration of the evidence for each of the above statements and a beginning operational strategy to actualize them. My hope is this encourages those who are key to making it happen (see the Theory of Change at the end) to further flesh out the narrative, engage others in this endeavor, and create the chorus to actualize it.

**1. Voter Support Exists.** Most political polling (by candidates, parties, and political consultants) focuses upon high visibility issues in the news that have attracted controversy and attention – immigration, abortion, gun control, taxes and affordability, social security and Medicare, school vouchers and school choice, and climate change among them. Seldom are there broader questions about children and families.

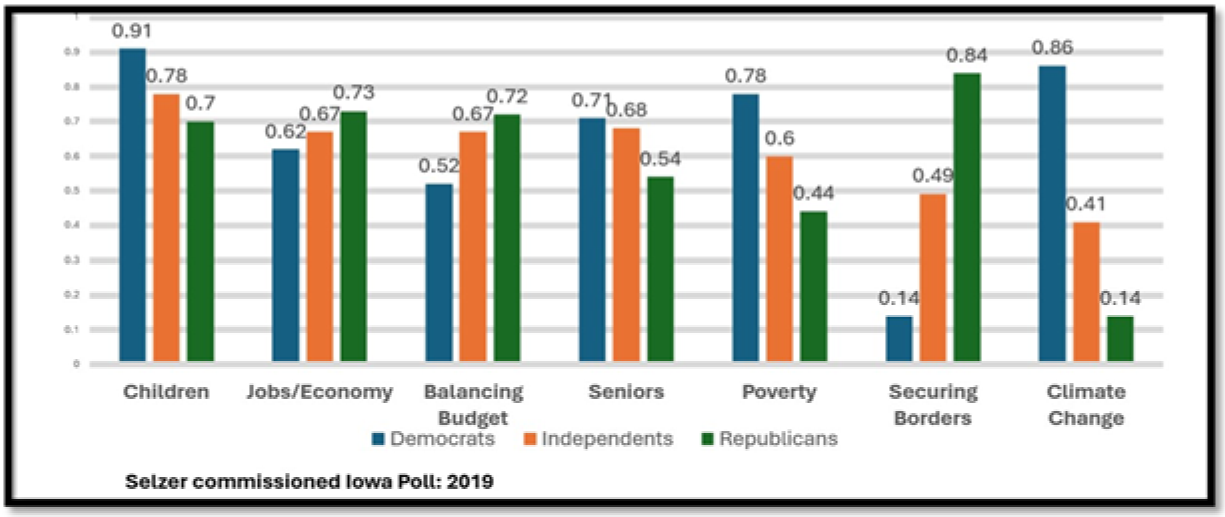
In fact, however, child and family concerns are on voters' minds, and they would like government to do more to address them. Periodic polling over the last decade commissioned by child and family policy organizations has shown strong voter support for investing more in a wide array of child and family services, as well as voters indicating they would be more likely to vote for candidates who support doing so, even when that involves raising taxes to finance them. Expanding the child tax credit, making child care more affordable, financing preschool, expanding child and family health coverage, and providing home-and-community services for special health care needs all poll strongly among all voters and for a majority of voters in both parties. In addition, voters believe the current tax system is rigged to the wealthiest and show strong and bipartisan support for raising taxes on the wealthiest individuals and most powerful corporations, presented as part of a Family Values narrative and set of policies discussed in Part Two.

Of course, this is not translated into how voters vote unless voters see clear differences between candidates on these issues and feel the issues will receive policy attention after the election.

In a 2019 Iowa poll commissioned by the Iowa Child and Family Policy Center and Every Child Matters and at the time of the Presidential caucuses, Selzer & Company focused upon voter views on child and family policy issues. That poll showed the potential for child and family issues to be wedge issues and a game changer in elections.

Chart One provides responses showing where child issues ranked as important in voters' minds compared with other issue areas. Chart One shows children ranked right up at the top, with "jobs and the economy." Further questions also showed that children topped the list when voters were asked to choose their top two or three priorities (29 percent of all voters compared with 22 percent for jobs and the economy) and particularly for those who were most persuadable about the election. Senior voters rated child policy as a more important concern even that senior policy. The conclusion from the Selzer Poll was that child and family policy ***could be*** a game changer, provided there was focus given to it. Voter concerns exist, but translating that into voting behavior requires specific attention as a campaign issue.

**Chart One: Voter Views on Select Issue Areas as a High Voting Priority**

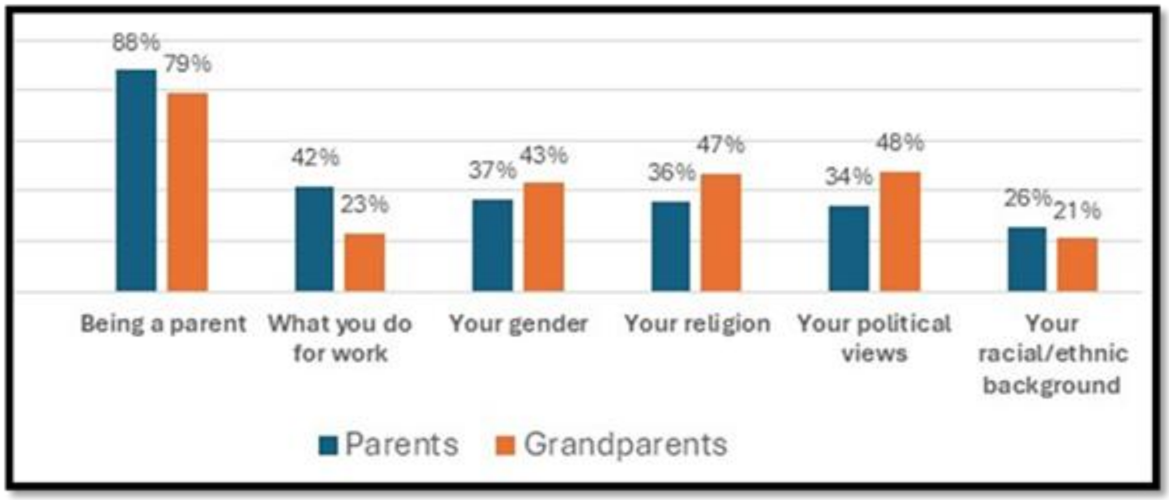



**2. The Most Persuadable Voters Are Receptive.** While much partisan campaigning stresses identifying supporters and then getting them out to vote, the fact is that there is a smaller but very important group of persuadable voters who will ultimately decide many close elections. Many are skeptical of partisan campaigns and turned off and fatigued by the negative partisan messaging that represents a major share of partisan campaign expenditures.

After the 2024 Presidential election, ParentsTogether commissioned a Change Research poll to go into more depth on child and family issues as they related specifically to parent (and grandparent) voters – which showed their particular role as persuadable or swing voters.

As shown in Chart Two, this polling showed, for parents as opposed to nonparents, parenting itself represented a paramount identity value in their lives. For both parents and grandparents, parenting was much more central to how they defined themselves than their job, gender, faith, political views, or race or ethnicity – and it wasn't even close.

**Chart Two: Change Research Poll for ParentsTogether:**
**"To what extent are each of these a big part of your life?"**




This polling also showed that parents were much more likely to have shifted their vote for President between 2020 than non-parents (10 percent compared to 3 percent) and that the reasons for doing so related to the greater strains they experienced in meeting their household budgets and parenting responsibilities. Parents also expressed the most willingness to switch parties in voting for candidates, if those candidates were committed to addressing their top concerns.

Parents with children under eighteen represent over one-fifth of the voting population, and when grandparents and those serving children and families in their jobs (teachers, child care workers, and health practitioners and care providers (who also have a big stake in what government does to invest in families), a majority of all voters have some major personal stake in how government responds to child and family needs. Persuadable voters will decide the 2026 Congressional elections, and those with concerns about children and families and their future include a disproportionate share of those key persuadable voters.

**3. Organizations Advocating for the Policies that Comprise the Narrative Are There.** Presenting a compelling narrative and identifying persuadable constituencies is the foundation for advancing a Valuing Families narrative and agenda. Engaging advocates and messengers to present, educate, and dialogue with that constituency around that narrative is needed to bring it to life.

The remarkable thing is that we do not need to build this infrastructure from scratch. We have more than enough organizations and leaders who can do this, provided there is a concerted effort to coalesce and support them in their different roles in doing so and ensuring they become a powerful chorus for the overall narrative as well as its individual components.

The following organizations illustrate the kind of leadership already present in the field (and represents only those I know and have worked with). This list is neither exhaustive nor intended to imply agreement with every aspect of this series. Rather, it reflects organizations whose work demonstrates that much of the necessary policy, research, and grassroots infrastructure and narrative alignment already exists.

- First Focus and the Human Needs Coalition as managers of the Children's Budget Coalition of over 80 leading Congressional policy advocacy organizations with a comprehensive child and family policy budget agenda fully aligned with the Valuing Families agenda;
- The Partnership for America's Children and its 40 plus state and community child policy advocacy network of member organizations engaged in state-level policy advocacy and select Congressional policy advocacy;
- The Children's Defense Fund, Families USA, the Council for A Strong America, and Save the Children Action Network with additional complementary policy agendas to advance child well-being.
- MomsRising, Parents Together, and Caring Across Generations and their grassroots activist networks of millions of advocates across the country with very similar overall agendas to a Valuing Families agenda;
- The Battleground Alliance, Families Over Billionaires, the Campaign for a Family Friendly Economy, and other independent Congressional electoral advocacy groups with child and family narrative messages and a focus upon relational campaigning;
- The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Citizens for Tax Justice, and the Institute on Taxation and the Economy, providing detailed analyses of the tax impact of federal tax policies and budget actions and who benefits from them; and
- The P-5 Policy Network, the National Center for Infants and Toddlers, the Women's Law Center, the Alliance for Early Success, and other policy advocacy groups from A to Z (American Academy of Pediatrics to Zero to Three) with a particular focus upon the healthy development of young children (birth to five or eight) and a policy agenda that supports them and their families.

In addition, there are literally thousands of respected nonpartisan policy research, practitioner, and advocacy organizations at the community and state levels (including state network members of the first list) with tens of millions of members and grassroots activists – most of which having agendas that are aligned with a Valuing Families narrative and agenda. Most primarily work on state legislative issues, but they also know their elected members of Congress and are recognized by those members. What most do not do now, nor have a funding base to do, is electoral education and advocacy, particularly on Congressional policy issues.

At the same time, they are well-positioned – particularly with the credibility they have and their relationships with office holders and deep knowledge of the political system – to be highly effective in electoral advocacy, as well, Moreover, many are recognized as nonpartisan, value-based, and independent from partisan campaigning, which is particularly important in reaching voters who are fatigued by partisan campaigns and distrustful of their messaging.

In short, the foundation for an organizational and advocacy base to actualize a Valuing Families narrative in Congressional elections exists. There just is not a powerful "big tent" coalition or orchestration to make a Valuing Families Congressional agenda a recognizable and persistent part of the 2026 Congressional elections.

**4. What's Needed Is Concerted and Intentional Organizational Advocacy Based Upon this Narrative.** So, with all these organizations and leaders, why isn't there ample funding already directed to advancing a Valuing Families narrative and ensuring an informed constituency around that narrative and Congressional candidates speaking directly to it?

In 2026, upwards of $10 billion will be expended by candidates, political parties, and political action committees in the Congressional midterms, alone. Yet a majority will be for media during the last weeks of the campaign, a major share of which is negative and contributes to election fatigue and distrust. It may contribute to the 2026 elections being a referendum on the current Congress and Administration, but it is unlikely to point a path to addressing the needs of children and their families and a positive role that government must play in doing so. It mostly will involve messaging that clearly involves promoting one candidate over another.

A few organizations and PACs, like the Movement Voter Project and the Strategic Victory Fund, are directing funding to advocacy groups and organizations to do independent Congressional electoral advocacy, both 501c3 and 501c4, but these are small and often largely in the mobilization space of getting out the vote of underrepresented constituencies. While important work, this also largely does not focus upon more extended engagement with persuadable constituencies and, similar to partisan campaigns, often focuses upon negative messaging.

The nonpartisan, 501c3 policy advocacy organizations which do focus upon child and family issues often are the only sources for information at state capitols and in the halls of Congress – but they have not been supported to extending their work into electoral education. Their focus can and does bring that perspective to issues currently before elected officials (Governors, state legislators, and members of Congress) in their policy deliberations – but not to policy education and advocacy to voters and community leaders around a broader Valuing Families narrative and vision.

There do not to be need huge sums of money to compete at a financing level with partisan campaigns – but there is a need for enough of an infrastructure to voice a Valuing Families narrative at a collective level and provide additional individual bandwidth to lead state and national organizations to do so, including providing time and resources for grassroots dialogue. This requires funders willing to move beyond the more comfortable world of nonpartisan philanthropy focusing upon research, demonstration, and education on child and family policy and into the electoral world of messaging, education, and dialogue.

**5. What Happens When We Succeed.** The purpose of this series is not to propose another organization, coalition, or campaign and a top-down macro-strategy to persuade voters or get them out to vote. Rather, it is to suggest that organizations that already share many common values would benefit from developing a more consistent public narrative during Congressional elections.

I fully expect—and hope—that others will disagree with portions of this paper. They may suggest better language, different priorities, additional organizations, or alternative strategies. That is precisely the point. If this becomes a useful document, it will not be because it remains one person's primary vision. It will be because it gradually becomes embedded in many organizations and their own way of policy narrative and advocacy.

Therefore, it suggests something simple. America already has extraordinary organizations working every day on behalf of children and families. What we have not yet developed is a shared public narrative capable of uniting those efforts during elections. We have not provided the needed (and tiny, contrasted with the overall investments made in campaigns) support those organizations need to share that narrative with their constituencies and voters. If enough trusted organizations begin telling the same story—in their own voices—that narrative can become part of the national conversation. We need to have discussions with those who fund us and those who fund progressive campaigns and candidates about doing so.

A Valuing Families narrative is a potential game changer in both elections and subsequent policy action, but it requires special attention and leadership to get above the other noise in Congressional campaigns. Elections should not only serve as referenda on current politics and policies. They also should create momentum and public will for future courses of action to strengthen society and democracy – and the strong families America needs to do so.

Families are not a special interest. They are America's greatest common interest. Elections should reflect that.

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As emphasized this series is designed to start a dialogue and discussion with those individuals and organizations who are key to actualizing the narrative. If a stronger Valuing Families narrative emerges, it will be because many people improve upon these ideas—not because one person got them right.

A quick synopsis is provided below, followed by the "theory of change" upon which it based.

**The Valuing Families Series – Core Thesis**

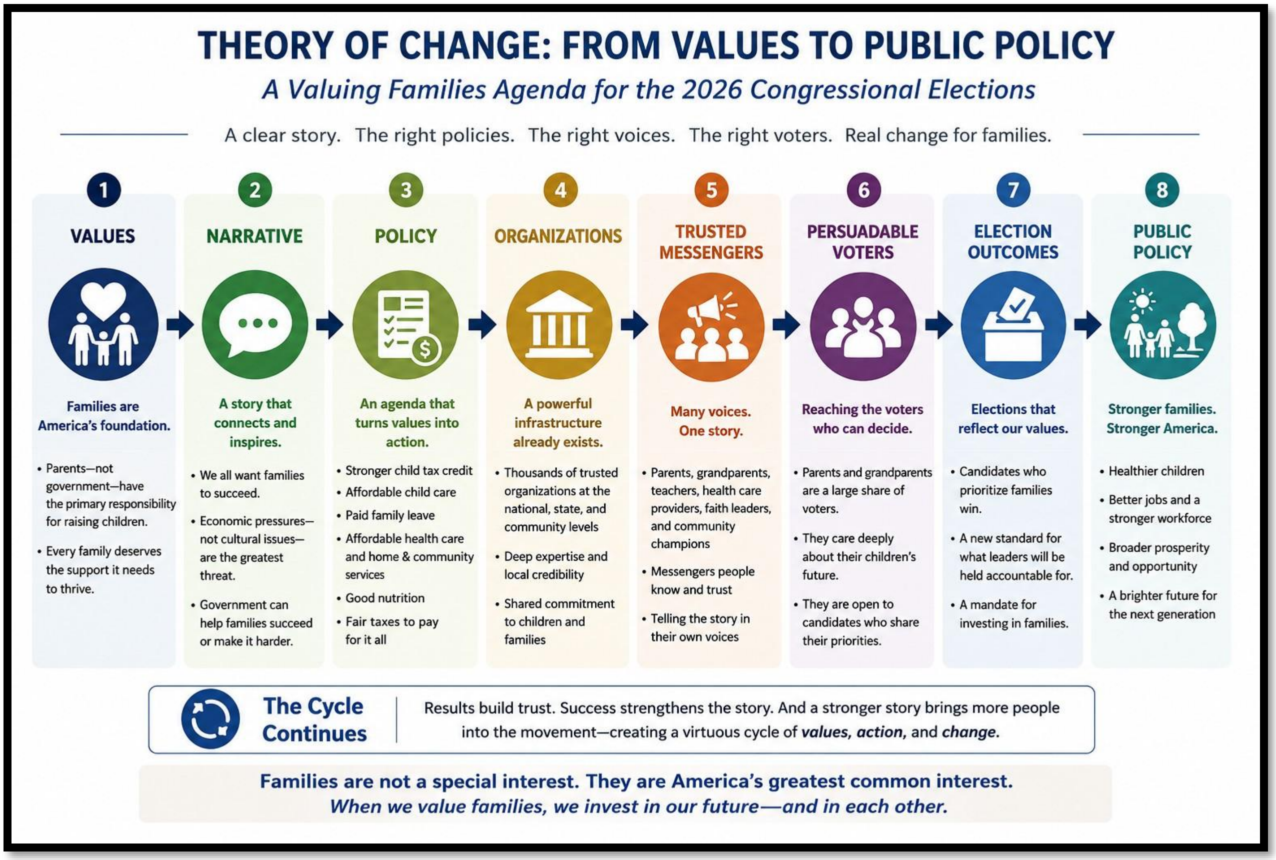
**Part One: Why a new narrative?** Family policies already exist, but they are rarely connected through a common public story. Elections should begin with shared values before moving to policy.

**Part Two: What does that narrative look like?** A Valuing Families narrative connects shared values with a practical Congressional agenda that helps families fulfill both their breadwinning and caregiving responsibilities.

**Part Three: Who can make it real?** The voters, organizations, research, and policy proposals already exist. The remaining challenge is to connect them through trusted messengers who can make family well-being a defining issue in Congressional elections.

**A Valuing Families Narrative Theory of Change**

My "theory of change" also is simple and embedded in Margaret Mead's famous dictum, "Never doubt that a few committed individuals can change the world... indeed, that is the only thing that ever has." For those who are seeking a more linear and operational theory, however, the figure below offers one. Either way, we know enough to act.


THEORY OF CHANGE: FROM VALUES TO PUBLIC POLICY
A Valuing Families Agenda for the 2026 Congressional Elections
A clear story. The right policies. The right voices. The right voters. Real change for families.
1
VALUES
Families are America's foundation.
• Parents—not government—have the primary responsibility for raising children.
• Every family deserves the support it needs to thrive.
2
NARRATIVE
A story that connects and inspires.
• We all want families to succeed.
• Economic pressures—not cultural issues—are the greatest threat.
• Government can help families succeed or make it harder.
3
POLICY
An agenda that turns values into action.
• Stronger child tax credit
• Affordable child care
• Paid family leave
• Affordable health care and home & community services
• Good nutrition
• Fair taxes to pay for it all
4
ORGANIZATIONS
A powerful infrastructure already exists.
• Thousands of trusted organizations at the national, state, and community levels
• Deep expertise and local credibility
• Shared commitment to children and families
5
TRUSTED MESSENGERS
Many voices. One story.
• Parents, grandparents, teachers, health care providers, faith leaders, and community champions
• Messengers people know and trust
• Telling the story in their own voices
6
PERSUADABLE VOTERS
Reaching the voters who can decide.
• Parents and grandparents are a large share of voters.
• They care deeply about their children's future.
• They are open to candidates who share their priorities.
7
ELECTION OUTCOMES
Elections that reflect our values.
• Candidates who prioritize families win.
• A new standard for what leaders will be held accountable for.
• A mandate for investing in families.
8
PUBLIC POLICY
Stronger families. Stronger America.
• Healthier children
• Better jobs and a stronger workforce
• Broader prosperity and opportunity
• A brighter future for the next generation
The Cycle Continues
Results build trust. Success strengthens the story. And a stronger story brings more people into the movement—creating a virtuous cycle of values, action, and change.
Families are not a special interest. They are America's greatest common interest.
When we value families, we invest in our future—and in each other.