

A Compelling Narrative For Grassroots Advocates in Helping Voters Decide on Which Congressional Candidates Support Children and Families

There's a very popular set of Congressional policies for children and families that is receiving very little media attention and coverage, amidst all the campaign rhetoric and messaging. Moreover, this set represents a positive and forward-looking agenda that should inform voters on who to support and that grassroots advocates can speak about with real credibility and passion.

Grassroots advocates can reach voters who are fatigued by and extremely distrustful of the negative campaign barrages going on, and who really want to vote for candidates who do commit to supporting children and families. This narrative starts with broadly shared values among voters (and especially parents and grandparents) and then describe the policies that relate to those values that can be a basis for making one's vote count.

- **Strong families build a strong country.** Government should make it easier—not harder—for families to provide for one another, raise their children, and care for the people they love. Which candidate will make supporting families in Congress a true priority?
- **Parents need both income and time to care.** No parent should have to choose between a paycheck and being there when a child or other family member needs them. Which candidate will make paid family and medical leave a reality for families?
- **Raising children costs money.** Families should not be taxed as though those costs do not exist. Which candidate will actively work for an expanded Child Tax Credit that helps all parents meet basic household needs?
- **Families need affordable care and early learning.** Today, it often takes two incomes to support a family, and parents still don't earn enough to pay for child care that can cost as much as college tuition. For working families and for the economy, government needs to step in. Which [candidate](#) supports affordable, high-quality child care and early education so parents can work and every child can thrive?
- **Health care must work for the whole family.** Employer-based health coverage may provide care for the employee, but it no longer can be expected to cover whole families and particularly children. Government needs to step in to ensure family coverage is affordable. [Which candidate](#) supports restoring Medicaid cuts, extending Affordable Care Act premium assistance, strengthening children's preventive and developmental coverage, and expanding home- and community-based services for people with disabilities and other significant health needs to provide whole family coverage?
- **All jobs should pay at a level that enables full-time work to be at a livable level and offer the opportunity to raise a family.** When people work full-time, they are exercising personal responsibility. The minimum wage needs to be raised dramatically and the value of work in such occupations as child care and direct care much better recognized as an area for public investment. [Which candidate](#) supports raising the minimum wage and making work pay?
- **The wealthiest should pay their fair share.** Working families should not pay more so that the wealthiest individuals and most profitable corporations can pay less. The wealthiest individuals and most profitable corporations benefit most from a strong workforce and rely upon strong families raising the next generation. [Which candidate](#) supports financing investments in families by reversing tax breaks at the top and enforcing the tax laws effectively – so we have a strong overall economy?

A Sample of Some Grassroots From-the-Heart Storytelling Positive Family Messages Supporting Candidates

There are many ways to present this narrative and information, but the best way is from the heart as well as from the head. Often, this starts with one's own personal experience and storytelling. The following are examples of some such messages that are value-based and, when there is a candidate who clearly supports them, powerful in elevating that candidate with other voters.

These could be personalized and adapted for letters-to-the-editor, emails to friends, posts on social media, elevator speeches given at a community forum, or simply the back-pocket ideas for sharing in communication when the time seems to fit.

[COACH] I coach my daughter's 2nd grade soccer team and want her and her teammates to play together, develop skills, and most of all have fun. I frankly hope they don't see the campaign ads that seem to be on constant display; they're so negative and play to people's worst fears. I want to know what candidates are going to do which actually help parents raise their children for a bright future. That's why I am excited about [Candidate X] and her genuine commitment to championing children's issues. Most of all, I want to vote for someone who stands for something, and [X] is the real deal.

[WORKER] I have two essential jobs. The first involves providing for my family through the work I do and career I have. The second is what I do when I get off work and come home. That's family time and above all being there for my children. My mother once said to me, "The key to parenting is to laugh with your children every day," but today's life leaves too many parents with stresses that make that hard. Work demands can compound that. I want my vote to count in making it easier for parents to fulfill both their roles. I'm very excited because, to me, {x} is that candidate. He not only talks the talk, but he walks the walk and will fight for the investments our children and their parents need.

[GRANDPARENT] I'm now a grandparent, and I'm really grateful to those in my parents' and grandparents' generation who worked to create social security and Medicare so I can be secure. There still an important issue for me, but now it's not for me but for my children and especially my grandchildren. Above all, I want my grandparents' future to be bright. My children are great parents but I want my elected officials to make it easier, and not harder, to provide for and raise their children. In today's world, that means creating paid family and medical need and affordable family health care and child care. I'm voting for X not because she will support keeping social security and Medicare viable (which she will), but because she supports investing more in what parents need to raise the next generation.

[WORKER IN A CHILD-SERVING FIELD] I'm a [pediatrician, elementary teacher, child care worker] and I love my job. The only thing that bothers me is that too many of the parents of the children I [care for, teach, care after] struggle and often don't have enough time or resources to care for their children in the way they'd like. Job demands are too heavy and pay too low, there's not enough for the extra costs that raising a child requires, they can't be there when their child is sick or most in need. I wish more people who campaigned for Congress would speak to what they will do to support parents in their critical roles. Fortunately, X is running here and he/she speaks from the head and the heart about what children and their parents need and what Congress must do to ensure they can secure that.

[YOUNG ADULT] It's easy for people my age to be distrustful of politicians and the negative campaigning that goes on doesn't help or really speak to us and what we want. We don't want to be talked down to or thought of as only concerned about money, the cost of housing, or student debt. In fact, we are concerned about our future and it does relate to jobs and the ability to have meaningful careers. It's also about whether we can really afford to raise a family or we really want to bring a child into this world, knowing what is ahead for us. We don't want to be pandered to by politicians; we want candidates who commit to making the future brighter and making it more possible for those who want to be parents to be able to do so. X is my candidate for Congress, not because he is promising my generation some special perks, but because he has a vision for the future that not only will enable me to be successful, but enable the sons and daughters I may have to do so, as well.

[NEW PARENT]. We're over the moon with our new child, but we now have to get down to earth with the realities of our responsibilities. Before [x], we had options on how we used our time and whether we wanted to earn a little extra to meet our needs with a gig job. Our parents say it is the most important and meaningful job we'll ever have, and we want it to be – but that means a lot of changes to be there for our children. Above all, we want to raise our kids according to our faith and values and to support them in what they dream to be – and not have politicians tell us what to do. At the same time, we want those we elect to make it possible to do so – and that does mean paid family leave, affordable child care and health care for our family members, and enough left in our paychecks to provide for the basics, which means a bigger child tax credit. Most candidates aren't talking about these things, but X has practical and concrete proposals to do so. And she speaks from the heart about them.

[EVANGELICAL]. For me, my faith is my guiding star and what I live by. My family comes next and my caring for others third. I work to raise my children in my faith and with Christian values, but I also try to love my neighbor, even if one with different beliefs than mine. I don't want government to tell me what to believe or legislate morality. I want anyone who represents me to value me as a person of faith, but I also want him to make sure that all parents and families can raise their children to give them the best chance of success. To me, means helping those in need and recognizing the extra costs and responsibilities that any parent has. X is a candidate that fits that criteria, for me.

[PARENT OF A CHILD WITH A DISABILITY]. My child is special and I love and value him/her. X, however, has [condition] that makes him/her need extra help. As parents, we and our friends and families most of that, as well as the love that she/he deserves. At the same time, it is not always easy and too many parents in our situation struggle to do so. We know how important it is to make sure that health care is there, including home-and-community based care, and our educational systems respond and include our child. To us, a pro-family agenda includes education services that include our children and additional home-and-community health care where that is needed. It means our being able to be there when she/he really needs it. I'm excited this election about candidate X, who really understands this and supports family and medical leave, health care covering extra home-services, and IDEA, the federal individuals with disabilities education act. So many candidates speak about how Congress is endangering us, but for me candidate X is committed to ensuring that all children have what they need and deserve to live a full life.