

Getting the “Valuing Families” Message Across:

What Candidates, Nonpartisan Organizations, and Grassroots Champions Can Do

Charles Bruner Values to Votes Substack entry, August 10, 2026

The Values to Votes Initiative has outlined a “Valuing Families” substack narrative and Congressional agenda that can be a game changer in the 2026 midterms – **If it receives the attention it deserves.** This includes an expanded and fully refundable child tax credit, paid family leave, affordable child care, and affordable and comprehensive child and family health care that include home-and-community services (see: [A Valuing Families Narrative for the 2026 Elec.pdf](#)). This is not a “pie in the sky” agenda but one that requires only a few changed votes for Congressional enactment.

Political pundits are pointing to the success of some progressive candidates in going directly to the people in their campaigns, and a number of politically progressive independent organizations are emphasizing the importance of relational campaigning and personal storytelling and deep canvassing and conversation with voters. As other substack entries have presented, one of the most powerful storytelling and canvassing and conversations topics is around families and supporting them in both their breadwinning and caregiving roles.

Often, this going to the people (relational campaigning and micro-targeting, in campaign lingo) is focused upon the process of doing so, teaching generic canvassing skills or social media storytelling posting. The content, however, also matters – and for some voters that content can and should be around what Congress should do to make it easier, rather than harder, for families to raise the next generation.

Here are some suggestions for Congressional candidates, nonpartisan child policy advocacy organizations, and grassroots champions on what they can do to make this happen. None of these require a lot, if any, campaign money. They represent **people power**, which truly is **PRICELESS** when it comes to preserving democracy.

Congressional Candidates. The following all require very small budgets and also can actually expand the volunteer base and activity and can more than pay for themselves.

- **Include an issue/priority plank on your website about Valuing Families.** This gives volunteers a clear reference point they can cite when talking with voters, writing letters to the editor (LTEs), or posting on social media.

- **Publish a guest opinion in one of your district's newspapers.** Congressional candidates usually have multiple opportunities for earned media through guest opinions (and a number of local papers they can reach). It can then be linked through social media and shared at meetings and events.
- **Develop a short elevator speech about families.** Even if you do not use it in every speech, you have it ready when you are asked a question.
- **Have a palm card handout on your valuing families (or another name) agenda for distribution.** A concise leave-behind reinforces the message, particularly for site visits or meetings with child- and family-serving or advocacy groups.
- **Create a Valuing Families advisory group with members from across your district.** There are many people who may volunteer to work for you, but some also have nonpartisan credibility and trust in their communities as supporting children and families – pediatricians, home visitors, youth program workers, child care directors, nonprofit service and philanthropic leaders, who can be influential in nonpartisan ways. They also can be great postcard writers to voters in their communities to voters out a buzz in the community on your interests and outreach.
- **Do Listening Sessions, Town Meetings or Forums, or Site Visits on Family Policy.** Candidates will get local press coverage and grassroots engagement, particularly when they draw upon activists and leaders in the community to help, testify, or moderate (another role for advisory committee members). These can be around a visit to a child care center, a community health center clinic, or a parenting program located at a faith community. They can be sponsored by a local group of grassroots leaders with different roles and backgrounds in supporting families. They reinforce the candidate's genuine commitment to families and offer avenues for further volunteer efforts – both formal and informal – that engage and influence voters.

Why It's Important. Parents represent 21 percent of the voting public but 44 percent of those who switched their Presidential vote between 2020 and 2024. Further, parents not only vote their pocketbook but they vote their children's future. In addition, grandparents and those providing child care, health services, and other care for children represent another 30 percent of voters who are particularly receptive to candidates who speak out for families and those who support them.

Nonpartisan 501(c)(3) Child Policy Advocacy Organizations.

Particularly as many persuadable voters have become fatigued by partisan campaigns and skeptical of politicians and government acting in the public interest, they will be informed and influenced in their voting decisions when they get information from people and organizations they respect.

- **Create a Coalition of Organizations Calling Attention to Children and Families in the 2026 Elections.** There is strength in numbers and every state has a number of respected 501c3 organizations that advocate for agendas closely aligned with supporting families. These include overall child advocacy organizations (as represented in the Partnership for America's Children network), which often can serve as the lead and convener. They also include more specific groups – chapters of the American Academy of Pediatrics, the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the National Association of Community Action Agencies, and the National Association of Social Workers – along with state education and teachers groups, early childhood providers and advocates, and faith-based or civic organizations.
- **Publicize the Importance to Families and Children of the 2026 Elections.** At any time, the Coalition as a whole or any of its members can write guest opinions to newspapers or other media sources on children and families and the 2026 Congressional elections or hold press conferences or press briefings on the subject. They also can convene a statewide summit or forum (virtual or in person) to discuss these issues and get in more depth on the issues and stakes involved.
- **Call Upon Congressional Candidates to Present their Positions.** The Coalition, or any of its members, can publicly call upon all candidates for Congress to present their platforms on children and families. Depending upon time and resources, this can go further to seeking and then publicizing their responses to a survey questionnaire or inviting them to participate in meetings with advocates or as part of community forums.
- **Sharing updates and information with members.** Many organizations have members or a key contact list that they communicate through newsletters, social media posts, and e-blasts. Using these to provide Congressional electoral information can help ensure that members feel connected and up-to-date and informed.
- **Create Resources for Easy Use by Grassroots Advocates in Speaking Up.** Again, the Coalition or any of its members can provide resources so grassroots advocates can raise these issues – including asking candidates to state their views at their events,

hosting neighborhood coffees to discuss these issues, or convening a town hall meeting or forum on these issues. In addition, they can provide resource materials and fact sheets that may be handed out or used by grassroots champions at community meetings and events or simply shared to friends and neighbors in the field. State coalitions also have members throughout the state and often can identify people at the local level to participate in grassroots forums or events.

Why It's Important: A handful of votes in both the U.S. House and Senate will determine whether the valuing families agenda that is aligned with so many nonpartisan policy advocacy organizations will move forward in Congress. The nonpartisan child policy advocacy community is absolutely the best messenger and orchestrator for the presentation of a valuing families narrative and the attention and dialogue around it needed to influence voters and energize candidates. Sometimes, the best electoral advocacy is achieved through nonpartisan, 501(c)3 actions – and this is critical not only to getting the message across but also ensuring that, post-election, policies stay on target in advancing the agenda behind the message.

Grassroots Champions. One of the most powerful things grassroots champions can do is engage people in their own networks and make them aware of what is at stake for children and families in the election. Personal contact from trusted and respected people is among the most important ways to engage and influence persuadable voters. At the same time, grassroots champions do not have to do it alone – and they can and should draw upon the work of statewide organizations and coalitions in doing so.

- **Talk with candidates.** If grassroots champions already have connections with Congressional candidates, they can use those to encourage those candidates to speak out and present their positions on child and family issues. When candidates have their own events, they can be ready to raise questions or thank candidates for the positions they hold.
- **Get Out the Word.** Grassroots champions can use their “John” or “Jane” Hancock on LTEs or in social media posts in whatever way they are comfortable– emphasizing the importance of voting for children and families, stating support for a particular candidate because of their positions, or sharing the differences between candidates on these issues.
- **Be the influencer you are.** It may be friends, neighbors, co-workers, or fellow board members on local boards and committees, but grassroots champions know people

who share their views or would be affected by Congressional actions setting child and family policy. Reaching them—through kitchen-table conversations, email, social media, or whatever feels most natural—is key to ensuring they are better informed. This is especially powerful when it involves storytelling, invites responses, and creates genuine dialogue.

Why It's Important. In today's polarized political world, often exacerbated by partisan campaigning, many voters experience election fatigue and don't trust candidates, parties, or the ability of government to support them. They want reasons to vote for candidates that will advance agendas they consider important, and they look toward those they respect and know in their communities for guidance. Grassroots advocacy, messaging, and dialogue are key to informing voters around these key policy issues.

Getting Started. For the past decade, I have probably been a broken record in trying to make this case. I have found that candidates often are being instructed by their parties and political consultants not to do so and going “off message” and risk securing the financing they need. I have found nonpartisan child policy organizations to be willing and interested, but with a very limited bandwidth for such activities, particularly when their primary focus is upon state and not federal issues. I have found grassroots champions eager to do something and committed to a valuing families agenda but not knowing where to start, without candidates pushing the agenda, public dialogue about it, or help in making the case when conversations turn to substantive agendas. I see, however, signs that this is changing. Winston Churchill once said, “Americans have a great tradition for doing the right thing, after they have explored all other options.” To my mind, this is one of the right things to do to preserve democracy.

I also recognize that this particular article comes late in the 2026 electoral season – I often argue that the most effective relational campaigning is when there is not the harsh and ubiquitous political noise of post-Labor Day messaging and partisan campaigning. But I also take it to heart that “it is not when you start, but whether you start.” It may be late in the 2026 electoral season, but this is not a one-and-done effort.

And that little bit of money for increasing the bandwidth of nonpartisan electoral education can make a difference. I still give to candidates, but I expend most of my political contributions to policy advocacy in the nonpartisan realm. Let me know what you think.