

Mobilizing Support for Child Care: Five Key Messages

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Introduction

Financing child care has been on the nation’s political agenda for over three decades. In the course of this lengthy debate proponents and opponents of government funding for early care programs have each framed the policy discussion from multiple perspectives. At its core, the debate centers on whether child care is a public good or a private responsibility. Advocates’ demands for public funds to pay for early care are based on assertions that child care strengthens families and supports our youngest citizens. Countering these arguments, opponents underscore that having children is a private decision that leaves parents, not taxpayers, responsible for paying for child care.

These broad philosophical themes are often conveyed in more tailored messages highlighting specific negative or positive consequences of funding early care and education programs. Advocates focus on the child, pointing to research showing that early learning programs help children become more productive citizens: on the other hand opponents claim experts exaggerate research findings: if parents don’t do their job, early learning programs won’t make any difference. Opponents focus on family values, lamenting parents’ failure to put their children’s needs ahead of their own careers or materialist desires; advocates counter by stressing the need to subsidize child care because middle-class families can no longer survive on one paycheck.

Ultimately, the degree to which Americans view child care as a public good is measured by their willingness to use tax dollars to pay for the early care of other people’s children. While a large body of existing public opinion research reveals that the public is sympathetic to many of the values-based arguments being made by both proponents and opponents of publicly financed child care,¹ current surveys also find that whatever values the public brings to this debate, 73% of parents of young children and 65% of all adults support government financial assistance to help families pay for quality child care,² 66% favor using public money to fund high-quality, voluntary pre-

¹ “Necessary Compromises: How Parents, Employers and Children’s Advocates View Child Care Today” by Public Agenda. Nationwide telephone survey of 815 parents of children 5 years old or under, as well as 444 parents of children 6 to 17 and 214 adults who are not parents. Conducted between June 1 and June 15, 2000. “What Grown Ups Understand About Child Development,” sponsored by Civitas, Zero to Three and the Brio Corporation, conducted by DYG, Inc. 3000 adults nationwide, including 1066 parents of children aged newborn through six. June 12 – July 5, 2000. “Top Ten Points Illuminating Voter’s Position on Child Care” EDK Associates Inc. Nationwide random-digit-dialed survey of 1200 registered voters. Conducted June 23–27, 1999.

² “What Grown Ups Understand About Child Development,” sponsored by Civitas, Zero to Three and the Brio Corporation, conducted by DYG, Inc.

school programs for 3 and 4 year olds,³ and 71% insist that child care financing be a central component of welfare reform legislation.⁴

Building on these past findings, the Berkeley Media Studies Group commissioned Ethel Klein of EDK Associates Inc, a New York City-based public opinion research firm, to conduct additional research determining the extent of political support and opposition for financing early care and the values that shape these political judgments. The survey was designed to simulate the public debate so that participants heard a variety of competing views before they were asked about their policy preferences. Respondents were read a series of eight paired statements. Each pair posed two competing arguments, one in favor of publicly financing child care and the other opposed. After hearing each set of paired statements respondents were asked to choose which statement came closer to their view. For example, to address the broad ideological question of private versus public responsibility, voters were asked which of the following statements comes closer to their point of view:

Government can help strengthen family values by providing high quality child care for families.

or

Having children is a private decision. Parents need to take responsibility for that decision including paying for child care. Taxpayers do not have a responsibility to ensure access to high quality, affordable child care to every child.

The political importance of early learning programs in promoting child development was ascertained by asking participants to select one of the following statements:

Early care and education programs are an investment in our community's future because they promote basic social skills, values and learning that leads children to become productive citizens.

or

Experts exaggerate the importance of early learning programs; there are plenty of children who did not go to quality child care and grew up to be successful adults.

These choices help us understand how the public aligns with the different values-based frames that define the current debate.

³ Market Strategies national survey of 803 adults fielded June 4–6, 2002. An earlier survey of 3,230 voters conducted by Peter Hart Research between November 29–December 13, 2001 for the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) found 64% strongly support the state government providing and financing support for preschool programs so that all parents who want to can afford to enroll their children.

⁴ Nationwide random-digit-dialed survey of 801 registered voters conducted by Peter Hart Research for the National Campaign for Jobs and Income Support. Conducted March 19–21, 2002.

Having heard the debate through this series of paired counterstatements, respondents were then asked their positions on child care related politics and policy. The electoral significance of people's views on child care was determined by asking participants if they would be more likely to vote for a candidate, less likely to choose that candidate, or would it make no difference in how they voted if they learned he or she was in favor of helping all families meet child care expenses and improving the quality of existing child care services. Policy support and willingness to pay for these services was measured by whether voters would strongly favor, favor, oppose, or strongly oppose legislation that called for billions of dollars in child care expenditures in order to help all families meet child care expenses, to increase the supply of child care services, and to improve the quality of existing child care services.

Three separate national random-digit-dialed telephone surveys of 500 registered voters (total N=1500) were conducted, each testing different competing frames of the child care debate. In all three surveys, voters were read values-based statements presenting the viewpoint of one side and then the counterargument in response. In two of the surveys, policy questions were phrased with different options to assess whether financing child care had a differential impact on a congressional as compared to a gubernatorial race. Follow-up questions comparing the difference in support for legislation calling for \$10 billion dollars in expenditures as compared to \$5 billion dollars explored the potential impact of the cost of programs on support for legislation.

Majority of Voters Support Financing Child Care

After taking respondents through a series of opposing views on government funding of child care that allowed them to assess the issue from multiple perspectives, this study finds what others have concluded: A majority of voters support public financing of child care. The polling results underscore that the child care movement does not need to persuade voters about child care, it needs to mobilize supporters and move child care higher up on their political agenda. That's good news. A mobilization campaign seeks to make an issue more salient—that's a task that is more complicated but shorter-term than a persuasion or educational campaign. [See Table 1.]

Willingness to expend billions of dollars to provide access to affordable, quality child care is a strong measure of support for financing early care. Six in ten voters favor a \$10 billion dollar proposal to make quality care affordable (67% favor a \$5 billion dollar package). Voters who favor these large expenditures for child care constitute movement "supporters." Supporters are comprised of two groups. Core supporters are the base of activists and committed public that most movements need in order to form a political constituency. This group recognizes that meeting the country's child care needs is a societal imperative. About one in four voters is a Core supporter because they strongly support public financing. Soft supporters are those who endorse legislative expenditures but are not as ardent in their view. This group sees meeting the country's child care needs as useful. About four in ten voters are Soft supporters.

Challenges facing child care advocates include developing capacity to reinforce and organize its core supporters and to increase the importance of child care among its soft supporters. There is enough popular support for financing child care that the movement does not have to educate or persuade people who currently oppose legislation.

Table 1
Child Care and Political Preferences

Suppose there was a proposal before Congress calling for spending \$10/ \$5 billion dollars in order to help all families meet child care expenses, to increase the supply of child care services, and to improve the quality of existing child care services. Are you inclined to strongly favor, favor, oppose or strongly oppose this proposal?

Support for Legislation	\$10 Billion	\$5 Billion
Strongly Favor	24%	27%
Favor	36	40
Oppose	23	21
Strongly Oppose	17	12

If you were to learn that a candidate for Congress running in your district/ Governor in your state was in favor of helping all families meet child care expenses and to improve the quality of existing child care services would learning this make you more likely to support the candidate, more likely to oppose the candidate or would it make no difference?

Support for a Candidate	Congress	Governor
More likely	46%	54%
No difference	35	34
Less likely	19	12

Demographics of Core Supporters

While the majority of voters in most demographic groups support child care legislation, some segments of the population are more likely to be part of the movement's constituency base. Women are significantly more supportive than men (66% to 54%). People with annual family incomes below \$40,000 are more supportive than those making more than \$40,000 (71% to 52%). Similarly, people under 45 years old are more supportive than those over 45 years of age (71% to 52%). Democrats (76%) and Independents (61%) are more willing to spend large sums for child care than Republicans (43%). Three quarters (76%) of voters whose children attended child care are supportive of public spending compared to 55% of those having never used child care.

Financing child care also matters enough to a significant number of voters that a candidate's position on this issue could influence their vote in upcoming elections. A hypothetical congressional candidate will find that taking a pro-child care position does him or her a lot more good than harm (46% are more likely to support this candidate compared to 19% less likely). The same is true for a gubernatorial candidate (54% more likely to 12% less likely). A third of the electorate does not care enough about child care to have it influence their vote.

Table 2
The Child Care Movement's
Demographic Base

Demographic Group	Total Base	Strong Supporters
Gender		
Men	54%	18%
Women	66	30
Family Income		
<\$20,000	78%	34%
\$20-30,000	65	24
\$30-40,000	71	35
\$40-50,000	58	19
\$50-75,000	50	19
\$75,000 +	51	17
Party Affiliation		
Democrat	76%	38%
Independent	61	37
Republican	43	33
Age		
18-34	78%	24%
35-44	64	34
45-54	56	22
55-64	54	24
65-74	59	22
75 or older	32	6
Child Care Use		
Current	78%	41%
Past	75	27
Never	55	18

Values that Shape Preferences

Public Good Versus Private Responsibility

Child advocates position early care as a social good because it strengthens families and supports children while opponents insist that families have the primary responsibility for providing care to their children. If posed as an either/or choice, the majority of voters (55%) gravitate toward seeing child care as a private decision, saying, in essence, that people should not have children if they cannot afford to pay for them. Only 39% believe that “government needs to support and protect its youngest citizens by ensuring that every child has access to affordable, quality child care.” Similarly, only 39% choose the argument that “government can help strengthen family values by providing high quality child care for families” while 56% opt for parents having to take responsibility for their decision to have children by paying for child care. [See Table 3.]

Table 3
Public or Private Responsibility for Child Care

Government can help strengthen family values by providing high quality child care for families.	
<u>or</u>	
Having children is a private decision. Parents need to take responsibility for that decision including paying for child care. Taxpayers do not have a responsibility to ensure access to high quality, affordable child care to every child.	
Government can help strengthen families	39%
Having children is a private decision	56
Don't know/refused	5

Government needs to support and protect its youngest citizens by ensuring that every child has access to affordable, quality child care.	
<u>or</u>	
Having children is a private decision. Parents need to take responsibility for that decision including paying for child care. Taxpayers do not have a responsibility to ensure access to high quality, affordable child care to every child.	
Support and protect youngest citizens	39%
Having children is a private decision	55
Don't know/refused	6

Given that policy questions consistently show solid support for early care and education programs, this assertion that child care is a parent’s responsibility does not mean there is no political will for financing child care. This seeming contradiction is an example of how Americans often hold conflicting views: some believe that child care is a parent’s responsibility AND that the government needs to help parents by funding child care. Looking only at voters who feel that child care is a private responsibility reveals 40% of this group also favors legislation and 27% say they would be more likely to vote for a pro-child care Congressional candidate. The key lesson is that for these four out of ten Americans, saying having children is a private responsibility does not mean that “We as a society should not fund child care.” [See Table 4.]

Table 4
Many People Who Say Child Care is a Private Responsibility
are not Opposed to Financing Child Care.

Suppose there was a proposal before Congress calling for spending \$10 billion dollars in order to help all families meet child care expenses, to increase the supply of child care services, and to improve the quality of existing child care services. Are you inclined to strongly favor, favor, oppose or strongly oppose this proposal?

	Among those who said Support and Protect Youngest Citizen	Among those who said Having Children Private Decision
Strongly Favor Legislation	47%	9%
Favor Legislation	45	31
Oppose Legislation	8	60

If you were to learn that a candidate for Congress running in your district was in favor of helping all families meet child care expenses and to improve the quality of existing child care services would learning this make you more likely to support the candidate, more likely to oppose the candidate or would it make no difference?

	Among those who said Support and Protect Youngest Citizen	Among those who said Having Children Private Decision
More Likely to Vote For	76%	27%
Less Likely to Vote For	5	28
Will Make No Difference	20	45

Another key lesson is that almost all voters (92%) who say child care is a public good support funding child care. Nearly half of the people choosing this option are Core supporters. These voters are also overwhelmingly (76%) more likely to favor a Congressional candidate who champions child care.

Child care is less central to voters who say funding is a parent's responsibility. Voters who believe child care is a public good, vote that value. In contrast, only 28% of voters asserting it is a private responsibility oppose such a candidate. Moreover, people who say child care is a private responsibility are twice as likely to say a candidate's position on the issue will not make a difference in how they plan to vote (45% to 20%). This underscores that opponents of child care cannot rely on messages of parental responsibility to defeat candidates who campaign in favor of government financing of early care.

Military Model

One of the challenges facing efforts to gain public support for increased government spending is that while people will often support policy goals, they doubt the federal government's capacity to solve the problem. The US military's recent experience with child care gives early care advocates a new way of talking about the issue: the military experience illustrates that child care is good for society and shows that government funding of child care is a workable solution.

Survey participants were informed that the U.S. armed forces serves more than 200,000 children every day at over 300 worldwide locations. In 1989, the Military Child Care Act was enacted by Congress because of the extremely poor condition of child care available to military families. The military initiated new child care staff positions, staff training and compensation and inspection programs. The military child care system is now considered a model for the nation.

After hearing this, people's willingness to say child care is a public responsibility increased from 39% to 49% when framed as "the military experience shows that we can have a high quality child care system if we make the commitment. We should expand the military model to set up a better child care system for the rest of the country." The percentage insisting that taxpayers do not have a responsibility for child care dropped from 56% to 46% saying "extra investments in child care are justified in the case of the military because these men and women are risking their lives for their country. However, tax payers do not have the same responsibility to other children and parents." [See Table 5.]

Voters are even more supportive of expanding the military model to the nation as a whole when the military experience is described as an example of America's ability to succeed, our "can do" spirit when the country commits itself to solving difficult prob-

lems. Framed in this way, 57% of voters opt for the position that “the military experience shows that a big, complicated problem like providing quality child care can be solved if we put our minds to it” while only 33% side with the counter position that taxpayers do not have the same responsibility to children and parents who are not serving in the military.

Table 5
Success of the Military Helps Increase Support for Financing Child Care

The military experience shows that we can have a high quality child care system if we make the commitment. We should expand the military model to set up a better child care system for the rest of the country.	
<u>or</u>	
Extra investments in child care are justified in the case of the military because these men and women are risking their lives for their country. However, tax payers do not have the same responsibility to other children and parents.	
Set up a better child care system for the rest of the country	49%
Military exception, taxpayers not responsible for child care	46
Don't know/refused	5

The military experience shows that a big, complicated problem like providing quality child care can be solved if we put our minds to it.	
<u>or</u>	
Extra investments in child care are justified in the case of the military because these men and women are risking their lives for their country. However, tax payers do not have the same responsibility other children and parents.	
Big, complicated problem care can be solved if we put our minds to it	57%
Military exception, taxpayers not responsible for child care	33
Don't know/refused	10

The military’s successful solution to their child care problems helps voters link their concerns about early care to finding workable policy solutions. Once again we find that the belief that child care is a social good is a more deeply held political position than the assertion that taxpayers are not responsible for child care. People who argue that we should expand the military model to set up a better child care system for the rest of the country translate this judgment into political preferences — 86% support legislation and 69% are more likely to support a Congressional candidate if he or she takes a pro-child care position. Once again nearly a third (36%) of those who say military efforts are exceptions so that taxpayers are not responsible for funding child care still support legislation and 25% endorse pro-child care candidates. [See Table 6.]

Table 6
Many People who say Child Care is a Private Responsibility
are not Opposed to Financing Child Care

Suppose there was a proposal before Congress calling for spending \$10 billion dollars in order to help all families meet child care expenses, to increase the supply of child care services, and to improve the quality of existing child care services. Are you inclined to strongly favor, favor, oppose or strongly oppose this proposal?

	Among those who said Military system for rest of County (49% of Sample)	Among those who said Children Private Responsibility (46% of Sample)
Strongly Favor Legislation	37%	11%
Favor Legislation	49	25
Oppose Legislation	14	44

If you were to learn that a candidate for Congress running in your district was in favor of helping all families meet child care expenses and to improve the quality of existing child care services would learning this make you more likely to support the candidate, more likely to oppose the candidate or would it make no difference?

	Among those who said Military system for rest of County	Among those who said Children Private Decision
More Likely to Vote For	69%	25%
Less Likely to Vote For	8	29
Will Make No Difference	23	46

Child Care is a Public Responsibility

This study repeatedly finds that the child care constituency – voters who favor major expenditures to improve the early care system and say they will reward candidates for championing this cause – bases that support on a belief that child care is a public good, a social responsibility. The public good argument can be made in different ways. This analysis frames the reasons for public responsibility in terms of child care strengthening family values, protecting and supporting our youngest citizens, and expanding on the military’s successful experience to provide quality child care to the rest of the country.

Whether the reason for taking public responsibility for child care is to strengthen families, to support children, or to build on our demonstrated success revamping the military’s child care system, these responses are highly intercorrelated. Each argument fleshes out a core common value. The more reasons people give as to why child care is a public responsibility, the better. Given three opportunities to choose between arguments as to whether child care is a public good or private responsibility— 60% opt for the public good position at least once. Among this group 23% consistently say it is a public good, 19% choose public accountability in two of the three instances and another 18% are persuaded by one of the three arguments (most likely expanding on the military example). Four in ten consistently reject the argument of public good, unwavering in their belief that people who decide to have children have the responsibility to pay for the care of those children. And yet, again, even among this group, about one in four supports candidates who make child care a priority and policies to increase resources for child care.

A willingness to believe that we as a society have a responsibility for the early care of other people’s children is a major threshold that needs to be crossed in order to gain policy support. Most supporters of legislation calling for billions in expenditure for affordable, quality child care pick the public over private responsibility option in at least two of the three statements (63%). Almost all (80%) of Core supporters opt for the public good response at least twice – over half (52%) select the social responsibility argument all three times. Soft supporters also believe that child care is a social good, if somewhat less deeply. A little over half (53%) of Soft supporters pick this option in at least two circumstances, 30% always select the public good position. The “public good” argument needs to be a mantra for the advocacy community in order to mobilize the base. [See Table 7]

Table 7
Social Responsibility for Child Care is a Major Threshold for Constituency Support

# of Public Good Responses Chosen	All Supporters	Core Supporters	Soft Supporters
None	17%	6%	24%
One	20	14	23
Two	25	28	23
Three	38	52	30

Child Care and Child Development

When new research on brain development in the early 1990s documented the accelerated pace of learning taking place in the first five years of a child's life, advocates of early care and education built on this research to emphasize the contribution quality child care makes in providing stimulating, age-appropriate learning environments. Since then advocates stress advantages of providing quality care and the negative consequences of not making these investments. Public opinion studies show that the public now knows the importance of the early years for child development. One such study commissioned by child development experts in 2000 finds that 71% of all adults understand that brain development can be impacted very early on and 76% acknowledge that experiences in the first years of life have a significant impact on abilities that appear much later in children's lives.⁵

Currently the child advocacy community is most likely to promote early care by framing the issue in terms of ensuring that every child enter school ready to succeed. Advocates underscore that "we should take the best advantage of this opportunity to pair young children with well-trained teachers since children are eager to learn in the early years when their brains are rapidly developing" and remind Americans that, "It takes a lot of skill and patience to be creative with children all day long. Well trained teachers are able to engage children when they ask lots of questions and help them learn to find the answers themselves."

Initially, arguments on school readiness focused on cognitive development, stressing verbal and reading skills. More recently, for most voters the importance of social development has come to the fore in response to concerns about parents' inability to discipline children and teach them appropriate social skills.⁶ Adding social develop-

⁵ CIVITAS, op cit.

⁶ CIVITAS op. cit. Public Agenda (1999) *Kids These Days '99: What Americans Really Think About the Next Generation*. NBC News June 1999 (N=1005).

ment to the mix, advocates now argue that “early care and education programs are an investment in our community’s future because they promote basic social skills, values and learning that leads children to become productive citizens.” Expanding the school readiness argument to include the importance of social as well as cognitive skills, experts assert that “when child care is done right, kids benefit by learning how to share, follow directions, and do projects with other children. They profit from a learning environment with set rules and clear limits. Child care helps prepare children for school.”

Opponents respond to the mounting evidence on the importance of the early years to a child’s cognitive and emotional development by negating the role of child care and emphasizing the centrality of family life in preparing children to be productive adults. After all, common sense tells us “if parents won’t do their job, early learning programs won’t make any difference in preparing a child for school.” Opponents also play on the public’s resentment toward experts who “exaggerate the importance of early learning programs; there are plenty of children who did not go to quality child care and grew up to be successful adults.”

When we tested these competing claims, we found that Americans are persuaded that early learning programs can make an important contribution to a child’s development. Virtually six in ten voters said that early investments in promoting social and learning skills lead children to become productive citizens (61%) and that when child care is done right it helps prepare children for school (59%), despite having heard opponents concerns that if parents do not do their job early learning programs will not make a difference or that experts exaggerate the importance of the early years. Part of making sure child care is done right is providing young children with well trained teachers (59%) because it takes a lot of skill and patience to be able to engage children when they ask lots of questions and to help them learn to find answers for themselves (57%). [See Table 8.]

Proponents of child care also believe that failing to finance early care will have disastrous results for society. But voters are less receptive to discussions of negative consequences. They split between 50% acknowledging “children who enter first grade behind on their ability to learn have a hard time catching up” and 44% agreeing, “experts exaggerate the importance of early learning programs.” Only 42% believe that “if America does not make greater investments in quality child care programs to help children now, we will pay far more later in crime, welfare, and other costs,” compared to 53% saying “if parents won’t do their job, early learning programs won’t make a difference” is closer to their point of view. [See Table 8.]

Table 8
Negative Consequences of not Providing Child Care not as Persuasive as
Arguments Stressing Benefits

When child care is done right, children benefit by learning how to share, follow directions, and do projects with other children. They profit from a learning environment with set rules and clear limits. Child care helps prepare children for school.

or

If parents won't do their job, early learning programs won't make any difference in preparing a child for school.

When child care is done right kids benefit	59%
If parents do not do their job	37
Don't know/refused	4

Since children are eager to learn in the early years when their brains are rapidly developing, we should take the best advantage of this opportunity to pair young children with well-trained teachers.

or

Experts exaggerate the importance of early learning programs; there are plenty of children who did not go to quality child care and grew up to be successful adults.

Take advantage of early learning programs	61%
Experts exaggerate	35
Don't know/refused	4

It takes a lot of skill and patience to be creative with children all day long. Well-trained teachers are able to engage children when they ask lots of questions and help them learn to find the answers themselves.

or

If parents won't do their job, early learning programs won't make any difference in preparing a child for school.

It takes patience and skills to help children	57%
If parents do not do their job	40
Don't know/refused	3

Early care and education programs are an investment in our community's future because they promote basic social skills, values and learning that leads children to become productive citizens.

or

Experts exaggerate the importance of early learning programs, there are plenty of children who did not go to quality child care and grew up to be successful adults.

Investment in community's future	58%
Experts exaggerate	38
Don't know/refused	4

While it appears voters are more likely to side with advocates when the positive aspects of early investments are promoted, other research indicates that negative consequences can be very persuasive when delivered by appropriate messengers. For example, in a recent study of support for pre-k programs, only 30% of adults agree that the statement “children who do not participate in pre-kindergarten programs are more likely to have problems in school and to get involved in things like gangs and drugs as they get older” provides a convincing rationale for supporting these programs. In contrast 63% of those same respondents say they are more likely to support increased state funding for pre-kindergarten programs once they learn that “recently, dozens of police chiefs appeared before the state legislature in support of funding pre-kindergarten programs for all children ages three and four whose parents wanted them to attend. The police chiefs testified that these programs are proven to help kids learn to get along with others and succeed in school, so that there are fewer dropouts and less crime in the future.”⁷ Having police chiefs assert the importance of pre-kindergarten programs for reducing crime serves to convince the public of the need to fund early care.

It turns out being convinced that investing in quality child care is valuable to children does not necessarily mean a voter will support pro-child care legislation or candidates if he or she do not already believe that child care is a social good. First, looking at people who agree that when child care is done right children benefit, only 31% of those taking this position strongly support legislation calling for billions of dollars for quality child care (our core support group), while 29% oppose. In contrast, 47% of voters who say government needs to support child care in order to care for its youngest citizens are Core supporters and only 9% oppose. [See Table 9.]

⁷ NIEER op cit.

Table 9
Early Learning Needs Strong Link to Policy Preferences

Suppose there was a proposal before Congress calling for spending \$10/ \$5 billion dollars in order to help all families meet child care expenses, to increase the supply of child care services, and to improve the quality of existing child care services. Are you inclined to strongly favor, favor, oppose or strongly oppose this proposal?

	Support for Legislation Among Voters who Opt for the Statement: When child care is done right, kids benefit by learning how to share, follow directions, and do projects with other children. They profit from a learning environment with set rules and clear limits. Child care helps prepare children for school.	Support for Legislation Among Voters who Opt for the Statement: Government needs to support and protect its youngest citizens by ensuring that every child has access to affordable, quality child care.
	Support for \$10 Billion for Child Care	
Strongly Favor	31%	47%
Favor	40	44
Oppose	29	9

The picture is further complicated by the fact that 75% of voters who say early care programs are a social responsibility also believe that children benefit when child care is done right. We need to disentangle how much of support for financing is due to their concerns about early learning specifically versus their overall belief that child care is a social good. The majority of voters (52%) who believe that child care is a social responsibility and agree that when child care is done right children benefit are strong supporters of spending \$10 billion dollars on financing child care while only 5% oppose. In contrast, only 10% of voters who believe that child care is a parental responsibility and agree that when child care is done right children benefit while the majority (53%) oppose. This demonstrates that it is the belief that child care is a social good that drives legislative support. A recognition that children can benefit from child care adds little to increasing the support base. [See Table 10.]

Table 10
Disentangling Public Good Sentiments and Belief that Children Benefit from Child Care

(% Supporting \$10 Billion In Expenditure For Child Care)

Voters who say that child care is a social responsibility AND agree that when child care is done right, children benefit by learning how to share, follow directions, and do projects with other children.

Strongly favor	52%
Favor	43
Oppose	5

Voters who say child care is a parental responsibility AND agree that when child care is done right, children benefit by learning how to share, follow directions, and do projects with other children.

Strongly favor	10%
Favor	37
Oppose	53

Selling Pre-K

Having succeeded in educating voters about the importance of early care and education for preparing children to be ready to learn, advocates now need to connect that awareness to a public policy agenda. In the past activists have politicized support for child care by making it an electoral issue or a movement-based concern, as was the case in the 1988 election and subsequent efforts to pass the Act for Better Child Care in 1989 and 1990. Currently there is a movement building for passing statewide and national legislation to fund high-quality, voluntary preschool programs for 3 and 4 year olds.

The majority of the public is supportive of public financing of preschool or pre-kindergarten in polls conducted by a major media firm, a public philanthropy, a Republican strategic research firm, and a child advocacy organization. In 1996, 70% of voters favored expanding quality preschool programs for 3 and 4 year olds in the public

schools even if it means taxes will be increased by \$100.⁸ In 1998, the Washington Post reported 64% favored increasing federal funding to states so that all 4-year olds may attend preschool.⁹ A poll for the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) at the end of 2001 found 75% of voters support state government providing funding and financial support so that all parents in the state who want to send their children to a high quality preschool program can afford to do so – 43% strongly supported this. In 2002, Market Strategies, a Republican polling firm, found 67% in favor of using public money to fund high-quality, voluntary preschool programs for 3 and 4 year olds.¹⁰

These studies establish a clear public interest in and willingness to fund universal pre-kindergarten. Some of this support diminishes once voters are reminded of how expensive these programs are and that they are open to three year olds as well as four year olds – 48% chose the statement “When we learned that children start learning at a young age we went from starting children in school at age five instead of age six. Now that we know more it makes sense to give parents the option to start preschool at age three.” Virtually the same number (46%) choose the competing statement “Early care and education programs may be good things but they are very expensive. We cannot afford to provide society with everything people want. There are other, more pressing demands on our tax dollars.” It is impressive that at this early stage in the conversation about pre-k, one in two Americans continues to support legislation even after being told the expense and that pre-K is intended for three year olds, as well as the traditional 4 year olds.

Currently, political strategists are advising advocates to link the public’s appreciation for preschool to their concern about education and support for education reform. Advocates hope to persuade the public that education starts earlier than kindergarten. The public has not made that link as yet. A recent study found that when adults are asked which time period is most important for investing public funds if we want to improve the learning experiences of children, 18% say birth to three and 15% chose four and five year olds, 41% say elementary school, 12% picked middle school, 10% focused on high school and 4% did not know.¹¹

⁸ Tarrance Group and Lake Research for Coalition for America’s children. December 4–8, 1996 (N=2004)

⁹ Washington Post, Kaiser Family Foundation, Harvard University Education Survey May 11–22, 2000 (N=1,225 registered voters).

¹⁰ Market Strategies, national survey of 803 adults conducted June 4–6, 2002.

¹¹ Market Strategies, national survey of 803 adults conducted June 4–6, 2002.

There is considerably more support for early learning programs when these investments are not pitted against traditional K-12 education. When asked which of the following statements better represents their point of view, “When we learned that children start learning at a young age we went from starting children in school at age five instead of age six. Now that we know more it makes sense to give parents the option to start preschool at age three,” or “Given all the problems facing the public school system, we need to spend tax dollars on improving the public education we currently provide in elementary school before we spend money on early education programs for younger children,” only 39% sided in support of universal preschool.¹²

Table 11
The Public Does Not View Pre-K as Part of School Reform

When we learned that children start learning at a young age we went from starting children in school at age five instead of age six. Now that we know more it makes sense to give parents the option to start preschool at age three.

or

Given all the problems facing the public school system. We need to spend tax dollars on improving the public education we currently provide in elementary school before we spend money on early education programs for younger children.

Enroll three year olds in preschool	39%
Focus on public schools	54
Don't know/refused	7

¹² Market Strategies reports similar results in both their national poll on this question and on statewide polling they have done in Illinois.

Some child advocates have expressed concerns about linking preschool funding to reforming the public schools, fearing that peoples’ current disgust with the inadequacy of public education would serve as a reason to oppose spending money on pre-K. That appears not to be the case. When the debate against supporting universal pre-k for three year olds is framed in terms of “Given what a failure the public education system has turned out to be, the last thing we need to do is spend more money on starting kids in that system at an earlier age,” the public favors supporting preschool by a margin of two to one (61% to 35%).

Table 12
The Failings of Public Education Are Not Visited on Pre-K

When we learned that children start learning at a young age we went from starting children in school at age five instead of age six. Now that we know more it makes sense to give parents the option to start preschool at age three.

or

Given what a failure the public education system has turned out to be, the last thing we need to do is spend more money on starting kids in that system at an earlier age.

Option to enroll three year olds in preschool	61%
No sense to spend money on a system that does not work	35
Don't know/refused	4

Putting Children First

While child advocates were promoting the developmental benefits of child care, opponents were expressing deep concerns about declining family values. When the weakened economy of the eighties gave way to rapid economic growth in the nineties and mothers of very young children continued entering the labor force, opponents argued that families could afford to have these mothers stay home. Taking the offense in the mid-1990s, opponents of child care admonished working parents with young children for not making their children their top priority. Child care, according to opponents, undermined family values. Forced to respond, child advocates initially argued that child care helped strengthen family values because most middle-class families could no longer survive on just one paycheck.

Testing these arguments revealed the public divides on the question of whether child care strengthens or undermines family values. Siding with advocates, 47% agree “Government can help strengthen family values by providing high quality child care for families” while 45% opt for opponents’ contention that “Using government money to pay for child care helps to undermine some basic family values we have in this country. Tax dollars should be used to support families where one parent chooses to stay at home to care for young children instead of paying for child care.”

As we have seen before, voters siding with advocates are more likely to hold congruent political views — 82% favor allocating billions of dollars to child care services; 34% are strongly in favor. In contrast, those who take the opponents’ view largely hold this as a social value, not as a policy position. You would expect that people who said money should be spent to help one parent stay home to oppose child care financing legislation, however, the majority (54%) of those who say tax dollars should be used to help one parent stay home actually support a \$5 billion proposal to assure access to affordable, quality child care — 20% strongly favor and 34% favor this legislation — because they do not see child care financing in polarized, ideological terms. [See Table 13.]

Having warned Americans that materialism and feminism threaten children’s well being, opponents continue to champion stay at home mothers and introduce public policies that provide incentives for more women to take this option rather than incentives for using child care.

Too many mothers of young children, according to opponents, are working to support a materialistic lifestyle or promote their careers at the expense of providing the care and attention young children sorely need. Dual income families with young children need to be “parents first.”

Table 13
Family Values and Support for Child Care Legislation

Government can help strengthen family values by providing high quality child care for families.

or

Using government money to pay for child care helps to undermine some basic family values we have in this country. Tax dollars should be used to support families where one parent chooses to stay at home to care for young children instead of paying for child care.

Government can help strengthen families	47%
Government help parent stay home	45
Don't know/refused	8

Suppose there was a proposal before Congress calling for spending \$5 billion dollars in order to help all families meet child care expenses, to increase the supply of child care services, and to improve the quality of existing child care services. Are you inclined to strongly favor, favor, oppose or strongly oppose this proposal?

	Strongly Favor	Favor	Oppose
Government can help strengthen Families	34%	48%	18%
Government help parent stay home	20	34	46

Feminism is only part of the problem for child care opponents. A growing focus on material possessions at the expense of shared quality time with family is also a serious concern. Opponents contend that too many couples with young children are both working because parents are not willing to cut back on their lifestyle in order to give their children the attention they need. Taxpayers should not be rewarding this behavior by paying for child care.

More recent efforts have focused on getting the public to move beyond the “mommy wars” by reminding voters of the reality that the majority of young children are in some form of child care, which means we need to ensure children are provided quality care.

Beyond Mommy Wars

Those opposed to child care wage a two prong attack that underscored parents are failing to “put their children’s needs ahead of their own.” First, they criticize working mothers of young children for putting their career needs ahead of their children’s need for consistent and constant parental (read maternal) care. Challenging working mothers to reevaluate their priorities, they assert that women are entitled to careers but then should not have children if those children are going to be put in child care for 40 hours a week. Government financing of child care should be opposed because it serves to encourage these bad choices.

Table 14
Most Americans Reject Attacks on Working Mothers

Given that most middle-class families can no longer survive on just one paycheck, it is important for government to support child care.

or

Too many mothers of young children are working to promote their careers at the expense of providing their young children the care and attention they really need. We should not be encouraging this by paying for their child care.

Given the economy, government support for early care is necessary	56%
Too many mothers are working to promote their careers	35
Don’t know/refused	9

Too many mothers of young children are working to promote their careers at the expense of providing their young children the care and attention they really need. We should not be encouraging this by paying for their child care.

or

Given that the majority of young children are in some form of child care, we need to ensure that children are provided quality care. When done right, child care promotes language and reading skills, helps kids learn how to get along with others, and helps teach children how to value themselves and others.

Too many mothers are working to promote their careers	27%
Most children are in some form of child care so lets make it work	68
Don’t know/refused	5

Most voters are not willing to wage political war against working mothers. Earlier surveys have documented that adults believe mothers of young children work because they need the money.¹³ Criticizing working mothers with young children helps child care opponents connect with their base by strengthening their opposition to child care legislation, but importantly it does not increase opposition to child care legislation among those who are not already opposed.

Americans are much more likely to believe that a mother's decision to enter the work force is driven by finances rather than career needs. They want to go beyond the "mommy wars." A majority (56%) agree with child advocates that, "Given that most middle-class families can no longer survive on just one paycheck, it is important for government to support child care," while only 35% think "Too many mothers of young children are working to promote their careers at the expense of providing their young children the care and attention they really need. We should not be encouraging this by paying for their child care." Voters are even more likely to favor taking a pragmatic position, 68% acknowledging that since most children are in some form of child care we should do all we can to make that care high-quality care; on the other side, 27% take the more dogmatic position that working mothers are not giving their children the attention they really need. [See Table 14.]

Voters who agree with advocates and reject the "mommy wars" take these values into their political decision-making. Support for child care legislation is very high among both those who say most middle class families could not support themselves on one paycheck (84% favor) and those who take the pragmatic position that most children are in some form of non-parental care so we need to make that care better (76% favor). One in three voters who agree with these statements is a Core supporter. [See Table 15.] One in three voters (36%) who took the position that middle class families cannot no longer survive on one pay check strongly support legislation, as do 31% who took the pragmatic position that most children are in some form of non-parental care so we should ensure that they receive quality care.

Voters who believe working mothers are putting their career needs ahead of their children's welfare are the core constituency for the child care opponents. Over seven out of ten (72%) oppose child care legislation if they reject the pragmatic argument that most children are in some form of care in favor of criticizing mothers of young children for working to promote their careers. Similarly, although not as strong, 56% oppose legislation if they think too many mothers of young children are working to promote their careers rather than agreeing that middle class families need two incomes to survive. Connecting to antifeminist arguments results in noticeably higher opposition to legislation than was found among those who believe child care is a private responsibility (43% opposed).

¹³ Public Agenda Necessary Compromises

Table 15
Mommy Wars Solidifies Support Among Opponent's Base

Position on Legislation Based on Those who Agreed with Statement A Over Statement B

A: Given that most middle-class families can no longer survive on just one paycheck, it is important for government to support child care. [56% of Total]

Strongly Favor	36%
Favor	48
Oppose	16

Position on Legislation Based on Those who Agreed with Statement B Over Statement A

B: Too many mothers of young children are working to promote their careers at the expense of providing their young children the care and attention they really need. We should not be encouraging this by paying for their child care. [35% of Total]

Favor	44%
Oppose	34
Strongly Oppose	22

Historically, child advocates avoided linking providing high quality child care to a defense of feminism. Women's rights advocates have recently reentered the fight for child care legislation. Asserting that equality for women is a core American value, feminists insist that in order to achieve that goal society has to take on greater responsibility for child care. Voters do not object to women wanting careers. Six in ten agree that equality for women is a core American value that requires greater social responsibility for child care, while only 29% argue "women shouldn't have children if they are going to put them in child care for 40 hours a week."

Position on Legislation Based on Those who Agreed with Statement C Over Statement D

C: Given that the majority of young children are in some form of child care, we need to ensure that children are provided quality care. When done right, child care promotes language and reading skills, helps kids learn how to get along with others, and helps teach children how to value themselves and others. [68% of Total]

Strongly Favor	31%
Favor	45
Oppose	24

Position on Legislation Based on Those who Agreed with Statement D Over Statement C [27% of Total]

D: Too many mothers of young children are working to promote their careers at the expense of providing their young children the care and attention they really need. We should not be encouraging this by paying for their child care.

Favor	28%
Oppose	37
Strongly Oppose	35

The real value conflict for most Americans comes in balancing the rights of women with those of children. Studies find that the majority of Americans are not willing to support the rights of women at the expense of the care of children.¹⁴ Earlier polls show that many adults are concerned that while men and women have both gained from women having more rights and freedoms, children are worse off as a consequence. Voters in this study want women to put their role as parent first. Two-thirds (63%) believe that “Women who have children need to reevaluate their priorities to ensure they are parents first” compared to 31% opting for the feminist position that financing child care is critical to promoting gender equality.

¹⁴ When asked which value held greater importance to them “Working for the rights of women or preserving traditional family values?” 29% said the rights of women compared to 65% who choose preserving traditional family values. Post/Kaiser/Harvard nationwide telephone survey conducted August 2 – September 1, 2002 among a nationally representative sample of 2,886 adult respondents.

Anti-materialism

The second prong of the “putting children first frame” is an attack on the assertion that families of young children need two incomes to survive. Opponents argue that parents should curtail their desire for material comfort in order to provide young children with the security of consistent, constant parental care. Too many couples with young children, according to opponents of child care, are both working because parents are not willing to cut back on their lifestyle in order to give their children the attention they need. Taxpayers should not be rewarding this behavior by paying for child care.

Our nation’s infatuation with material well-being is a serious concern for many voters. They don’t believe that women’s career needs shape families’ decisions to have both parents work but they do believe that decision is influenced by the desire to maintain a quality of life based on material comfort. Voters are more likely to agree (54%) with “Too many couples with young children are both working because parents are not willing to cut back on their lifestyle in order to give their children the attention they need. Tax payers should not be rewarding this behavior by paying for child care,” than with the advocates’ contention (42%) that “Given that most middle-class families can no longer survive on just one paycheck, it is important for government to support child care.”

Table 16
Materialistic Values Opposition’s Strongest Argument

Position on Legislation Based on Those who Agreed with Statement A Versus Statement B

A: Given that most middle-class families can no longer survive on just one paycheck, it is important for government to support child care. [42% of Total]

Strongly Favor	43%
Favor	46
Oppose	11

B: Too many couples with young children are both working because parents are not willing to cut back on their lifestyle in order to give their children the attention they need. Tax payers should not be rewarding this behavior by paying for child care. [54% of Total]

Strongly Oppose	27%
Oppose	34
Favor	39

Within the “putting children first” framework, opponents are strongest when they position child care as a symptom of growing materialism. Six in ten voters (61%) who believe materialism, more than economic need, influences parents’ child care decisions oppose child care legislation. Still, nearly four in ten (39%) who lament parents’ focus on material comfort are willing to support child care legislation. Voters who agree with child advocates that parents are working for financial survival rather than material comfort are much more likely to have consistent political views – 89% support legislation. [See Table 16.]

Child care advocates can also effectively challenge charges of materialism with the pragmatic argument that the reality is most children are in some form of child care and that we need to ensure that these children receive quality care. When forced to chose between these two concerns, many more voters side with the pragmatic argument about the prevalence of child care use (69%) than with apprehensions about material comfort (27%). Nine out of ten voters who side with child advocates support legislation. In contrast, only 64% of those who side with child care opponents are against legislation. [See Table 17.]

Table 17
Pragmatism a More Persuasive Argument than Materialism

Position on Legislation Based on Those who Agreed with Statement C Versus Statement D

C: Given that the majority of young children are in some form of child care, we need to ensure that children are provided quality care. When done right, child care promotes language and reading skills, helps kids learn how to get along with others, and helps teach children how to value themselves and others. [69% of Total]

Strongly Favor	33%
Favor	48
Oppose	19

D: Too many couples with young children are both working because parents are not willing to cut back on their lifestyle in order to give their children the attention they need. Tax payers should not be rewarding this behavior by paying for child care. [27% of Total]

Strongly Oppose	28%
Oppose	36
Favor	36

Dimensions of the Debate

The child care debate ranges across many competing values, from championing children to vilifying working mothers, from strengthening families to undermining family values, and from financial security to rampant materialism. Policy support for child care is heavily dependent on the recognition that that society has a responsibility to ensure quality care for America's children. Six out of ten voters have crossed that threshold either because children are our future citizens and they need our support, child care strengthens families or we have the capacity to create a viable, successful child care system in this country. Nine out of ten (94%) people who strongly favor spending \$10 billion on affordable child care (core supporters of the child care movement) and 75% of those who favor this legislation (soft supporters) agreed with a social responsibility message at least once across three paired arguments.

People who value child care as a social good also recognize that children benefit from early care programs and want to take advantage of the developmental growth that takes place during the early years. Most are pragmatic, believing that many middle-class families cannot maintain their lifestyle on one salary and accepting that since most children are in some form of child care, they need to get the benefits of quality care.

The belief that child care is a social responsibility, however, is not the only reason for favoring pro-child care candidates and endorsing legislation. One in four voters who support legislation that allocates billions of dollars of public funds to child care consistently reject the argument that child care is a social responsibility. Pragmatic considerations are the key factors motivating these voters. Pragmatic concerns include: recognition that middle class families can't survive on one pay check, acceptance that most children are in some form of care so it is important that they receive quality care, and an acknowledgement that it makes sense to enroll three year olds in child care to take advantage of children's development and growth.

These assertions are based on exploring which statements lead to a greater willingness to support child care legislation among the forty percent of the electorate who consistently reject all statements arguing for public responsibility. For example, among those who believe child care is a private responsibility, 42% support a \$10 billion dollar expenditure package if they also take the pragmatic view that most children are in some form of care so we need to make sure they benefit from quality care. Few voters who think child care is a private responsibility and reject this pragmatic view favor legislation – 15% support legislation (a 27% difference). [See Table 18.]

This difference in support is based on pragmatic concerns more than valuing early learning per se. Voters were read a similar argument about how children benefit from child care when it is done right that does not begin with the caveat "given that most children are in some form of child care." The early learning argument alone does not have the same motivating effect. A third of voters who consistently say child care is a private responsibility and believe it benefits children support legislation compared to 21% of those who believe early care programs will not work if parents do not do their job – a 12% difference. Another statement that stresses we

should take advantage of children’s eagerness to learn during the early years has even less influence on legislative. For those who believe child care is private, 29% support legislation if they agree that we need to take advantage of children’s eagerness to learn and 24% support legislation if they take the counter position that experts exaggerate the importance of early care – a 5% difference. This means child advocates need to preface their statements about the importance of early learning with the reminder “Given that the majority of young children are in some form of child care, we need to ensure that children are provided quality care.”

Pragmatism helps address opponents’ arguments challenging middle-class materialism. Among voters who believe child care is a private responsibility, people who also believe that most families need two incomes to maintain an adequate standard of living are more likely to favor legislation than those who take the counter position that couples need to cutback on their lifestyles for the good of their children (43% to 25% – 18% difference).

Table 18
Sentiments Motivating Support for \$10 Billion Expenditure
Among Those who Believe Child Care is a Public Good and
Those who Believe Child Care is a Private Responsibility

	Responsibility for Child Care?	
	Private	Public
When child care is done right, children benefit	33%	88%
Parents need to do their job	21	70
Children eager to learn in early years; take advantage	29	85
Experts exaggerate contribution of early learning programs	24	75
Middle-class families can’t survive on one paycheck	43	92
Couples need to cut back on lifestyle	25	65
Pre-K for 3 year olds	39	91
Pre-K too expensive	23	65
Most children in some form of care, done right they benefit	42	86
Mothers value careers over kids, don’t encourage	15	62

Voters who are in the private group consistently said that child care was a private responsibility.

Voters who are in the public group selected the social good perspective at least two out of three times.

Pragmatic arguments also serve to reinforce the child care advocacy base. Voters who believe that child care is a public good — those rejecting the private responsibility argument in at least two or the three statements — have consistently higher level of support for legislation if they also agree with pragmatic assertions be it middle class families need the money, most children are in care so let's provide quality care, or it makes sense to enroll three year olds in pre-kindergarten. For example, voters who believe that child care is a societal responsibility are more supportive of funding if they agree that middle class families need the money than if they select the counter argument expressing concern that families are not willing to cut back on their lifestyle for the sake of their children (92% to 65%). Similarly, given what we know about children's learning capacity, more voters who believe it makes sense to give parents the option to start preschool at age three support legislation than those who say paying for pre-kindergarten is too expensive (91% to 65%).

Five Key Messages

This analysis of how people balance these multiple views reveals advocates should focus on five key messages in order to influence support for child care policies.¹⁵ Each of these arguments addresses a different dimension of the debate.

- 1: Remind voters that providing child care is a public responsibility. Arguing some form of the public good argument such as “Government needs to support and protect its youngest citizens by ensuring that every child has access to affordable, quality child care” builds political support. Six out of ten voters support legislation because they believe children are our future citizens and they need our support, or child care strengthens families or we have the capacity to create a viable, successful child care system in this country. Nine out of ten (94%) of people who strongly favor spending \$10 billion on affordable child care (core supporters of the child care movement) and 75% of those who favor this legislation (soft supporters) agreed with a social responsibility message at least once across three paired arguments.
- 2: Reinforce the general message that child care is a social good with specific mention of the successful experience the military has in developing a quality child care system and the need to expand that model to the rest of the country. The public is encouraged when they learn that “The military experience shows that we can have a high quality child care system if we make the commitment. We should expand the military model to set up a better child care system for the rest of the country.” The “can-do” spirit of the argument “The military experience shows that a big, complicated problem like providing quality child care can be solved if we put our minds to it” also inspires them.
- 3: Underscore the pragmatic needs facing middle-class families. People make the connection that child care strengthens families when they are reminded “Given that most middle-class families can no longer survive on just one paycheck, it is important for government to support child care.” In periods of economic stress, this message could be an increasingly powerful counter to opponents’ lambasting child care as a symptom of a materialistic society that values “things” more than children.
- 4: Press for Pre-K1. Voters know quality child care is a positive experience for children but most people do not translate this understanding to supporting child care policy. One way to politicize their understanding is to make a prag-

¹⁵ Model Summary

R=.658 N=455 F=57.01 Sign=.000

The dependent variable is a four-point scale. Predictors are dichotomous variables.

matic argument for pre-k, “Now that we know more about how children learn it makes sense to give parents the option to start preschool at age three. This connects the abstract information about brain development to a concrete notion of children learning in a “school” setting. It also helps move pre-school into the larger conversation about education reform.

- 5: Reframe the conversation away from people’s nostalgic wishes for the way things were to a positive statement about how things can be. Realistically, the mommy wars are over. Most children are in and will continue to be in some form of non-parental care. Voters respond when they are extolled to ensure that this be quality care that provides children with a positive, desirable experience. Remind Americans “*Given that the majority of young children are in some form of child care, we need to ensure that children are provided quality care. When done right, child care promotes language and reading skills, helps kids learn how to get along with others, and helps teach children how to value themselves and others.*” The introduction to this statement challenges the listener to “get real” about the need for quality child care.

Coefficients*

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.270	.023		11.767	.000
	R Strengthen Families	7.665E-02	.034	.102	2.237	.026
	Child care done right	7.375E-02	.028	.100	2.647	.008
	Middle class families one paycheck	9.717E-02	.038	.131	2.559	.011
	Pre-K for three year olds	.117	.031	.160	3.762	.000
	R Youngest citizens	.168	.037	.224	4.574	.000
	R Military Experience	.130	.035	.178	3.773	.000

*Dependent Variable: Scale 10 billion

Conclusion

Politicians love to talk about children. Hillary and Bill Clinton taught us “It takes a village to raise a child.” George W. Bush extols us to “leave no child behind.” Little is said beyond the slogans. Visiting child care centers has joined kissing babies and dropping by at senior centers as integral parts of a political landscape designed to show that candidates care. These conversations are about values devoid of policy. In contrast, advocates rarely face voters, spending time hammering out policies with opinion makers rather than articulating values to the public. Activists need to address more values-oriented messages.

Yet, over the years voters have heard a series of debates as to why government should or should not finance child care. Many say they want government to make sure all children have access to affordable, quality care. A sizeable number really mean it. Luckily advocates have a menu of messages they can use to reach this audience. The challenges facing the child care community are finding the vehicles to deliver the messages and developing the organizational capacity to organize public support.