

The Caring Family Policy Agenda

As practical as it is principled, the *Caring Family Policy Agenda* is based on the shared core moral principles of religion and humanism: caring, compassion, justice, and nonviolence. Its principles and programs are easily articulated and have powerful emotional appeal. The Caring Family Agenda has three interacting components:

1. Children's Bill of Rights
2. Caring Family Values
3. Family-Friendly Economy

Why Focus on the Family?

- *Humans must be cared for* -- Unlike other species, it takes 18 years for human beings to fully develop. Most of this development takes place within the family, and neuroscience shows that the early years are especially important. Sound family policies must be a top political and social priority.
- *Our values, and ability to respect others, are shaped by our family experiences* -- Families are the primary transmitters of values. It is in families that people develop the core belief systems that consciously or unconsciously determine how we engage in all facets of our lives, from the personal to the political.
- *Well-developed humans are critical to successful democratic societies* -- People are the real wealth of nations. Families contribute significantly to the development of authentic, creative human beings, preparing them to seek innovative solutions to the challenges of the postindustrial era.

We want to stimulate the development of family policies, including legislation and ballot initiatives, needed for a healthy, equitable, and productive democratic society.

1. Children's Bill of Rights

The Children's Bill of Rights strengthens the rights of children to have a fair opportunity to grow up healthy and thrive. It includes the right to shelter, nutrition, health care, education, freedom from violence, and a clean environment.

- *Care for Every Child.* Ensuring that all children have high quality health care and childcare. This benefits children, families, the economy, and society.
- *Preschool for All.* Guaranteeing access to comprehensive high quality preschool education as a basis for life-long learning.
- *Quality Education.* Focusing on the quality of each individual child's education, including the arts, music, literature, and science, rather than on high stakes testing.
- *Safe Children Initiative.* Protecting children from violence and abuse in the family, in schools, and when children are in the custody of the state.
- *Prevention First: Ensuring Every Child Is Wanted.* Comprehensive sexuality and relationships education in the public schools is the key to protecting teenagers from unwanted pregnancies, ensuring that every child is born to loving parents prepared for this important responsibility.
- *Safety and Good Loving Care for Children in Foster Care and Adoptive Homes and Rehabilitation of Children in State Custody.* This saves lives – and tax dollars.
- *High Standards for Professional Training and Living Wages for Childcare Workers and Early Childhood Teachers.* This is an essential investment in our children's future.

2. Caring Family Values

Families based on partnership, mutual respect, and caring are foundational to a free, equal, and democratic society. The Caring Family Policy Agenda can be embraced by all – right and left, liberal and conservative, secular and religious. We must further this agenda to build strong healthy families and a just, caring, and prosperous democratic society.

- *Education for Responsible and Loving Family Relations.* Mandatory family life education in schools, including parenting education based on scientific findings about best parenting practices.
- *Safe Families Initiative.* Better enforcement of domestic violence laws, and increased state funding for shelters for battered women and children are critical to stop intimate violence, which causes enormous suffering and teaches children that it is acceptable to use violence to impose one's will on others.
- *Support for Care Work.* Women still do the bulk of this work for free in homes and poverty wage jobs. Yet caring for people, starting in early childhood, is foundational to our economy and society. We must recognize the value of this work.
- *Retirement Security for Caregivers.* Because today Social Security only covers work in the market, women over 65, most of them caregivers in homes, are twice as poor as men. We must recognize the value of the work of caregiving in families through changes in our Social Security system.
- *Fulfilling the American Dream of Equality.* Equality between women and men promotes healthy relationships in families and society, as well as a healthy, democratic, and caring society.
- *Respecting Every Family Initiative.* It is America's moral duty to respect and support every committed family constellation, including single-parent and LGBTQ families.

3. Family-Friendly American Economy

Studies show that investment in families and children ensures a stronger economy and a healthier society – for example, productivity rises exponentially when there is a family/employment balance. Investing in families is the best investment a nation can make; our corporations cannot carry it alone and still compete in a global economy.

- *National Family Health Initiative.* An affordable national health care system, prenatal to lifelong, focusing on wellness and prevention of illness is essential not only for human wellbeing but for national wellbeing. It is unfair to put this burden solely on employers; it is our job as a democratic nation.
- *State-funded Child Care* with well-trained licensed caregivers, as well as tax and other incentives for employers to provide good childcare.
- *Universal Paid Family Leave for Part- and Full-Time Employees* including family and medical leave for both fathers and mothers of babies as well as caregivers for elderly parents provided by the state and through tax and other incentives for employers.
- *Inclusion of the Caregiving Work Done in Households in GNP and Adoption of Other Measures of Economic Productivity, such as Social Wealth Economic Indicators.* Statistical analyses in the U.S. and other nations show that the value of unpaid work is the largest contributor to economic productivity. GDP does not include this work; we urgently need a national Social Wealth Economic Index that demonstrates the economic value of care work, including care work in homes.
- *Living Wage Legislation enacted at the local, state, and federal levels,* which should focus on adequate rewards for care work and include equal pay for work of equal value.
- *Caregiver Tax Credit to give visibility and value to the invisible caregivers that keep our economy going, many of who live below the poverty line,* including a stipend in the amount of the credit as a step toward addressing the disproportionate poverty of caregivers.
- *Workplace Rules that Enable Parents to Spend Quality Time with Children,* including flex time, telecommuting, and increased vacation and sick leave.
- *Laws that Phase Out Corporate Practices that Harm Families and Children –* from toxic dumps and other forms of environmental pollution, to marketing unhealthy food and drinks to children.

- *Incentives Encouraging Environmentally Friendly Practices* – Individuals and businesses must be encouraged to use science, conservation, and restoration to protect our natural environment for our children and generations to come.