

Strolling Thunder 2022

Family Media Talking Points



Thank you for participating in our media efforts around *Strolling Thunder*TM on May 17, 2022!

Your voice matters, and your personal story about you and your children is one of the most powerful things you can share. Here are a few talking points that can help you prepare for an interview with the media. Please note that there are talking points for several policy issues included here. You only need to focus on the issue area that you are focusing on in your meetings! It will help to read through your relevant talking points, but you don't need to memorize them! Keep them handy in case you are called on for an interview.

Key Messages

- Babies' brains grow faster between ages 0 to 3 than at any other point in their lives. This has an enormous impact on their future.
- Supporting the brain development of babies is one of the most important things we can do to raise healthy, well-rounded adults.
- Families like mine want and need support so we can help lay the foundation for our children's success.
- I'm joining with families with babies and toddlers from all 50 states and DC for *Strolling Thunder* on May 17, 2022. Together, we're urging Congress to push babies to the top of their priority list.

Why should we invest in babies?

- Babies' beginnings lay the foundation for everything that's coming. When babies have strong, nurturing relationships, positive early learning experiences, and good health and nutrition, we lay a strong foundation for the rest of their lives.
- When babies don't get what their growing brains need to thrive, they don't develop as they should. This can lead to life-long challenges. Investing in the brain development of babies is one of the most important things we can do to raise healthy, well-rounded adults.
- To do better for our babies and our country's future, we need Congress to pass the policies we know work and that are built on the science of brain development.

What is Strolling Thunder?

- *Strolling Thunder* is the main event of ZERO TO THREE's *Think Babies*, which is designed to bring attention to what babies and their families need to thrive across the country.
- On May 17, my family and I will join babies and families from all 50 states and DC as we meet with our policymakers and push Congress to invest in the policies that make sure all babies have the opportunities that support good health, strong families, and positive early learning experiences.

- *Strolling Thunder* is about making certain that our voice – the voice of parents caring for young children – is heard. And that Congress really understands what our families need.

Child Care

- Child care helps shape early brain development and supports our ability to work. But child care has been unaffordable and difficult to access for a long time. In fact, infant care costs more than housing in three out of four regions. And COVID has made things worse.
- The quality of child care is important to me. My baby's development is being shaped in the earliest years of their lives. Too often, child care options do not feel like positive early learning environments for my child.
- Only 4.6% of low- and moderate-income infants and toddlers are served by the Child Care and Development Fund.
- Long term, sustained investment in child care would make sure that families can afford the high-quality child care their babies need – and can find it in their communities! We need Congress to invest in real resources to support our early educators and treat them like the professionals they are, ensuring that they get the training they need and are paid at least a living wage.

Paid Leave

- Babies need time to bond with their parents, and parents need time to care for their babies without jeopardizing their families' ability to meet basic needs. But right now, the majority of working parents don't have access to paid leave.
- A baby's beginning lays the foundation for everything to come. Every minute and every interaction is a lesson in how the world works, how they are valued, and how people relate to each other. Parents and caregivers need to be there for those important first moments.
- Most working parents don't have access to paid leave, either after a child is born or adopted or if they have a serious health need. Today, only twelve states and the District of Columbia offer, or will soon offer, a paid leave program. That means that many parents just like me have to make an impossible choice between taking the time they need to bond with their babies or care for a seriously sick child, and losing their jobs and economic security.
- The *Family and Medical Insurance Leave (FAMILY) Act* would create a permanent, comprehensive national program that makes paid leave affordable for employers of all sizes, and available to all workers and their families. It's inclusive, comprehensive, and meaningful, letting parents like me take at least 12 weeks to care for my family and maintain my job.

Economic Security

- The first few years of a child's life are critical for all later development. But as many as 40% of all babies and toddlers today live in families without enough income to make ends meet. And even before the pandemic, more than two million babies in our country were living in poverty.
- Over the course of COVID, 35% of families with young children have had difficulties paying for basic needs, and over 65% say that they've had financial problems.


- The one year expansion of the Child Tax Credit by the Biden administration was a great first step toward helping families like mine have economic security, but since the expansion expired, families have been hurting, and many have slid back into poverty.
- Families need a permanent, expanded Child Tax Credit that can help families afford basic needs, such as diapers to keep a baby dry and healthy, gas or bus fare to get to a job, and household supplies for daily life. Families like mine must have financial security when so much is at stake for our baby's development.

Early Head Start

- Early Head Start programs support the healthy development of babies, toddlers, and pregnant people living in poverty to ensure that all families have the same opportunities to success. It's proven to succeed, helping parents improve their prospects for economic security while ensuring that their children are on a solid path from the earliest age.
- Early Head Start knows that our family is important to our baby's development! Not only does the program provide early childhood learning experiences, it provides health and nutrition services and supports me in being the best parent I can be. It also connects us with any services we might need.
- Research shows that Early Head Start helps boost babies' learning, language, health and behavior. It helps families be more emotionally supportive and more likely to provide support for our babies' language development and learning. It also promotes our participation in education and training as well as employment!
- Just 11% of eligible children and families have access to Early Head Start programs nationwide. We need to invest in these programs so that more of our babies and toddlers are able to get the support that they need to thrive.

Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health

- We've seen so much discussion over the past year about children's mental health, but so little about infant and early childhood mental health. Too many people seem to overlook that babies and toddlers absolutely have their own mental health needs and concerns!
- "Infant and early childhood mental health" refers to how well a child develops socially and emotionally in the early years.
- Positive early childhood experiences promote strong emotional health and go hand-in-hand with strong cognitive development.
- Parents and caregivers influence babies' social and emotional development from the start. When parents' own stressors inhibit them from responding to their children's needs, children's development can be impacted as well.
- One in five children have a mental health disorder that's considered diagnosable. But there's a national shortage of skilled infant and early childhood mental health workers equipped to provide what these very young children need.
- We need to invest in the emotional health of our nation's babies. Congress can and should support increased investments that build the infant and early childhood mental health system so that very young children have



access to the prevention and treatment services they need. This includes reauthorizing and increasing funding for the Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Grant Program; increasing and ensuring that new Community Mental Health Services Block Grant funding is dedicated to young children; and investing in the workforce so that there are enough providers who are trained specifically to work with young children and families.

Family Support

- Because of their rapid brain development, the stakes couldn't be higher for babies and toddlers entering the child welfare system.
- Unfortunately, the child welfare system wasn't set up to support the unique needs of babies who need security and stability, or their families. And many states and communities don't have the support structures in place to ensure strong early development, address family trauma, and ensure safe and loving environments for young children.
- The *Strengthening America's Families Act* would support states and localities in building community-based Infant-Toddler Court Teams, which work collaboratively to prevent abuse and neglect, as well as to address the needs of young children experiencing maltreatment and their families.