

Strolling Thunder 2023

Family Media Talking Points



STROLLING THUNDER
June 21, 2023

Thank you for participating in our media efforts around *Strolling Thunder*[™] on June 21, 2023!

Your voice matters! Your personal story about you and your children is one of the most powerful things you can share. Here are a few general talking points that can help you prepare for an interview with the media. While there are talking points for several policy issues included here, you only need to focus on the issue areas that you are speaking about and you don't need to use all of them! It will help to read through your relevant talking points prior to any interviews, but you don't need to memorize them.

Why should we invest in babies?

- 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. And supporting the brain development of babies is one of the most important things we can do to raise healthy, well-rounded adults.
- 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.
- Families like mine want and need support so we can give our children the best possible beginning.

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.
- I'm joining with families with babies and toddlers from all 50 states and DC for *Strolling Thunder* on June 21, 2023. Together, we're urging Congress to "Think Babies" and make sure infants and toddlers are at the top of their priority list.
- *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 and what they can do about it.

Child Care

- Child care helps shape early brain development for babies and supports my family's ability to work. But child care has been unaffordable and difficult to access for a long time. In nearly every state, infant care costs more than college and it costs more than housing in three out of four regions.
- 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.
- Just 17 percent of qualifying families and only 4.2 percent of families with low to moderate income who could benefit actually receive child care assistance they qualify for.
- Long term, sustained investment in child care would make sure that families, like mine, can afford the high-quality child care our babies need – and can find it in our communities!
- I want 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 to support my child and are paid at least a living wage.

Paid Leave

- Babies need time to bond with their parents, and I need time to care for my baby without jeopardizing my ability to work and meet the basic needs of my family. But right now, the majority of working parents don't have paid leave.
- Parents and caregivers need to be there for those important first moments of their baby's life. A baby's beginning lays the foundation for everything to come. Every minute and every interaction for a baby is a lesson in how the world works, how they are valued, and how people relate to each other.
- Most working parents don't have paid leave, either after a child is born or adopted or if they have a serious health need. 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

- More than 80% of children in families with low incomes live in a household where at least one person is employed, but work alone may not be enough to lift a family out of poverty or help them reach economic security.
- The temporary expansion of the Child Tax Credit was a great first step toward helping families like mine have economic security, but since the expansion expired, families have been hurting during a critical time in our babies' rapid growth development.
- Families need a permanent, expanded Child Tax Credit that can help us 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 succeed. It's proven to succeed, 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!
- Early Head Start reaches only 11 percent of eligible children and families. 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

- Over the last few years, the national conversation about children's mental health has grown, but so little has been said 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! It is estimated that 10 to 16% of young children experience mental health conditions including PTSD and anxiety.
- With a baby's brain developing so quickly, early promotion, prevention and intervention in mental health are key to their healthy development.
- Positive early childhood experiences promote strong emotional health.
- Parents and caregivers influence babies' social and emotional development from the start. Sometimes, stressors can interfere with us responding to our children's needs the way we want to. The way I feel can impact my child. It is hard to find mental health services right now, and it is especially hard to find providers who understand the special needs of infants, toddlers and their families.
- 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 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 the needs of their families.