



Families First

Families First Agenda: Fighting for America's Working Families

Democrats are proud to announce the Families First Agenda -- a set of realistic proposals to encourage responsibility, promote personal and economic security and create greater opportunity. Americans have had their fill of empty promises and meaningless talk of revolution. They need the kind of change that makes a difference in their homes, in their neighborhoods, and in their children's schools. They're ready for moderation. That's what Democrats are offering -- moderate, modest and achievable changes that will help families that are struggling just to pay the bills, educate their children, and save for retirement.

Why Families First?

In today's economy, it's hard for families to get ahead. Parents are working harder and longer and too many work second or third jobs just to pay the bills. Instead of looking forward to the day when their child earns a college degree and gets a good-paying job, too many parents wonder if they will be able to afford college tuition at all. And after a lifetime of working hard and playing by the rules, their dreams of a secure retirement are clouded by shaky or non-existent pensions.

These families and their concerns need to come first for a change. Parents deserve help affording a good education for their kids, and they should know the pensions they've worked for are secure. Parents should be able to send kids to school knowing they'll be safe, and more children should have access to quality health care. This is the least we can do to help families who already face difficult challenges in an increasingly competitive economy.

What's Different About the Families First Agenda

The Families First Agenda is different because of what it does not do. It does not offer a new bureaucratic program for every problem we face. People don't want big government solutions and they don't want empty promises. They want a course that is reasonable, help that is realistic and solutions that can be delivered. The Families First Agenda does not propose massive spending programs or unrealistic goals. This is a moderate, achievable common-sense agenda that will improve people's daily lives, and not increase the size of government.

<http://www.dccc.org/families-first>

What's in the Families First Agenda

In the Families First Agenda, Democrats offer realistic, moderate and achievable ways to help every struggling family. They can be described in terms of three main principles: security, opportunity and responsibility.

Security

- Paycheck security: helping families get the paycheck they deserve.
- Health care security: expanding access to quality health care for children.
- Retirement security: making pensions more available and portable.
- Personal security: making our neighborhoods, communities and schools safer places to live, work and learn.

Opportunity

- Educational opportunity: making college and vocational school tax deductible and other ways to make it easier for parents to make sure their kids get better paying jobs.
- Economic opportunity: helping small businesses to prosper.

Responsibility

- Government responsibility: balancing the federal budget, while protecting fundamental commitments like Medicare.
- Individual responsibility: real welfare reform and a crack-down on parents who won't support their children and efforts to prevent teen pregnancy.
- Corporate responsibility: hands off employee pensions, end tax breaks that encourage companies to move American jobs overseas and basic protection of our environment.

Democrats: Ready to Lead

Americans sent a powerful message in 1994; they were tired of a government that promised too much and delivered too little. But Americans didn't get the change they voted for. Republicans saw the 1994 election not as an opportunity to fix what's wrong with government, but as a license to destroy what's right -- like education, Medicare, and sensible protections to keep our air clean and our water safe.

Democrats heard America's outcry against the Republican "revolution" and fought those wrong-headed proposals. But it's not enough to say what we stand against -- we have a responsibility to tell America what a Democratic Congress would stand for. That's why we've put together the Families First Agenda. As you read more about the proposals that a new Democratic Congress would work to accomplish, we hope you'll agree that this agenda is truly for families, for a change.



Families First

June 22, 1996

Dear Journalist:

We are delighted to share with you the Families First Agenda -- the steps that a new Democratic majority would take to improve the lives of hard-working, middle class families if we are given another chance to lead the Congress this November.

As you are well aware, Democrats have worked to fight the more extreme parts of the Republican agenda during the past year and a half, and we make no apologies for that role. We believe it was important to defend the interests of average, working families. But Democrats also have an obligation to tell those families what we would do if we are elected this fall -- and why their choice of Representative or Senator will have national, not just local, consequences.

The truth is, we're in a much more competitive global economy. For too many middle class families, just staying in place means a never-ending scramble of longer hours, second jobs, and credit card debt. Family incomes have been falling for nearly twenty years. Economic pressures are stretching the limits of family and community life. Our country is changing in profound and permanent ways -- and too many Americans aren't prepared for that change.

Whether you agree with their agenda or not, the Republicans have all but ignored these bread-and-butter, day-to-day concerns. That is why the Families First Agenda is comprised entirely of the kinds of changes that affect people's day-to-day lives -- in their homes, in their neighborhoods, in their children's schools.

Just as importantly, we do not want to replace the extremism of one party with the extremism of another. Every part of this agenda is modest, moderate, and achievable. It is not about big government hand-outs. It is merely an attempt to help families earn more security for themselves in this tough new economy. Our hope is that, in the end, many moderate Republicans will join us in supporting the Families First Agenda.

Our message is simple: if Democrats are given a chance to lead the Congress this fall, our sole and central mission would be to help those families that are working hard to pay the bills, raise their children, and save for a decent retirement. That is the only way to have a Congress that truly puts families first, and special interests last.

Yours very truly,

Richard A. Gephardt
Richard A. Gephardt

Thomas A. Daschle
Thomas A. Daschle



Families First

Families First on the Internet

Information about Families First is available on the World Wide Web, at:

<http://www.dccc.org/families-first>

Also, Web users are invited to join a live interactive discussion of Families First with House Democratic Leader Richard Gephardt on Wednesday, June 26. This live event will take place on the *Washington Post's* new Web site (www.washingtonpost.com) from 6:30 to 7:00 p.m. Eastern.

What:

Live interactive discussion of Families First
with House Democratic Leader Richard Gephardt

Where:

<http://www.washingtonpost.com>

When:

Wednesday, June 26
6:30 to 7:00 p.m. Eastern



Families First

Paycheck Security

Each month at kitchen tables across America, parents sit down with their checkbooks and a stack of bills. Exhausted from working too hard for a paycheck that disappears too fast, they wonder how they'll ever manage to provide the quality of life and good education they dream of for their children.

Just to keep up, parents are having to work longer hours and take second and third jobs. More women are joining the workforce, and bringing home a desperately needed second paycheck. Yet no matter how hard families work, their income never seems to keep up with the soaring costs of day-to-day living. Choices between providing a safe home or affording a college education are not choices parents should have to make.

Democrats believe that we can make families more secure by making sure they get the paycheck they deserve -- and that it's enough to pay the bills. That's why the Families First Agenda calls for paying women at the same level as men who do the same jobs. The whole family suffers if a woman isn't paid what she deserves. We also need to make child care more affordable for working families. And we need to make sure that American workers are competing in a fair market, so that their jobs aren't threatened by competition from illegal child labor abroad.

The Families First Agenda calls for:

- **Paying Women What They Deserve.** By better enforcing the laws already on the books requiring equal pay for women and by offering voluntary "fair pay" guidelines for businesses, we can help make sure women get the pay they deserve.
- **Making Quality Child Care More Affordable.** Families shouldn't have to cut corners on child care, but with quality care priced at thousands of dollars a year, many families have no choice. That's why Democrats are proposing a bigger tax break to help parents afford quality child care.
- **Banning Imports Made with Child Labor.** American workers shouldn't have to compete with illegal child labor from abroad. Products manufactured in violation of a nation's child labor laws would be banned from entering the United States.



Families First

Health Care Security

A parent's worst fear is a sick child. To see a child full of promise and dreams for the future held back by pain and suffering is heartbreaking. Many parents with sick children face the added agony of being unable to get the best possible care for their children -- to give them the greatest chance at a healthy, happy future -- because they simply don't have the money to pay for it.

For too many American families, quality health care is a luxury they can't afford. Even in families with both parents working, health care is often priced out of reach, because many employers don't offer health benefits and buying a family policy on their own is outrageously expensive. That means millions of kids don't have health care, and without health care, even a minor childhood illness can become a major catastrophe.

Democrats believe that our first obligation should be to our children. Putting families first means putting kids first -- fighting to keep them healthy and strong, without emptying their parents' wallets. Children are much less expensive to insure than whole families -- yet few insurance companies allow families to purchase "kids-only" health plans. Democrats want to change that, and make health care for America's children available, accessible, and affordable.

The Families First Agenda calls for:

- **Kids-Only Health Plans.** We'll require private insurance companies to offer special "kids-only" health plans, with sound benefits to protect children. These health plans will follow a set of common-sense rules: that children can't be denied or dropped from health coverage if they get sick, or if their families move. We'll also offer assistance for working families to help make kids-only health policies affordable.



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Retirement Security

Many Americans can't afford to worry about a secure retirement until it's too late. Preoccupied with paying the bills and keeping their kids clothed, fed, and schooled, many parents don't realize the limits of their pension plans until they're ready to retire and there's nothing they can do.

Retirement security can also easily be thrown into jeopardy. Elderly couples get their fixed income pensions dramatically cut because of a company bankruptcy or merger. Middle-aged workers forced to change jobs lose years of equity in their pension plan. Widows learn after it's too late that their husbands have unwittingly signed away their survivor benefits.

Democrats want to make your pension more secure and more flexible. We want to give more people access to pensions -- including employees of small businesses. We want to let you take your pension with you if you change jobs. We want to give families the flexibility to use their IRA to buy a first home or pay for college tuition. We want to protect widows from unethical insurance companies who try to mislead them into signing away their survivor benefits. Most important, Democrats want to stop companies from raiding employee pensions.

The Families First Agenda calls for:

- **Pension Reform and Protection.** Stiffer penalties for abuse of pensions and a crack-down on companies that use the money you've earned and saved as their piggy bank.
- **Making Pensions Portable.** With so many people changing jobs in today's fast-paced economy, it's important that workers be allowed to take their pension with them from job to job.
- **Expanding Pension Coverage.** Democrats would make it easier for small businesses to offer pensions and expand IRAs to another 20 million families earning up to \$100,000 a year.
- **Protecting Women's Pension Benefits.** Protecting widows from losing pension benefits by developing standard easy-to-read consent forms which companies selling pensions must use.



Families First

Personal Security

Our kids face enough challenges getting ahead in the world without having to cope with random violence. But all across America, violence from drugs and gangs is creeping into the halls of our schools and the streets of our neighborhoods. Children today don't have to look for trouble; it comes to them. And it's not a problem just in our inner cities. Parents across the nation -- in cities, suburbs and small towns alike -- are increasingly worried about their children's safety.

No one will ever come up with a single magic solution to the crime problem. But we can take a strong step in the fight against crime by giving our police and community leaders the tools they need to tackle violence and to combat the influence of drugs.

Democrats want to make sure we have enough police on our streets, and will work to keep the promise of 100,000 new police officers for our local communities. We need to make sure our kids are taught to avoid violence, and that means giving judges greater power to intervene with kids the first time they commit a crime -- before it's too late. Democrats will also help local community groups offer supervised places where kids can go after school to stay out of trouble.

The Families First Agenda calls for:

- **Putting More Cops on the Beat.** Putting police on our streets who know our communities has proven very effective in fighting crime. Democrats would extend this popular program for two years, putting 125,000 police in our neighborhoods.
- **Keeping Kids off the Streets and out of Gangs.** Democrats want to give judges more flexibility in dealing with youth offenders, and offer incentives to get kids off the streets before they start causing trouble.
- **Cleaning Drugs out of Our Schools and Testing Drug Offenders.** Every schoolchild should understand the dangers of drugs, and every drug offender should be tested for drug use.



Families First

Educational Opportunity

One of a parent's proudest moments is the day a son or daughter puts on a cap and gown and receives a college diploma. But for many parents that day never comes, often because college is priced out of reach for working families. For parents lucky enough to get their children through school, the most common graduation present is thousands of dollars in student loan debt.

Education is the key to opportunity, and giving every child the chance to succeed means giving every child access to higher education. But many families are struggling to pay their monthly bills, never mind afford the skyrocketing costs of college tuition for their children.

Democrats want to offer those families a helping hand -- a way to make sure their kids get to college, without busting the family budget. That's why the Families First Agenda includes new scholarships for kids who make good grades and stay away from drugs, and new tax deductions making college and vocational school tuition tax deductible to help families afford education and job training.

The Families First Agenda calls for:

- **\$10,000 Tax Deductions for College & Job Training.** Families will be able to deduct up to \$10,000 from their taxes for tuition at a college, graduate school, or certified training or technical program. The deduction will also be available to recent graduates paying off interest on student loans, to help them get going in the working world without drowning in debt.
- **Two Years of College for Kids with Good Grades.** For students who are prepared to work hard, keep a B average, and stay off drugs, Democrats are prepared to offer a helping hand. Through HOPE Scholarships, we'll provide a \$1,500 tax credit for the first two years of college, enough to pay the full tuition at most community colleges or get a good start on tuition at a four-year college.



Families First

Economic Opportunity

Small business owners face tough odds in today's fast-paced global economy. Keeping the company afloat is a daily challenge for most small business owners and their workers. Big corporations can hire well connected lobbyists to sweeten the competitive environment for them, while many small business owners are out there on their own.

We need to make America a better place to do business, and help small businesses thrive and grow. After all, they're the engine of economic growth, creating more than half of all new jobs.

Democrats want to make sure that we give small businesses the opportunities they need to keep growing and creating jobs. That's why we are calling for tax relief for small businesses, and new investments to rebuild our nation's economic lifelines.

The Families First Agenda calls for:

- **Helping Small Businesses Thrive and Create Jobs.** This initiative would help keep family businesses in the family, by offering tax relief for businesses that are being handed down from one generation to the next. It would also encourage growth by giving tax breaks to small businesses to help them invest in new machinery and equipment.
- **Investing in Our Communities.** All over our great nation, decaying roads, bridges, rail systems, and water treatment systems are clogging our economic lifelines. These are vital to business expansion and continued economic growth. Already, many states have set up special investment funds to help attract private dollars to rebuild our communities. We would offer this investment opportunity to every state, plus encourage targeted investments in improving sewage treatment and safe drinking water facilities.



Families First

Government Responsibility

Every month, Americans have to balance their family budgets. Sacrifices often must be made in less essential areas, like new clothes or a family vacation, in order to afford the basics, like food and rent. Each family sets the priorities that guide those important decisions.

The same must be true of government. Tough choices are necessary to balance the federal budget, and we need the right priorities to help make them. The government must do what families do -- figure out what can be cut, and what must be preserved.

Some in Washington have tried to balance the budget by cutting Medicare, eliminating the health care safety net for children, forcing seniors and their families to give up their home or the family farm to pay nursing home bills, cutting education, and rolling back environmental protections. That's the wrong way to balance the budget.

Democrats want to balance the budget the right way -- by eliminating wasteful spending and loopholes for large corporations and special interests. The budget can be balanced while still maintaining our obligations to our parents, our children, and our nation's future.

The Families First Agenda calls for:

- **A Balanced Federal Budget.** We must balance the budget responsibly -- by closing tax loopholes for special interests and the privileged, eliminating needless corporate subsidies, making responsible cost-saving reforms in government programs, requiring our allies to share more of the costs of defending democracy, and rooting out fraud and abuse in Medicare and Medicaid. Cuts will have to be made -- but the budget does not have to be balanced on the backs of American families. We must continue to protect families by preventing deep cuts in Medicare, education, and the environment.



Families First

Individual Responsibility

One of the most important values parents teach their children is to take responsibility for their actions. If they make a mess, they should clean it up. If they break something, they should fix it. If they cause a problem, they should help find the solution. Actions should have consequences.

We live in a society today where people can too easily avoid taking responsibility for their actions. Some people become dependent on the social safety net provided by government, instead of working to become financially independent and support their own families. In too many cases, divorced parents will move to another state simply to avoid paying support for their own children.

Democrats believe that we must require people to take greater responsibility for their own actions. That means welfare reform that requires work, but still protects innocent children. It means getting tough on "deadbeat parents." And it means working hard to prevent kids from having babies -- driving down the rate of teen pregnancy.

The Families First Agenda calls for:

- **Welfare Reform That Requires Work and Getting Tough on "Deadbeat Parents."** We need welfare reform that requires people to work for their welfare benefits -- without hurting innocent kids. We must move people off welfare and into the workforce, by temporarily providing the child care, health care and training they need to make that transition. And we must require people who agree to sponsor legal immigrants to take responsibility for that decision.

We must also crack down on "deadbeat parents," who bring children into this world that they refuse to support. By giving states new tools to enforce child support orders and collect child support across state lines, we can force many "deadbeat parents" to take responsibility for their actions.

- **Preventing Teen Pregnancy.** We need a significant national effort to prevent teen pregnancy -- reaching out to young people at the greatest risk of becoming teen parents and forcing them to take a hard look at what could all too easily happen to them.



Families First

Corporate Responsibility

Families living near a manufacturing plant, or whose children swim and fish in a lake or river used by a local business, often worry that businesses are endangering their health through careless pollution. Workers who spend their lives helping a company grow and prosper worry about their company failing to keep up its end of the bargain, instead of protecting their jobs whenever possible and safeguarding their pensions.

America's strength comes from one of the greatest partnerships in world history: business, individuals, and government all working together. We all share a common goal: working toward a better future for our nation and for our families. But in the pursuit of short-term profits, we sometimes forget that greater goal. As we ask for more responsibility from government and individuals, we have a right to expect our corporate partners to return to earlier standards of loyalty to their employees, communities and country.

Democrats believe in holding corporations to a reasonable standard of accountability. That means honoring employees' pensions, and making sure that workers get the benefits they were promised when they retire. Corporations must also respect the air and water we all share, and do their part to keep it clean and safe. And they should think twice about moving valuable American jobs overseas just to take advantage of cheaper foreign labor.

The Families First Agenda calls for:

- **Making Sure Pensions Are There for Employees.** The Families First Agenda calls for an end to pension raiding and demands immediate reporting of any misuse of a pension fund.
- **Holding Corporations Accountable for the Safety of Our Water and Air.** Corporate leaders must take responsibility for keeping our families' drinking water safe and our air clean.
- **Ending Tax Breaks that Encourage Companies to Move American Jobs Overseas.** We can't stop American companies from building their plants overseas, but we can stop giving them tax breaks for doing it. We should not reward disloyalty to our country and its workers.

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TRUMPET NOTES

February 1996

If the trumpet gives
an uncertain sound,
who shall prepare
to the battle?

1 Corinthians (14:8)



Media Advocacy News
You Can Use From
The Certain Trumpet Program

What Is This?

What in the hell is a Certain Trumpet?! And what are (or is) *Trumpet Notes*? And who are "Talking Back Advisories" advising and about what?

Part of the answer lies in the lousy events of the last year.

Remember January 1, 1995? "Happy New Year" was replaced with Noisy Newt Year. Not only had a Republican leadership, brandishing the cynical, destructive Contract with America, won the Congress, but it was proclaiming a national mandate for radical right-wing and fundamentalist rule. Using the libertarian rhetorical theme that "all government is evil," they swept into office to rearrange that same government to fund their corporate supporters at the expense of the American people.

Those of us who call ourselves progressives hunkered down, looked inward, went back to first principles, and prepared for the battles ahead.

At the Advocacy Institute, the Berkeley Media Studies Group, the Benton Foundation, and the Marin Institute, we were each asking ourselves, "What exactly do we have to contribute? What can we do differently to help our friends and colleagues fight back more effectively?"

The result? The Certain Trumpet Program—a project based at the Advocacy Institute but which includes all of the organizations mentioned above.

Where'd we get the name? In 1 Corinthians (14:8) St. Paul writes, "If the trumpet gives an uncertain sound, who shall prepare to the battle?" Gingrich and Co. sounded a loud, brassy horn. The media listened to and amplified their riffs. And some people, with a taste for such music, were mobilized and energized. Meanwhile, progressives whistled in the dark.

Over the years, the Certain Trumpet partners have helped community-based advocates work strategically—with people, with policy-makers, and with the media.

The goal of the Certain Trumpet Program is to **build the media advocacy capacity of committed progressive advocates to influence public policy and to effectively counter the libertarian rhetoric of the right.**

Why the focus on media? For years we've been teaching what we call "media advocacy." And while we'll draw on the flashy tools of modern public relations, like focus groups and targeting maps, there is a fundamental difference

Gingrich and Co. sounded a loud, brassy horn

between media advocacy as we practice it, and public relations: we trust the ability of community-based advocates to approach the media strategically and to wield language as an effective weapon. You don't need communications experts to think or speak for you. Yet a few thoughtful hints and insights can help you do a better job.

This came from
the group Mar's
working on
how we talk about
this issues

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