



**THE REPUBLICAN  
STUDY COMMITTEE**

## **RSC Family Policy Agenda**

Families are the building-blocks of our nation. Whether or not a child is raised in a stable, intact family is the single strongest predictor of their future well-being. Likewise, the state of American families offers a window into our country's future.

American families are in trouble. Divorce rates remain too high, more Americans are postponing marriage or foregoing it entirely, birth rates have plummeted, too many children are being raised without fathers, and many two-parent homes are struggling to make ends meet.

The federal government has created barriers to safe and flexible childcare options, allowed woke ideology to infiltrate education at all levels, and limited the availability of flexible employment arrangements. Parents' finances are threatened by discriminatory tax and welfare policies. The traditional family is held in open contempt by far-left ideologues, who seek to pit children against their parents and intrude on families' personal childrearing decisions.

Conservative' policymakers must work to restore the American family. The following document should guide their work.

It includes over 80 recommendations touching on issues from education and crime to occupational licensing and anti-discrimination laws. These policies should be used as a starting point, and its 10 principles as a guide to help conservatives answer the crucial public policy question—what might this mean for families in my district?

- 1) **We support the protection of children from far-left ideologies inside and outside the classroom** like the transgender movement and racial essentialism, the dangers of Big Tech and internet predators, and other negative influences that cause trauma, endanger children's health or otherwise blunt their development into functional adult citizens.

**Protecting Children from Radical Gender Theory:** Congress must protect children and families from the left's radical gender ideology. Whether by holding medical professionals who engage in these harmful acts legally accountable or by prohibiting schools from fostering so-called gender transitions behind parents' backs, Congress must ensure families are protected.

Accordingly, Congress should enact the *Protect Minors from Medical Malpractice Act* and the [\*Empower Parents to Protect Their Kids Act\*](#), bills led in the House by Chairman Banks and Rep. Doug LaMalfa (R-CA), and in the Senate by Sen. Tom Cotton (R-OK). The [\*Protect Minors from Medical Malpractice Act\*](#) would empower victims of dangerous, experimental "gender transition" procedures to hold doctors civilly liable for their injuries. The *Empower Parents to Protect Their Kids Act* would require elementary and secondary schools that receive federal funding to obtain parental consent before initiating a child's gender transition.

Congress should also consider withholding federal funds from schools that fail to receive parental consent before referring to a child by a different name or pronoun. Additionally, Congress should take steps to address California's SB 107, which would require California courts to disregard other states laws that are designed to protect minors from the dangers of gender transition procedures. Moreover, SB 107 would also allow California courts to take emergency jurisdiction in custody cases involving a minor who has been taken from their legal guardian to California for purposes of undergoing gender transition procedures. Last, Congress should pass the [\*Protect Children's Innocence Act\*](#), introduced by Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-GA), which would federally outlaw the performance of gender transition procedures performed on minors.

Furthermore, Congress should consider enacting legislation that more clearly defines what a woman is, which is critical to protecting young girls. Congress should also pass Rep. Debbie Lesko's (R-AZ) [\*Women's Bill of Rights\*](#), which reaffirms legal protections afforded to women under Federal Law.

Lastly, Congress should ensure that women are able to compete and win in athletic competitions designated for females without threat from biological males. To enshrine this right to fair competition, legislation such as [\*Protection of Women and Girls in Sports Act\*](#), introduced by Rep. Greg Steube (R-FL) should be signed into law.

**Protect Young Children from Sexualization:** Congress must address the increasing sexualization of children. There is a [correlation](#) between possession of obscene child sex abuse dolls and robots, and the commission of child pornography and sexual abuse crimes. Congress should consider passing the [\*JUSTICE Act\*](#), introduced by Rep. Jeff Duncan (R-SC), which would ban the importation and transportation of these dolls. Furthermore, Congress should ensure the Department of Justice increases enforcement of obscenity laws against the pornography industry and that they are adequately funded to do so.

**Protect Young Children from Racist Ideologies in their Schools:** Within the last decade many school children have been taught extreme, racist ideologies. These ideologies have many names, including Critical Race Theory, and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, but all purport to teach the same thing—that race is all that matters, categorizing children as either victims or privileged racists depending upon the color of their skin. No child should be subject to this harmful and divisive way of thinking. Instead, education should focus on useful skills—reading, writing, arithmetic, socializing—and not who ranks where on the victimhood hierarchy. This Congress, conservatives introduced numerous bills designed to address this issue that are worthy of consideration. For instance, Congress should consider passing the *Say No to Indoctrination Act*, introduced by Rep. Burgess Owens (R-UT), and the *No CRT for our Military Kids Act* introduced by Rep Vicky Hartzler (R-MO).

**Increase Penalties for Those that Harm Children:** Congress should consider significantly increasing mandatory minimums for crimes against children. This would include child predators who are convicted of child trafficking, child pornography, or child sexual assault or sexual abuse. There should be a very high cost for those that choose to harm children in these ways.

**Protecting Children from Dangers of Drugs:** Marijuana remains a federally scheduled controlled substance, but that has not stopped more and more states and localities from legalizing it under their own laws. This has led to an explosion of marijuana use among children, which is having a hugely negative impact on their health. Congress should not legalize marijuana, while also taking steps to constrain this new industry's ability to harm children. At the very least, Congress should direct the CDC to gather data and conduct studies on the health impacts of THC use during childhood and early adolescence with a special focus on deaths by suicide and those involved in violent crime to provide Congress and the public with further information about these dangers. In addition, Congress should pass the *Protecting Kids from Candy-Flavored Drugs Act*, introduced

by RSC Chairman Jim Banks (R-IN), which would increase criminal penalties for anyone who manufactures or distributes drugs that are disguised as candy.

**Protecting Children Online:** Congress should consider amending the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) to require social media companies to obtain verified consent from parents or legal guardians before a minor is allowed to start an account on their platform. In addition, it should require that the parent or guardian be allowed to be an administrator on the minor’s account, so they have full access to revoke or limit their privileges. Congress should also consider banning the use of surveillance advertising of anyone under the age of 18 to prevent companies from curating content and selling micro targeted ads to keep kids hooked on their platforms. Congress should also consider passing the *Stop Shielding Culpable Platforms Act*, introduced by RSC Chairman Jim Banks, which would make it clear that Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act does not provide a liability shield for companies that knowingly allow illicit or illegal content on their platforms. Lastly, Congress should also consider requiring pornographic websites to verify the age of every user to prevent children from gaining access to this material.

2) **We support policies that give working families flexibility** in where and how they earn a living and in the kind of benefits they receive instead of one-size-fits-all, government run prescriptions.

**Enact Universal Savings Accounts:** Congress should consider enacting legislation that would create Universal Savings Accounts (USAs), which would allow individuals and families to save money tax free for things like health care, education, childcare, time off to care for new child, or whatever else a family might want to prioritize.

**Encourage the Portability and Flexibility of Health Care Benefits:** The American health care system has been hampered by decisions made decades ago to provide prereferral tax treatment of health care to those who receive insurance through their employer. Conservative health care experts have called this the original sin of health care policy. The result has been a general lack of portability of insurance for individuals and families, higher expenses for those buying insurance in the individual marketplace, and a lack of choice to meet specific needs. Traditionally, conservatives have embraced Health Savings Accounts (HSAs) as a means for fixing this issue. Universal Savings Accounts could also be used for this purpose.

The Republican Study Committee’s [Health Care Task Force](#) has also proposed other important health care sector reforms that would provide additional flexibility for working families. First, the RSC health care plan from the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress recommended that Congress enhance portability protections of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) between the employer and individual market to better protect people with pre-existing conditions. This, along with the recommendations for creating Guaranteed Coverage Pools and reforming Medicaid to target those in need (see more on that below), would provide a more holistic approach to protecting the truly vulnerable than the status quo created by the Democrats.

Second, the [RSC Budget plan for FY 2023](#) recommended budget neutral reforms to modernize the tax treatment of health insurance by “providing a capped exclusion for all spending on health insurance by and behalf of the tax filer, as well as for related dependents.” This would not impact current employer provided insurance but would provide those not in that situation equal footing from a tax perspective.

Taken together, these reforms would provide tremendous cost savings and maximize flexibility for working families while also providing significantly better overall health care compared to the status quo or the Democrats’ radical dream for a complete government run health care system.

**Provide Families Flexibility in the Workplace:** Federal government labor laws significantly hold back the kinds of working arrangements and schedules that could appeal to working families. Congress should consider amending these laws to provide as many options and as much flexibility for workers and employers as possible. For example, in 1978, federal workers were given the option of accruing paid time off in lieu of overtime pay. Congress should consider enacting the *Working Families Flexibility Act* introduced by Rep. Mary Miller (R-IL), which would give private sector workers these same options. Workers could use this to take additional paid time off after the birth of a child, to address childcare issues, to meet a health need, or take additional family vacation time, among many other possibilities.

In addition, current federal overtime law is structured around a 40-hour work week, with hourly workers entitled to overtime pay should they go over 40 hours per week. To allow for greater flexibility, Congress should consider providing an optional alternative 80-hour per two-week framework for determining overtime. This would allow an individual to choose to work more hours in one week and less in the following week. For example, an arrangement like this might allow an individual to take every other Friday off work completely, or to use this flexibility to schedule appointments or to be more involved in school functions for their children.

Lastly, as states and localities continue to add employee benefit requirements that create a labyrinth of regulations for employers to observe, Congress should consider amending the Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA) to create a safe harbor for qualifying companies. This reform is based on the *Workflex for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Act*, introduced by Rep. Mariannette Miller-Meeke (R-IA). Under this proposal, if a company provides a qualified flexible workplace arrangement plan with a certain amount of paid leave and at least one flexible work option (i.e. a biweekly work schedule, a compressed work schedule, telework, job sharing, flexible scheduling, or predictable scheduling) they would not be subject to certain state and local labor requirements. Instead of one size fits all, this approach would give greater flexibility to employees for their unique situations.

**Remove Government Barriers to Professional Status:** Rather than enhancing consumer protections, occupational licensing requirements often do nothing but erect government-imposed barriers to employment for American families. While mostly a problem at the state and local level, federal policy can also contribute to a solution. Congress should consider passing the *Freedom to Work Act*, introduced by Rep. Diana Harshbarger (R-TN), which would require federal agencies to review and identify federal policies that cause state and local governments to create occupational licensing barriers and then require agencies to submit to Congress recommended changes. In addition, Congress should consider passing the *Restoring Board Immunity Act*, introduced by Rep. Darrell Issa (R-CA), which would grant anti-trust immunity to licensing bodies if they adopted reforms to prevent runaway licensing restrictions.

**Protect Independent Contractor Status:** Independent contracting can be a valuable option for families who are seeking maximum flexibility in their work environment, such as mothers who wish to stay home while raising children. Congressional Democrats and states like California have sought to severely limit this type of work arrangement despite the many benefits they bring to working families. Congress should create a bright line test—applied consistently across federal laws—to determine who is an employee and who is an independent contractor. The test should apply the common-law definition, which is based on the level of control the individual has over their work, and when ambiguity remains, the worker should elect whether they want to be treated as an employee or contractor.

**Allow Different Kinds of Labor-Management Cooperation:** Current federal labor law is built on the premise that there must be friction between labor and management on workplace issues. This is backward thinking and not reflective of how much of the developed world operates or most employers and employees'

desires. Private sector union participation has been plummeting for decades in part because most workers reject the status quo labor structure. Yet, current law prohibits other forms of potential labor-management cooperation outside of a traditional union. Congress should consider enacting the [\*Teamwork for Employees and Managers \(TEAM\) Act\*](#), introduced by RSC Chairman Jim Banks (R-IN) and Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL), to address this problem. This legislation would allow employer and employee working groups to discuss workplace issues outside of the union structure. It also comes with the option of a non-voting worker representative on company boards to ensure a stronger worker voice.

- 3) **We support policies reflective of the reality that parents—not government officials—are best qualified to make decisions** about the physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing of their children. We understand that children do best when they are raised in a secure family with their mother and father, and our policies should always encourage and support that arrangement, never burdening it.

**Enshrine Parental Rights in Law:** Increasingly, governments at the state and local level and even unelected judges are inserting themselves into decisions that should belong solely to parents. Some at the federal level would love to do the same. Congress should consider passing a bill that would establish the responsibilities of parents to direct their children’s upbringing, education, and healthcare as a statutory right, prohibit the government from substantially burdening parental rights, and provide parents with a legal remedy if their rights are violated by the government.

**Empowering Parents to Know What is Happening in Their Children’s Schools:** In recent years, parents across the country have taken an increased interest in what is happening in their children’s schools. Instead of being welcomed, they have often been met with animosity from liberal state and local school district officials. Congress should consider following the lead of states like Florida, Arizona, and Texas and pass a Parental Bill of Rights, like Rep. Julia Letlow’s (R-LA) [\*Parents Bill of Rights Act\*](#). This legislation makes it a condition on schools receiving federal funds that parents have a right to review curriculum, engage with school boards and teachers, see the details of a school budget, protect their child’s privacy, and keep their kids safe in schools. Parents need to be particularly vigilant about school sex education, as that is where radical sexual and gender ideology are often finding their way into the classroom. Furthermore, Congress should consider giving parents the right to see school surveys before they are sent to their children by requiring schools to get permission from parents before giving them to their child.

**Empowering Parents Over Public Health Bureaucrats:** We believe that individual American citizens, not government bureaucrats, should be in charge of making their own health care decisions. The COVID-19 pandemic laid bare the reality that so-called public health experts should not, and cannot effectively, rule by fiat. Vaccine and mask mandates are not only unconstitutional, they did not work. Congress must act to ensure one-size fits all approaches to public health are a thing of the past. Further, it is paramount that lawmakers ensure children’s education is free from these damaging mandates. Even the CDC has finally acknowledged such policies are not effective or necessary for protecting our children. Ensuring every child has access to in-person education must be a priority that public health bureaucrats should not interfere with.

- 4) **We support a flexible and pluralistic approach to childcare**, ensuring that working parents can choose the option that is best for them without overbearing government mandates.

**Reform the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) to Increase Choices for Families:** The CCDBG provides funds to states to support low income working families with childcare, yet the program favors center-based care over other alternatives like home-based care, limiting the choices of parents. Congress should consider passing H.R. 1963, the [\*Child Care Choices Act\*](#) introduced by Rep Michelle

Fischbach (R-MN), which would promote parental choice and open the doors for more home-based, family-based, and faith-based childcare options, which often are more affordable. This legislation would effectively also protect religiously based childcare providers from being discriminated against by state and local governments.

**Encourage States to Reduce Unnecessary Regulatory Burdens on Child Care:** Many states and local governments have increased regulation of childcare centers under the guise of “quality,” including in Washington, D.C, which now requires all childcare workers to have college educations. These regulatory burdens do little to increase the actual quality of childcare, but do significantly increase costs and limit parent’s options. As a first step, Congress should consider passing H.R. 1973, the Child CARE Act by Rep Ashley Hinson (R-IA) to require HHS to conduct a study of the impact of state and local regulatory burdens on childcare.

**Transform Head Start into a Voucher Program for Low Income Families:** The Head Start program has been multi decade failure that has not been shown to improve educational outcomes of students compared to those that do not participate in the program despite the billions of dollars in yearly funding. Instead of a one-size-fits all, government run approach, Congress should consider turning the program into a state administrated voucher program that empowers parents to choose an early education program that fits their unique work situation and schedule and their children’s needs.

**Remove Red Tape Holding Back Hiring of In-Home Child Care Providers:** As outlined in RSC’s [American Worker Task Force Report](#) in the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress, if families pay childcare providers more than \$2,300 in a calendar year, families are required to consider that individual a “household” employee and register as an employer with federal and state authorities. This comes with burdensome tax and other paperwork that many families would consider not worth the benefit. To fix this, Congress should consider legislation to treat in home childcare providers like contractors instead of employees.

**Remove Red Tape holding back Companies Providing Child Care as Employee Benefit:** Many companies provide onsite childcare for their employees, but current law requires employers to include the value of the benefit as part of the “regular rate” of pay calculations instead of treating it like other benefits provided to employees like retirement and health care. Congress should consider amending the Fair Labor Standards Act to treat childcare benefits similarly to other major employer benefits. Fixing this would reduce the complexity and the cost for employers and increase the likelihood of employers to offer the benefit.

- 5) **We support the elimination of policies that discourage family formation** like marriage penalties in federal programs and tax policy. Furthermore, federal policy should never discriminate against working, two-parent families that make a financial sacrifice so that one parent can remain at home to care for young children.

**Making the Earned Income Tax Credit More Family Friendly:** While the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act did more for the financial health of families than any other policy achievement of this generation and took significant steps to eliminate marriage penalties in the tax code, more work can still be done. Critically, the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) should be reformed to remove, or at least significantly reduce, its inherent marriage penalty. The EITC, which is designed to reward hard-working Americans and incentivize self-sufficiency, unfortunately discriminates against working-class, two-parent families by rapidly [phasing out](#) tax benefits when couples choose to marry. The [Family Security Act 2.0](#) (FSA 2.0), proposed by Sen. Mitt Romney (R-UT), would among other things reform the EITC and Child Tax Credit (CTC) to ensure that the EITC incentivizes marriage instead of penalizing it. It would also smooth the EITC’s phase-out rate to reduce the severity of the credit’s benefit cliff. Importantly, the FSA 2.0 would make the credit available four months prior to the birth of a child, and for this reason has been endorsed by many pro-life organizations. Additionally,

to ensure that the benefits of the EITC and CTC flow only to those families that truly deserve them, the plan would authorize the Social Security Administration to oversee fraud enforcement and limit the credits to parents with legal and physical custody and a valid SSN. The CTC is an important tool in delivering tax relief to middle-income families and doesn't discriminate against families that have made the decision to have one parent remain at home.

**Address Marriage Penalties in Means-tested Safety Net Programs:** Similarly, discouraging marriage is counterproductive to lifting Americans out of poverty and off federal welfare rolls. Marriage is the single [most effective weapon](#) to combat child poverty. For this reason, conservatives should advance proposals that reduce marriage penalties in Medicaid, TANF, SSI, and SNAP. According to the [American Enterprise Institute](#), "...82 percent of those in the second and third quintiles of family income (\$24,000 to \$79,000) face ...[a] marriage penalty when it comes to Medicaid, cash welfare, or food stamps. By contrast, only 66 percent of their counterparts in the bottom quintile (less than \$24,000) face such a penalty."

**Fix the Student Loan Interest Deduction Marriage Penalty:** Another marriage penalty that lawmakers should address relates to the student loan interest deduction. Current law penalizes married couples by only allowing one deduction per tax return—even if both spouses qualify. Rep. Vicky Hartzler's (MO-04) *Student Loan Marriage Penalty Elimination Act* would eliminate this unfair treatment and reward married couples that are repaying their loans.

- 6) **We support efforts that incentivize work as a means of uplifting families** instead of trapping them in a cycle of dependency. The welfare system should not remove families from participation in larger society; every child needs to grow up with at least one working parent as a role model.

**Improve Work Incentives in TANF:** In 2020, of the 26.8 million adult Americans in poverty, 70.4 percent had not worked that year, whereas only 1.6 percent of those with full-time jobs were in poverty. Work requirement reforms have been engrained in conservative ideology for decades for a reason—they are [effective](#). The [RSC Budget](#) contains a number of pro-work reforms to TANF, SNAP, federal housing assistance, and SSDI. For instance, it offers a number of sensible TANF reforms built on Ranking Member Kevin Brady's (R-TX) [JOBS for Success Act](#), which mandates all work-eligible individuals receiving assistance, which excludes single post-partum mothers, meet their work requirements in exchange for monthly benefits, abandons today's easily-manipulated work participation rates for an outcome-based performance system, and prohibit states from diverting federal TANF funding to supplant state spending on social services.

**Remove Work Disincentives in SNAP:** In SNAP, Congress should eliminate the geographic waivers that allow people from a certain area to avoid meeting the work requirement and reduce the percentage of people a state can waive from the work requirement from 12 percent to 5 percent. These reforms are based on aspects of Rep. Garret Graves' (R-LA) bill, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Reform Act.

**Reject Universal Basic Income Proposals:** Congress should reject the anti-work proposals of the radical left, such as Universal Basic Income (UBI), enhanced unemployment benefits, and policies that remove income activation thresholds in tax credits like the Child Tax Credit.

**Mitigate Welfare Cliffs:** Congress should also examine budget-friendly reforms to reduce "welfare cliffs." The high marginal costs imposed on families when they take steps to become financially independent trap recipients in poverty and needlessly force them to become dependent on the federal government.

**Counter Fraud, Waste, and Abuse:** Lawmakers must also ensure that welfare benefits flow only to those individuals who truly need them, not liars and cheats looking to enrich themselves off of taxpayers. Fraud,

waste, and abuse of federal safety net programs diverts resources away from those who need it most. For instance, \$163 billion in taxpayer money was lost to fraud, waste, and abuse in the pandemic unemployment insurance program. With our entitlement programs facing dire financial futures and more Americans receiving welfare than ever before, wasting money is unsustainable and immoral. To this end, lawmakers should ensure the Social Security Administration (SSA) is used as a centralized database to determine the family status of welfare recipients, as [proposed](#) by the RSC Budget.

- 7) **We support empowering parents with more choice and control over Pre-K and K-12 education** dollars, so they can find the educational setting that works best for their children and their values, and we support giving parents the right to access their child’s curriculum.

The RSC understands that education is first and foremost about students and their families. For too long educators and administrators have taken advantage of the system to put themselves between parents and their children. After two years of school shutdowns, “Zoom classes,” mask mandates, woke agendas in classrooms, and lagging achievement, parents are more concerned than ever about the success of their child in the classroom and how their education dollars are being spent by government schools. RSC believes that school choice is one of the largest civil rights battles we will face this decade. To advance this principle, Congress should consider the following initiatives:

**Remove Federal Endorsement of Teachers Unions:** Currently, the National Education Association is the only teacher’s union in the country that has a federal charter passed by Congress. The union, and particularly its union president, demonstrated time and time again in the last few years that it is a woke, partisan organization that cares more about its own power and radical political agenda than it does about the education and wellbeing of children. Congress should consider removing its federal charter by passing the [National Education Association Charter Repeal Act](#) introduced by Rep. Scott Fitzgerald (R-WI).

**Expand Education Freedom and Choice Through Charitable Scholarships:** Congress should consider passing the *Educational Choice for Children Act*, introduced by the late Rep. Jackie Walorski (R-IN). This legislation would allow charitable donations from individuals and businesses to fund scholarships for students to attend the school of their choice and thus greatly expand the options for individuals, particularly in states with limited school choice.

**Provide School Choice for Our Military Families:** Many of our military families are dissatisfied with the educational opportunities of their children and cite it as a major factor for leaving the service. Congress should consider providing our military families with education savings accounts, which would strengthen military families and help recruitment and retention. Two proposals that takes steps toward achieving this goal include: 1) RSC Chairman Jim Banks’ (R- IN) *Education Savings Accounts for Military Families Act*; and 2) RSC National Security & Foreign Affairs Task Force Chairman Rep. Joe Wilson’s (R-SC) *Military Child Educational Freedom Act*.

**Permanent Reauthorization of DC Opportunity Scholarship Program (DCOSP):** The DCOSP provides vouchers to low-income parents who choose private schools for their children and is currently the only federally funded school choice program. Despite attacks from Congressional Democrats, the program has a proven track record of success for families increasing graduation rates, school safety, and satisfaction of families. It is long past time to make this life changing program permanent.

**Give States the Flexibility to Meet Local Education Needs:** To alleviate unnecessary federal regulation of local education decisions, Congress should consider passing *Academic Partnerships Lead Us to Success (A PLUS) Act* introduced by Rep. Ted Budd (R-NC), which would consolidate federal education funding into



block grants to states so they can meet and improve educational opportunities for families without burdensome federal requirements. This would allow states and local school districts to experiment with different education models that fit the unique needs of their students, including potentially inviting employers to play a more active role in educating students, which may benefit those who are likely to pursue careers outside of the traditional four-year higher education model.

**Federal Education Dollars Follow the Student** – Congress should also consider going a step beyond the *A-PLUS Act* and pass legislation like the *Support Children Having Open Opportunities for Learning Act* introduced by Rep. Chip Roy (R-TX) and Sen. Rand Paul (R-KY), which would allow federal funds for K-12 education to follow the child to the education setting of their choice, whether that be public schools, private schools, homeschooling, or different vocational models like apprenticeship or hands on training programs for those not planning to attend college after high school.

**Expand 529 Plans:** Congress should move forward with expanding 529 plans for homeschooling supplies and alternative career pathways for those not pursuing traditional college. Many families have chosen to opt out of government schools, with the number of families homeschooling tripling since 2019. To empower American families with educational choice, Congress should pass Rep. Jason Smith’s (R-MO) *Student Empowerment Act*.

- 8) **We support reforming our outdated Higher Education system** to open up pathways to the American Dream that do not require a college degree, and to ensure that student loan debt is not an impediment to family formation.

In the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress, the RSC American Worker Task Force produced a lengthy report with over 20 recommendations to reform our nation’s higher education system, some of which have been proposed as legislation during the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress. This section will amplify and expand upon the work previously advanced by that Task Force report. Additionally, House Education & Labor Committee Ranking Member Virginia Foxx (R-VA), along with RSC Chairman Jim Banks (R-IN) and Conference Chair Elise Stefanik (R-NY), recently introduced the *REAL Reform Act*, which includes many higher education finance reforms embraced by RSC American Worker Task Force’s report.

**Push Back on College for All Mentality:** For decades, society and governments at all levels have pushed more and more students to go to a traditional four-year college, even though that path does not make sense for all students. The aftermath is an underprepared and misallocated workforce and a debt-riddled generation who are postponing important life milestones like getting married, having kids, and owning a home. This cycle must be stopped. Congress should consider taking steps to level the playing field for non-traditional four-year options. For instance, Congress could 1) Modify programs, like TRIO and GEAR Up, designed to encourage students to take a four-year college path so they also promote alternatives education path ways; 2) Pass the 529 IRAP Expansion Act, introduced by Rep. Lloyd Smucker (R-PA) that would expand the uses of 529 plans’ funds to include costs related to Industry Recognized Apprenticeship Programs (IRAPs) and expenses related to a career and technical education program or a career pathway; 3) Pass legislation that directs the Department of Labor to revive the Trump administration’s IRAP rule; and 4) Pass RSC Chairman Banks’ *Pell Grant Flexibility Act*, which would allow for Pell Grants to be used by students in skills-based programs.

**Prevent Working Families from Bailing Out Others’ College Debt:** The Biden administration recently unilaterally announced an immoral and illegal plan to cancel the student loans of millions of people, essentially shifting the burden to many hardworking taxpayers who never went to college. Biden’s college loan giveaway could cost American taxpayers over \$1 trillion. This move also comes after the administration

repeatedly delayed student loan repayments using the pandemic as justification. Congress should consider: 1) Passing the *Federal Student Loan Integrity Act*, introduced by Rep. Bob Good (R-VA), which would block the Biden administration's illegal plan to cancel student loans and remove the Education Secretary's authority to extend the repayment moratorium without Congressional action; and 2) Passing the *PSLF Fairness Act*, introduced by Rep. Ken Buck (R-CO), which would limit the eligibility for the public service loan forgiveness program to ensure taxpayers are not paying for the forgiveness of loans for people of higher income and can afford to pay for their loans.

**Encourage Colleges to Create Workers Not Wokers:** Higher education institutions should create individuals who are prepared to enter the workforce, so they can better provide for themselves and their families. However, colleges and universities seem more intent on creating social justice warriors who are unprepared to contribute to society in meaningful and productive ways. Congress should consider passing legislation to address this perverse situation. For instance, the *Federal Work Study Improvement Act*, introduced by Rep. Fred Keller (R-PA), would ensure students who participate in the Federal Work Study program are freer to gain experience in real world jobs by removing restrictions on private sector employment. The *Federal Grant Accountability Act*, introduced by Rep. Ben Cline (R-VA), would ensure that federal research grant funding is not inappropriately used to promote woke, radical ideologies, but rather is used for legitimate and research-oriented purposes. Also, Ranking Member Foxx's PROSPER Act includes language that would make student aid more dynamic and responsive to labor market trends by requiring student loan repayment rates to be calculated at the program level, as opposed to an institutional level, for purposes of determining whether students enrolled in that program can receive federal loans. Lawmakers may also want to enact legislation that would decrease the amount of federal loans students can borrow on a program-by-program basis based on data demonstrating the value of the program. Last, Congress should pass legislation to give colleges and universities "skin in the game" by requiring them to pay a percentage of a student's debt if the defaults on federal student loans are too high.

- 9) **We support reforming the foster care and adoption system** to better meet the needs of families and children, while protecting faith-based institutions who serve these communities from discrimination.

**Protect Faith-Based Providers from Government Discrimination:** The Left is increasingly committed to preventing religious institutions from playing any role in civil society or being involved with any government function. This has unfortunately been the case with faith-based adoption and foster care centers, which have faced threats of funding being removed over their sincerely held religious beliefs. The radical Left would prefer fewer kids are placed in loving homes than allow religious organizations to participate in these efforts. In response, Congress should consider passing the *Child Welfare Provider Inclusion Act* introduced by Rep. Mike Kelly (R-PA), which would protect these faith-based institutions serving in the adoption and foster space from government discrimination based on their religious convictions.

**Reform the Foster Care System:** In the *Family First Prevention Services Act*, Congress focused on keeping families together to avoid having to place children in foster care. Unfortunately, that outcome is not always possible. Congress should take a hard look at foster care programs, and other related programs, to see how they might be better streamlined, improved, and made more evidence-based to better serve the children who are cared for in the foster system. For example, Congress will soon have the opportunity to make meaningful reforms to Stephanie Tubbs Jones Child Welfare Services program as part of a long-term reauthorization.

In addition, one of the challenges with the foster system is dealing with older children who age out of the program. Many of them often have a difficult time with that transition. Some of those children may be eligible for Social Security Survivor benefits or Veterans benefits due to the loss of a parent. States often use those

benefits to cover the cost of caring for that child. At a minimum, states should be transparent when they are using those benefits on behalf of the child and that they are not just a revenue stream for state budgets. Furthermore, Congress should consider ways to encourage states to set aside some of those funds to help a child transition into adulthood, particularly if certain benchmarks are achieved.

Another area that may be worthy of exploring further is the role other family members often play in caring for a child. If the state finds that the parents are not able to care for a child, often the next best option is a close relative such as a grandparent. Yet those family members are often not provided the same foster benefits as non-family foster parents because they have not gone through the bureaucratic foster-parent approval process. Congress should consider ways to encourage states to streamline approval of foster relatives so they may receive some financial assistance.

Lastly, some children do not have the option of returning to their parents or other family members and their only path outside of the foster system is adoption. Interstate adoptions can be particularly challenging because the two states often have different processes and standards. Congress should consider ways to break down these barriers to speed up interstate adoptions. For example, the state with the guardianship of the child receives a financial benefit for completing an adoption, while the state accepting the child does not, which tends to slow down interstate adoptions. To incentivize a speedier process, Congress could look to provide skin in the game for both states by splitting the incentive: 80% for the home state and 20% for the receiving state.

**Reform the Adoption Tax Credit:** Families that choose to adopt a child currently receive a tax credit of \$14,400, but that credit is not refundable, though it can be carried forward for up to five years. According to CRS, “There is currently little evidence that adoption tax benefits are an effective policy tool to increase adoptions. Instead, data suggest that adoption tax benefits are often a windfall to families that would have adopted in their absence. In addition, the vast majority of adoption tax benefits go to upper-income Americans, even though data indicate that a significant number of lower- and middle-income Americans adopt.” Congress should consider modifying the credit to ensure that it would benefit those at lower income levels, where the financial benefit of this credit could more likely be the difference between a family choosing to adopt and not. One way to potentially do this would be to make the tax credit partially refundable and pay for it by reducing the amount for higher income families. Additionally, the tax credit is available to families whether they adopt a child in the United States or from a foreign country. To encourage more families to consider adopting children in the United States, and particularly from the foster system, and to help with the expenses of that adoption, Congress should consider making the tax credit worth more for those who choose to adopt a child in the U.S. Increasing adoptions from children in the foster system would likely generate savings to the federal budget and make it more likely that fewer children would age out of foster care system, which often leads to bad outcomes for those children.

10) **We support efforts to end abortion**, which ends the lives of hundreds of thousands of children every year and to support mothers facing crisis pregnancies so that abortion becomes not only illegal but unthinkable.

Earlier this year the RSC released the most pro-life budget ever produced in Congress. This budget included 23 specific bills introduced by members to advance a pro-life agenda, including efforts to prevent taxpayers paying for abortion through codification of things like the Hyde amendment and a complete defund of Planned Parenthood. That budget was released before the historic *Dobbs* decision, which rightfully placed policy decisions about abortion back with the people’s elected representatives. This section will amplify and expand upon the work previously advanced by the RSC budget, particularly by looking forward to a post-*Roe*

landscape. Moreover, many of the proposals in points 1 through 9 above are also designed to prioritize support for pregnant women and women with young children.

**Take Additional Steps to Support Women Who are Pregnant** - Currently, states typically begin requiring child support payments to begin once the child is born. Congress should consider passing the *Unborn Child Support Act* introduced by former RSC Chairman Rep. Mike Johnson (R-LA), which would amend the Social Security Act to allow mothers to elect to receive child support payments from the moment of conception. Congress should also consider passing the *Pregnancy Discrimination Amendment Act* introduced by Rep. Tim Walberg (R-MI), which would expand protections for pregnant women in the workplace. Congress should also consider enacting Sen. Marco Rubio's (R-FL) *Standing with Moms Act*, which would create a database of life-affirming services available to support pregnant women.

**Support for Crisis Pregnancy Centers:** At RSC we understand the importance of supporting expecting mothers, especially in the wake of the *Dobbs* decision. One way that we can ensure support is for Congress to fund crisis pregnancy centers that offer an array of support options for women. As these centers come under both ideological and physical attack, conservatives should stand fast with these important centers. Furthermore, Congress should press the Department of Justice to investigate and prosecute the numerous examples of violence against crisis pregnancy centers around the country since the *Dobbs* decision.

**Rethink Medicaid:** The RSC Budget for FY 2023 and the RSC Health Care plan from the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress included reforms to reinvigorate Medicaid to make it work for those who need it the most. Congress should consider reforming Medicaid along these lines to repurpose existing funding into five new state-controlled funding streams. Each funding stream is focused on different populations currently served by Medicaid. For example, one provides coverage and services for pregnant and post-partum women. By allowing states the flexibility to control these dollars free from most federal rules, states could use these funds to create innovative care settings and treatment for postpartum coverage and extend the length of coverage for postpartum mothers beyond the current 60-day standard. They could also increase support for mothers facing crisis pregnancies and improve health care quality, as some are already considering doing after the *Dobbs* decision. As part of this new funding mechanism, Congress could provide efficiency and quality health incentive bonuses for states that meet certain benchmarks. Overall, conservatives must continue to offer flexible solutions that are pro-mother, which is in stark contrast to the Democrats' focus on increasing benefits for able-bodied, childless adults.

### **Bottom Line:**

Republicans fought against shutdowns, woke indoctrination and bureaucratic interference in our schools. We earned the right to call ourselves "the Party of Parents."

But we shouldn't stop at education. Republicans should champion American families' best interest in tax law, welfare reform, abortion, and on every policy front. The GOP should become the Party of Families.