

JANUARY 2024

Messaging the Child Tax Credit

As the debate on the Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act of 2024 turns from the House to the Senate, the spotlight should also turn to the bipartisan agreement's expansion of the Child Tax Credit — a far-reaching policy that has long been believed as indefinitely stalled in a divided Congress but now given a second-chance in the proposal.

In a political landscape so often marred by division, the expanded Child Tax Credit has consistently emerged as a rare unifier among voters. In fact, recent surveys from Navigator Research, Hart Research, Lake Research Partners, Echelon Insights, and Data For Progress have all found that the policy remains overwhelmingly popular. The Child Tax Credit enjoys broad bipartisan support and strong appeal across key demographics, even though voters remain unaware of who is responsible for bringing them such an effective, cost-cutting policy.

With that in mind, all data point to supporters of the Child Tax Credit having an opportunity to seize the intensifying debate around the Wyden-Smith proposal, re-introduce the expanded Child Tax Credit to the American electorate, and define themselves as the champions of the policy as we move toward November 2024.

SEVEN IN TEN VOTERS SUPPORT THE EXPANDED CHILD TAX CREDIT

Within the last year, data from Navigator Research (69% support / 17% oppose), Lake Research Partners and Echelon Insights (84), and Data For Progress (71/21) in January 2024; Hart Research (70/20) in September 2023; and Lake Research Partners (71/16) in May 2023 all reveal a compelling case for the universal appeal of the expanded Child Tax Credit.

In each survey, nearly seven in ten voters (and often more), including overwhelming majorities of Independents and Republicans, support a larger and improved refund for families with children.

THE CTC COALITION SPANS ALL DEMOGRAPHICS

Each survey's findings point to a diverse coalition supporting the expanded Child Tax Credit, but Lake Research Partners' May 2023 results, compared to an identical question from a year earlier, indicate that rising support of the Child Tax Credit is the result of rising intensity of support in certain subgroups.

In comparison to 2022, intensity among white voters has risen 5%, Black voters 12%, Latino voters 14%, and men 16%. Young voters are 9 points more likely to strongly favor the Child Tax Credit than older voters, and battleground voters' intensity in favorability outweighs voters overall by a 14-point margin. Lake's January 2024 research with Echelon Insights asked a slightly different version of the question, but still found rising intensity: 59% of parents strongly favor the Child Tax Credit and 78% of Republicans now do so, too, a notable 23% increase since Lake's May survey.

Despite Washington's conventional wisdom that the expanded Child Tax Credit was dead, voters not only sustained their support — they became even more fervent supporters in its absence, as the cost of living has become a top issue for voters.

VOTERS STRONGLY BELIEVE THAT THE CHILD TAX CREDIT SHOULD BE MADE AVAILABLE TO EVERY CHILD

Voters also respond especially favorably to expanding the Child Tax Credit to make it fully available to all low-income and middle-class families, a provision that is not currently included in the bipartisan tax agreement but still garners broad-based support. Hart Research found investing in all low-income and middle-class families is favored by overwhelming majorities of voters across party lines, with 82% feeling favorably (12% unfavorable) towards full expansion.

Building on this, Lake Research Partners and Echelon Insights found over three-quarters (78%) of voters think that elected officials are not doing well in reflecting the needs, desires, and experiences of younger people in this country. Even more, Americans across the political spectrum think that the federal government

spends too little when it comes to investments and programs that benefit children and youth: nearly three-quarters of Democrats and 62% of Republicans think the government spends too little on investments; 73% of Democrats and 52% of Republicans think it spends too little on programs.

A COMPELLING ISSUE FOR VOTER PERSUASION AND VOTER DECISION-MAKING

Hart Research found voters report, by more than two-to-one, that they would be less likely to support a candidate who opposes the expanded Child Tax Credit. When a candidate opposes the CTC while advocating larger tax cuts for the wealthy and corporations, voters are even more inclined to withdraw support: 58% say they would be less likely to support such a candidate. And, on top of that, Data For Progress reported that a majority (57%) of voters believe that taxes on large corporations should be increased, not cut.

This is a striking truth as Congress weighs the Wyden-Smith proposal, given that position is likely the rationale of many conservative members of Congress who are expected to oppose the package.

AN OPPORTUNITY TO CHAMPION THE EXPANDED CHILD TAX CREDIT

There is an opening right now for supporters, regardless of this bipartisan proposal's final outcome, to leverage the broad-based support for the Child Tax Credit and its ability to become a wedge issue between candidates. Many voters don't clearly know who or who does not support the Child Tax Credit, and it would be wise for supporters to claim and define this issue: to take credit for pushing for this expansion if it passes or to attack opponents for blocking it if it fails. There are several pieces of evidence for this finding:

First, the Hart Research survey finds voters believe that Democrats do a better job than Republicans on supporting families with children, but only by an 18-point margin. Second, spotlighting opponents around and following a vote on the Wyden-Smith proposal is an opportunity to strengthen that advantage, especially given that three in five voters are not aware that only Democrats supported expanding the Child Tax Credit between 2021 and 2024. Thirdly, Navigator Research

found this month that nearly one in three voters would blame Republicans if the current proposal fails, a 9-point margin over Democrats. However, another near-third would blame both parties and another near-third does not know who to blame, showing that supporters of the Child Tax Credit have a window to champion it in either scenario and to squarely define who is responsible for its success or its failure.

MESSAGING CAN MEET THIS MOMENT

By championing the expanded Child Tax Credit in this moment, its supporters in Congress can successfully make their case to voters that they are fighting to support the backbone of America — the working- and middle-class families — while its opponents are fighting for wealthy corporations and billionaires. The expansion of the Child Tax Credit is more than a policy; it's a commitment to American families and their children, and messaging should reflect that. That may sound like...

In success:

We are in this for the long-haul. We expanded the Child Tax Credit in 2021 and started the monthly checks to families, and we fought to make that permanent in 2022, but they blocked it. Unlike them, we are fighting to make sure billionaires and wealthy corporations pay their fair share in what they owe in taxes, and now two years later we held the line to bring the Child Tax Credit back because we said it's our job to deliver for working- and middle-class families. This means a larger refund this year for millions of American families — more money directly back into your pockets to make it easier for you to afford essentials like food, rent, diapers, and clothing for your children. And, this is just a down payment; we are still fighting for larger investments in families and for children, and we will fight for a permanent expansion of the monthly Child Tax Credit to make it fully available to all low-income and middle-class families.

Or, plainly calling out why it failed:

They blocked an opportunity to directly help families struggling with the cost of living. We were ready to put more money in your hands, and the failure of the expanded Child Tax Credit shows their clear preference for the well-being of corporations and billionaires over the well-being of American families and children. We expanded the Child Tax Credit in 2021 and started the monthly checks to families, and we fought to make that permanent in 2022, but they blocked it. Unlike them, we are fighting to make

sure wealthy corporations and billionaires pay their fair share in what they owe in taxes, and deliver more for working- and middle-class families. Now two years later, they have killed a bill that would do just that — this means that you aren't getting larger tax refunds this year because they wanted to give more money to wealthy corporations and billionaires instead of expanding the Child Tax Credit to help families deal with the affordability crunch. While they have their sights set on making the Trump tax cuts for corporations and billionaires permanent, we are fighting for a permanent expansion of the monthly Child Tax Credit next year, fully available to all low-income and middle-class families, because we have our sights set on delivering for the backbone of America — working- and middle-class families.