

**#FAMILIESFIRST**  
**ACTION GUIDE**

**2016 Ohio US Senate Debates**

## **Introduction**

While it's encouraging that issues impacting women and working families have entered the national spotlight during the 2016 election cycle—the discussion can't stop there.

Ohio voters deserve to hear from both Senate candidates on the issues that will have a direct impact on women and working families such as affordable child care, access to paid leave, raising the minimum wage, and addressing student debt.

Every Ohio woman and family should be able to make livable wages, take care of a new baby, family member, or recover from their own illnesses, to access affordable, high-quality child care, or get an education without being straddled with debt for decades.

Ohio women and working families have too much at stake in 2016 to not hold your Senate candidates accountable for where they stand. Use this toolkit to demand that Ted Strickland and Rob Portman put policies for women and working families at the forefront of the election and make these issues a central part of the Ohio US Senate race debates.

## **Table of Contents**

Page 3

### **The Issues**

---

Page 6

### **Where do they stand?**

---

Page 9

### **Sample Press Release**

---

Page 10

### **Sample Letters to the Editor**

---

Page 11

### **Sample Tweets and Graphics**

## **The Issues**

### ***Paid Family and Medical Leave***

Access to paid family and medical leave has been proven to improve the health outcomes for a new child and mother, reduce gender and economic disparities among workers, and create a stronger, more productive workforce. Despite these invaluable benefits, the US falls behind the rest of the world in failing to offer a national paid leave policy. In fact, only 13 percent of workers have access to the benefit, and among low-wage workers that number drops to just four percent.

Ohio needs workplace policies that put families first. Nearly three out of every four children in Ohio live in families where all parents work. Additionally, 1.48 million Ohioans serve as family caregivers. Outdated policies in our state prevent people from being able to take time off from a job to deal with a major life event – like a serious illness in the family or the birth of a child – or from taking paid time off when they or their kids come down with the flu.

Additionally, less than half, 37.6 percent, of working adults in Ohio are estimated to be eligible for and able to afford to take unpaid leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), the federal law that guarantees eligible employees up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave each year to care for a new child or a seriously ill family member, or to recover from pregnancy or a serious health condition. The lack of affordable child care and paid family leave is costing American families \$28.9 billion in lost wages per year.

Ohio needs a state policy that builds on the federal FMLA so that all workers and families know that they can take care of themselves, a parent, a sibling, or a loved one who gets sick, or to care for new children following a pregnancy or an adoption.

### ***Child Care***

High-quality, affordable child care is out of reach for millions of Americans, costing more than rent in every state. Our policies are out-of-step with the realities of American families—the overwhelming majority of young children in Ohio have all parents working, which means parents, especially working mothers, are often left to make an impossible choice between their paycheck and their child’s care.

As many women still take on the vast majority of caregiving duties, they are often forced to leave the workforce if affordable child care cannot be attained. When a typical woman in Ohio leaves the workforce for five years to become a full-time caregiver, she could lose nearly \$467,000 in lifetime earnings, or about a 19 percent reduction in her lifetime income.

The average annual cost of a child care center for a typical Ohio family with an infant and a toddler is more than \$16,000 per year, out of reach for most middle class families, but especially for low-wage workers, single mothers, and families of color who are often paying as much as one-third of their income for child care.

High-quality affordable child care and preschool are necessities, and a win-win for everyone. Children are our nation's future workforce and innovators and high-quality early education positively impacts the rest of their lives; Working families are being squeezed and need affordable, high-quality child care and pre-k to make ends meet; High-quality, affordable child care and pre-k levels the playing field and boosts the economy, benefitting everyone.

Ohio needs a major investment to put high-quality child care within reach for working families so no one is forced to choose between work and family and every child gets a strong start.

### ***Minimum Wage***

The minimum wage has failed to keep pace with inflation, which has left economic security out of reach for many working families that are living paycheck to paycheck. Women are disproportionately impacted by the minimum wage as two-thirds of low-wage workers are women. In our state and across the country, women are more likely to be living in poverty, working in minimum wage, or working part-time.

For more than 30 years in Ohio, there has been a growing disconnect between worker productivity and pay. While the state economy grew by more than two-thirds between 1979 and 2013, the typical Ohioan's wages actually dropped slightly when adjusted for inflation. Raising the federal minimum wage to \$12 by July 2020 would help restore the balance, benefit 1.5 million Ohio workers, including more than 300,000 parents and more than 700,000 women, and would help our economy.

Of all Ohio families earning less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level, nearly 70 percent are working. Between 2005 and 2013, the share of working families that earn less than 200 percent of poverty has expanded in Ohio, growing from 26 percent in 2005 to 32 percent in 2013.

Ohio's minimum wage falls so short of the cost of living, especially for families, that many full-time working families struggle to make ends meet and put food on the table.

If you work full-time, even for minimum wage, you should earn enough to meet basic needs. We need to raise the minimum wage so that working families can feed their children, keep the lights on, and stay off the streets. When you decide to work for a living, you should be able to make a living.

## ***Student Debt***

The student debt crisis is a dead weight on the American economy. Student debt is keeping American students and families from getting ahead. College costs have spiraled, forcing more and more students and parents to borrow and leaving less and less money for families to put towards buying a house or saving for retirement.

Nearly 2 million Ohioans hold some sort of student debt adding up to roughly \$50 billion in student loans, and 70 percent of Ohio college students finish school with almost \$30,000 in debt.

The student debt burden surpasses both credit card and auto debt in this country, and is the only type of debt that has increased since the Great Recession. Student debt originated in state disinvestment in higher education, passing the costs onto students. Over the past 30 years, while the price tag for tuition has risen 1,100%, all but two states have pulled money out of their public higher education system.

Affordable higher education isn't a radical idea. Thirty years ago college costs were low and Pell grants, coupled with a summer job, could allow students to graduate debt-free. Our parents were able to go to college without taking on crushing debt and we are asking for the same fair shot. We need to make higher education a public good again

Addressing the student debt crisis will jumpstart the American economy and expand opportunities exponentially for young Americans. Helping borrowers currently struggling with debt and ensuring that future students can graduate debt-free is the single best investment in our country's future we can make.

## **Where do they stand?**

### ***Increasing the minimum wage***

#### **Ted Strickland**

- Strickland has stated his support for increasing the federal minimum wage to \$12 per hour with exemptions available for very small businesses.
- In his campaign policy platform for 'Restoring Economic Fairness' - hosted on his website - he states that he supports an increase in the minimum wage, and would fight in the Senate for a higher minimum wage.

#### **Rob Portman**

- Portman has expressed both concern and support for raising the minimum wage through his public statements and his voting record. He voted against a 2014 proposal in the Senate to increase the federal minimum wage to \$10.10 an hour. When questioned about the bill, he stated that "I'm not in favor of the proposal for \$10.10. I think it's too high, too fast. I think it will result in job loss."
- He has voiced his support for Ohio's strategy of an annual indexing to inflation as a path forward for increasing the federal minimum wage. He voted for a proposal that was included in a nonbinding budget resolution in 2015 to raise the minimum wage from \$7.25 to an unspecified amount.
- Following the vote he stated, "I support the way Ohio handles minimum wage. Ohio has a higher minimum wage of \$8.10 and is indexed to inflation, and I support that. I supported the amendment today because it opens the door to indexing the minimum wage as Ohio does."
- However, Portman has not signed on as a cosponsor of the Raise the Wage Act, which was introduced a month after his budget vote and would gradually increase the federal minimum wage to \$12 per hour.

### ***Increasing access to paid family leave***

#### **Ted Strickland**

- During his campaign for Senate, Strickland voiced his support for a federal paid family and medical leave insurance program. Within his 'Ohio Families First: Fighting for Women and Working Families' platform, he states that if elected to the Senate he "...will support the Family and Medical Insurance Leave (FAMILY) Act that would provide working people with up to 12 weeks of partial income when they take time for their own serious health condition, including pregnancy leave and childbirth recovery and for a serious condition of a parent, child, spouse, or domestic partner."
- Strickland's 'Fighting for Women and Working Families' platform also includes support of access to paid sick days. The document states that if elected to the Senate, he would support the Healthy Family Act, providing workers with the opportunity to earn up to seven paid sick days per year.

## **Rob Portman**

- While Portman has not become a co-sponsor of the Family and Medical Insurance Leave Act in the Senate - which would have required paid family and medical leave for those employed and engaged in caregiving during their time off - he has not voiced his opposition for the issue of paid family leave.
- Additionally, he has not signed on as a co-sponsor of the Healthy Families Act, legislation that would provide workers with paid sick leave. During the 2015 budget debate, Portman voted in favor of a budget amendment that would strengthen paid sick leave, but this vote was largely symbolic as it was a non-binding resolution. It is unclear of how he would vote for paid sick leave legislation like the Healthy Families Act.

## **Increasing access to high-quality, affordable child care**

### **Ted Strickland**

- One of the pillars of Strickland's 'Ohio Families First' platform is the need for "Increasing The Availability Of Affordable And Quality Childcare." Within the plan, he states that if elected to the Senate, he will "work to increase the tax credits available to both families and employers so that we help tackle this challenge and make sure women and families have affordable, quality options for childcare."
- When he was governor one of his state budgets included increased funding for childcare providers, all-day kindergarten, toddler specialists and early-childhood mental health services.
- Additionally, Strickland signed an executive order as governor to allow child care workers to unionize in 2008, which was rescinded under Governor John Kasich.

### **Rob Portman**

- Portman voted in favor of the Child Care Development Block Grant Reauthorization Act in 2014, which was signed into law including two amendments offered by him. He sent out a press release to applaud its passage, and voice his support for the legislation.
- However, in a non-binding budget vote Portman voted to oppose a measure expanding preschool opportunities for low and middle-income families that would have been offset with revenue from closing tax loopholes on corporations.

## **Making higher education affordable**

### **Ted Strickland**

- During his campaign for Senate, Strickland has expressed his intent to expand and protect Pell Grants and the Perkins Loan Program. He's also argued that students should be able to refinance their loans to get a fair interest rate and ultimately make higher education debt free.
- As Governor, Strickland froze tuition costs for public college and universities.

### **Rob Portman**

- While Portman supports the use of Pell grants for use in high school to pay for early college credits, he voted for the largest cut in history of \$90 billion in the 2011.
- Senator Portman voted against legislation that would have enabled students to refinance their federal student loans to lower rates, though he says he supports lowering interest rates.
- Senator Portman recommended eliminating the Perkins loan program in the 2008-2009 federal budget, though he now says he supports the program.

## Sample Press Release

### **RELEASE: Thousands of Ohio Advocates Challenge Ted Strickland and Rob Portman to Discuss Their Plans for Policies that Address the Needs of Ohio Women and Working Families during the Senate Debates**

For immediate release

[DATE]

**Contact:**

**Phone:**

**Email:**

[CITY]— [ORGANIZATION'S NAME] demands that the Ohio U.S. Senate candidates put issues critical to Ohio's women and families at the forefront of the 2016 election and make these policies a central part of their upcoming debates.

While it's encouraging that issues impacting women and working families have entered the national spotlight during the 2016 election cycle—the discussion can't stop there. With only a few weeks left until Election Day, Ohioans need to hear where Ted Strickland and Rob Portman stand on the issues that Ohio women and working families are clamoring for: paid family leave, child care, the minimum wage, and student debt.

Every Ohio woman and family should be able to make livable wages, to take care of a new baby, family member, or recover from their own illnesses, to access affordable, high-quality child care, or get an education without being straddled with debt for decades.

[INSERT quote from one of your organization's leaders about the urgent need for these policies in Ohio]

Ohio's policies don't match the realities of our families. Nearly 70% of Ohio children under age 6 have both parents in the workforce, higher than the national average, which means parents, especially working mothers, are often left to choose between work and family as they're being squeezed with wages that are too low and student debt that is too high.

Ohio women and working families have too much at stake in 2016— [ORGANIZATION'S NAME] will be holding Ted Strickland and Rob Portman accountable for prioritizing these key policies at the U.S. Senate debates.

## **Sample Letters to the Editor**

### ***Progressive Advocate: Child Care***

Ohio families are facing a child care crisis. Nearly 70% of Ohio's children under the age of 6 have both parents in the workforce, yet high-quality child care and pre-k are out of reach for most middle class families and especially for low-wage workers, single mothers and families of color. Child care for an infant and a four-year-old costs more than \$16,000 a year for the average Ohio family, which eats up 27% of median family income and costs more than median rent. Many parents are forced to make the impossible choice of spending almost a third of their income on child care, putting their child in sub-standard child care, or leaving their jobs to stay at home and care for their children themselves. We need a major public investment in our child care system.

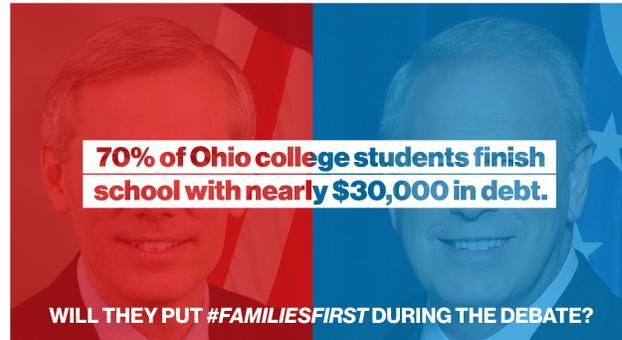
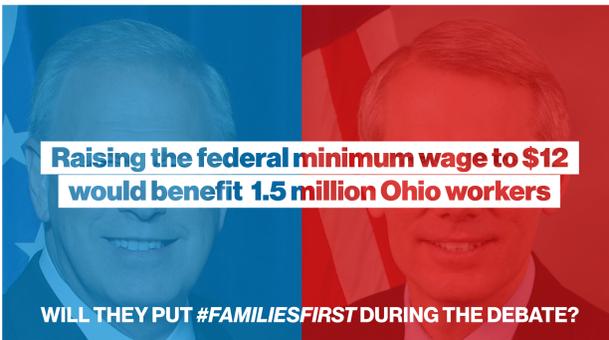
This is an issue that affects young children, working parents and Ohio's economy, and families cannot fix it alone. As presidential candidates talk about what they will do for our country, I want to hear what their plan is to put high-quality child care and early education within reach for Ohio families.

### ***Progressive Advocate: Paid Family and Medical Leave***

Enacting and investing in paid family and medical leave policies is a commonsense approach to support Ohio families and our economy. Paid family and medical leave would improve health outcomes for children and mothers, reduce gender and economic disparities among workers, and create a stronger and more productive workforce. The US is far behind the rest of the developed world in terms of paid leave policies: Only 13 percent of American workers have access to the benefit, and among low-wage workers that number drops to just four percent. Families should be able to take time to care for a new child or a seriously ill family member, or to recover from pregnancy or a serious health condition without fearing for their job and economic security.

The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) is the federal law that guarantees eligible employees up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave each year. However, less than half of working adults are eligible for FMLA and able to afford to take unpaid leave in Ohio. We need a statewide policy that builds on the federal FMLA so that all workers have the ability to care for themselves and their loved ones, regardless of their income or employer.

## Sample Tweets and Graphics



### Child Care

Childcare costs more than median rent in OH. It's time to put #familiesfirst at #OHSen debates @Ted\_Strickland @robportman

@Ted\_Strickland @robportman how are you going to make child care affordable for OH women & families? #familiesfirst @ #OHSen debates

W/o affordable childcare & paid leave, families lose out on \$28.9B in wages @Ted\_Strickland @robportman put #familiesfirst @ #OHSen debates

### Paid Leave

Ohioans shouldn't have to choose between work & family: @Ted\_Strickland @robportman must talk paid leave @ #OHSen debates #familiesfirst

Less than half of working adults in OH can afford to take unpaid leave. @Ted\_Strickland @robportman put #familiesfirst w/ paid leave #OHSen

### Minimum Wage

Raising the min wage to \$12 would benefit 1.5 million OH workers! Put #familiesfirst @ #OHSen debates @Ted\_Strickland @robportman

When you work for a living you should be able to make a living! #Raisethewage @Ted\_Strickland @robportman #familiesfirst #OHSen

### Student Debt

70% of Ohioans have student debt. It's time to put #familiesfirst and #higherednotdebt at the #OHSen debates @Ted\_Strickland @robportman

The avg Ohio student is graduating w nearly \$30k in debt. What are your plans? @Ted\_Strickland @robportman #familiesfirst #higherednotdebt