



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 14, 2017

CONTACT

Erin Souza-Rezendes

esouza@blff.org

617-234-0355, ext. 109

The Barbara Lee Family Foundation Releases New Research

**MODERN FAMILY: HOW WOMEN CANDIDATES CAN TALK ABOUT POLITICS, PARENTING,
AND THEIR PERSONAL LIVES**

Voters question how women can serve constituents and take care of personal responsibilities at the same time. At all levels of government, women candidates and elected officials are often asked about their family lives. With a record number of women interested in running for office – many for the first time – since the election, these questions are as relevant as ever.

The [Barbara Lee Family Foundation](#) today released unique qualitative and quantitative research that helps decode how women candidates can best communicate about their families and personal lives. [Modern Family: How Women Candidates Can Talk About Politics, Parenting, and Their Personal Lives](#) provides a clear road map for women candidates to respond to questions about their personal lives while showing they are up for the job.

“We’ve been studying the obstacles and opportunities women face on the campaign trail for almost 20 years. If there’s one question we’ve received over and over again from candidates on both sides of the aisle it’s ‘How do I respond to questions about my personal life?’” said Barbara Lee, founder and president of the Barbara Lee Family Foundation. “Our newest report is designed to give women candidates at all levels and of all family situations the tools they need to navigate the complexities of running for office – and to challenge stereotypes and biases in the process.”

A few examples from the trail:

- **Illinois Senator Tammy Duckworth:** “I can tell you firsthand that some voters want to know how a woman could manage her family and represent her constituents at the same time: I announced my campaign for the U.S. Senate when my daughter was just a few months old and was asked time and again how I would make it work.”
- **Former Massachusetts Acting Governor Jane Swift:** “Implying that I was going to be a bad or absentee mother was unfair and deeply hurtful. Like many expectant first time mothers, I had many fears and insecurities but as a high profile politician I couldn't voice any of those.”
- **Rhode Island Governor Gina Raimondo:** “The press couldn’t get their heads around it—was I a no-nonsense businesswoman or a warm and fuzzy mom? My question to them was always, ‘Why can’t I be both?’”

For this latest research, the Barbara Lee Family Foundation partnered with Lake Research Partners and Chesapeake Beach Consulting, along with 76 Words. They conducted focus groups, online dial surveys, and online bulletin board groups in 2016. A full methodology can be found [here](#).

The key findings:

- **Voters are worried about the juggle.** Voters express concern about the ability of women candidates and elected officials to balance the competing priorities of their families and their constituents. Further, voters worry about the effect of running for office on the candidate's children, on the candidate as a person, and on the job she will do in office.
- **Ignoring concerns is not the answer.** It is important for women candidates – no matter their family situation – to talk to voters about their personal lives. When questions arise about a woman's family life and her ability to manage her personal life and professional responsibilities, she must respond. If voters' doubts and concerns go unaddressed, it negatively impacts the candidate's perceived likeability and effectiveness.
- **Candidates can't always bounce back from critiques.** While men candidates are able to recover from critiques about their abilities to manage family and public office, the same is not true for all women candidates. Some women candidates do not gain back all the ground they lose after critiques.
- **The age of a candidate's children matters.** It is more challenging to overcome critiques for a woman candidate or elected official who has young children, whether she is married or single. Voters perceive women with infants, young children, school-age children, and middle school or older children differently. Each scenario presents its own challenges. In general, having younger children is more challenging for voters to accept than having older children.
- **Moms face different expectations.** Voters will raise questions about a candidate's role as a mother as part of campaign discussions. They recognize a double standard for moms, who will get the most questions, but actively participate in it and are conscious of doing so.
- **Candidates without kids get questions, too.** Some voters also worry that a candidate or elected official who has never married and does not have children will not be able to truly understand the concerns of families.

"These challenges are surmountable," said Lee. "From 20 years of research, if there's one thing we've learned, it's that every woman who runs for office is changing the face of politics and paving the way for other women."

The full report on **Modern Family: How Women Candidates Can Talk About Politics, Parenting, and Their Personal Lives** is available at www.barbaraleefoundation.org.

About The Barbara Lee Family Foundation

The Barbara Lee Family Foundation works to advance women's equality and representation in American politics through political research, strategic partnerships, and grants and endowments. The foundation's work is guided by its core belief that women's voices strengthen our democracy and enrich our culture.

###