

2009 CDF Action Council® Nonpartisan Congressional Scorecard

Children Need Emergency Help in This Deep Recession Now and Your Senators and Representatives Ought to Provide It

Millions of children are fighting a war for their lives and futures without the tools and armor they need to protect themselves and prepare for the future. Their enemies are identifiable, preventable, and confrontable: growing poverty and extreme poverty and the hunger, homelessness, poor education, family instability and stress they wreak. Massive parental unemployment, home foreclosures, huge cutbacks in education, social services, libraries, parks and recreation leave countless children and youths idle, unengaged with caring adults, and unshielded from the streets, corrosive television, unfiltered internet fare and music videos. Their hopes and dreams are waning and their visions of a future better or as good as their parents rapidly dimming and disappearing.

Children have only one childhood and it is right now. Millions of children in our nation require emergency attention in our recession ravaged economy if irreparable harm is not to be inflicted on them and on our nation's future.

The greatest threat to America's national security comes from no enemy without but from our failure to protect, invest in, and educate all of our children who are the foundation of our future. Every 11 seconds of every school day a high school student drops out of school; every 32 seconds a baby is born into poverty; every 41 seconds a child is confirmed abused or neglected; every 42 seconds a baby is born without health insurance; every minute a baby is born to a teen mother; every minute a baby is born at low birthweight; every three hours a child or teen is killed by a firearm.

In 2009, 15.5 million children lived in poverty – more than one in every five children. One in 3 Black and Hispanic children are poor. And the younger children are the poorer they are. The increase from 2008 to 2009 was the steepest rise in poverty of any age group and the largest single year increase for children since the 1960s. This increase would have been higher had enough Members of Congress not stepped forward to support many of the votes in our scorecard that offered urgently needed help to children, families and other adults struggling to keep their heads above water in this perilous economic downturn.

We applaud our political leaders who heeded the call to cushion dire child and family need in 2009, especially the 194 Members of Congress who scored 100 percent on the Children's Defense Fund Action Council's Nonpartisan Congressional Scorecard. We also warmly thank the 86 others who scored 80 percent or higher. We urge you to thank them for protecting and shoring up the foundation our children urgently need by voting for:

- The reauthorization of the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) in January and then passage of landmark national health reform in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act that extended access to health care to 32 million people, including 95 percent of all children in America.
- Stimulating the economy through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) in response to the economic crises facing our country. ARRA included basic safety net protections including an extension of unemployment and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits, Medicaid and foster care payments to states, as well as increased investments in early care and education, schools, public housing and nutrition assistance. Low and middle-income working families were enormously helped through expansions of the Child Tax and the Earned Income Tax Credits. All these measures helped buffer millions of people from extraordinary economic hardships and should be extended to continue to stimulate the economy.

- Extensions of unemployment benefits for the long-term unemployed with special attention to areas with the highest unemployment rates which offered hope to many of the 8.1 million children living in families with unemployed parents.
- Passage of the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act which tripled the number of volunteers available to assist needy children and families in communities across the country – and which helped many of the volunteers pursue their own education.

But sadly, far too many of our political leaders consistently tried to block legislation to help children and families in dire need. They tried to block expanded access to health coverage for tens of millions in America. They tried to block extension of unemployment insurance benefits. They tried to block additional federal assistance to protect or create jobs or expand tax credits for working families desperately trying to feed, house and clothe their children. They tried to block funds to stimulate a reeling economy with 14.6 million unemployed workers and massive state budget deficits. Two-hundred-seventeen Members of Congress scored below 70 percent on our children's scorecard – a failing grade from our school days, and 50 Members scored zero. If your Members are among those failing our children, please hold them accountable.

It is morally obscene for a nation with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) exceeding \$14 trillion to refuse to exercise common and economic sense and decency to provide an adequate safety net for its most vulnerable children. It is well established that poverty can have a long-term – even permanent – effect on children pulled from the stable security of their homes, schools, and friends when families lose their homes and jobs and are forced to move in with others or into homeless shelters. How wrenching it is for teenagers to leave home to ease the burden on their unemployed parents. The loss of a sense of safety amidst the turmoil of economic insecurity fuels stress for parents and children and breeds a sense of hopelessness about the future. All of our leaders need to respond now to prevent future increases in child poverty and eliminate its harmful short and long term effects.

Now is the time when America can and must turn economic downturn into an opportunity to step forward to correct the gross imbalance of government subsidization of the wealthiest and most powerful among us and provide a safety net for all children from growing hunger, homelessness and stress.

All our leaders in both parties need to respond. But they will not unless they hear from you through your voices and votes.

As candidates line up to ask for your votes in November 2010, demand that they commit to protecting babies as much as bankers and investing in children as generously as corporations. It does not matter whether Members of Congress are liberal, conservative or moderate, Democrat, Republican or Independent, children need all of them to vote for, speak for and protect them now. Thank those that protected children in these desperate times and let those with scores below 70 percent know you expect them to do far more for children. Then hold them accountable for what they say they will do for children.

We must declare a national child emergency and demand that all our leaders act now to alleviate the massive child suffering around the country. The catastrophic BP oil spill's assault on our environment is an urgent national emergency but so is the catastrophic impact of this recession and the chronic plight and suffering of millions of children left adrift in a sea of poverty, hunger and homelessness and political neglect. It is critical that Members of Congress vote against extension of the profligate tax cut for the top two percent of wealthiest Americans and for extending tax cuts to the 98 percent of Americans who need help. Our future prosperity rests on our courage to step forward and close the gaping and growing gap between the very richest few in America and the rest of those in America, especially our struggling children.