

# Preface

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## Children Need Emergency Help from Congress Now

Millions of children in our nation require emergency help in our recession ravaged economy to prevent irreparable harm to them and our nation's future. Child poverty, hunger, and homelessness are rampant. The wealth and income gaps between the richest one percent of Americans and the rest of us are out of control. Forty-six million people in America are poor. In 2010, 16.4 million children lived in poverty – 950,000 more than in 2009. More than one in every five children is poor. More than one in three Black and Hispanic children are poor. And the younger children are the poorer they are - with one in four infants, toddlers and preschoolers poor. Between 2000 and 2010 the child poverty rate increased 36 percent.

The deteriorating economy hurt millions of families, spreading stress, instability and uncertainty about their children's futures. Massive parental unemployment, home foreclosures, and huge cutbacks in education, after-school and summer programs, social services, libraries, parks and recreation are leaving many children and youths idle, disengaged and unshielded from the streets. Although child needs have dramatically increased with growing child poverty, investments in programs that protect children face additional cascading cuts at the federal, state and local levels. Unless citizens and voters raise a ruckus for new investment priorities, our children and grandchildren will continue to slide backwards as America's dream goes into reverse. Our children's hopes and dreams are waning as their visions of a future better than or as good as their parents are rapidly vanishing.

### *How Members of Congress Scored*

Engaged and outspoken citizens and voters make good leaders. Thanks to your efforts, more than 200 Members of Congress stepped up to support key votes in the 2010 Children's Defense Fund Action Council® Nonpartisan Congressional Scorecard (CDF Action Council Scorecard). They offered urgently needed help to children, families and other adults struggling to stay afloat in this perilous economic downturn. In 2010, **104 Members of Congress scored 100 percent** on the CDF Action Council Scorecard and **141 Members scored between 80 and 100 percent**. Please thank them. These leaders saw the importance of protecting and shoring up the foundation for children by voting for:

- Passage of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act and the improvements added by the Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act. The final Affordable Care Act extended access to health care to 32 million people, including 95 percent of all children.
- Extension of basic lifelines such as unemployment insurance, a higher federal reimbursement rate for Medicaid, and increased aid for low income students struggling to benefit from higher education. These hard fought gains helped buffer millions of people from worse economic hardships in these tough times.

That is the good news. The bad news is that **263 Members of Congress scored below 70 percent** on the CDF Action Council Scorecard – a failing grade from our school days and **136 of these Members scored zero**. If your members are among them, please let them hear from you and hold them accountable.

### *“Robbing Peter to Pay Paul”: Tough Choices*

Unfortunately, some important gains for children came at the expense of threatened cuts in important programs for needy children and families. For example, the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 continued key child nutrition programs through 2015 for children, many in low-income families. It also included significant new investments in after-school meals, higher reimbursements for school lunch providers, and improvements in the nutritional quality of school meals and meals for children in child care programs. But many Members of Congress were put in the uncomfortable position of having to “rob Peter,” in this case the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which provides food stamps to families and individuals, to “pay Paul” for the comprehensive child nutrition bill. Because the President and Congressional leaders have committed to fix the cut in SNAP before it occurs in 2013, CDF’s Action Council has counted it as a “yes” vote but all of us must make sure that promise is kept. A similar “rob Peter to pay Paul” trade-off was required on the Medicaid and Education Assistance bill vote, which in both the House and Senate provided billions of dollars for jobs for educators and extended increases in federal funds for Medicaid provided in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (the Recovery Act). However, both bills paid for these gains in part with proposed cuts to SNAP (food stamps) in 2013. Here too there were commitments from Members to work to eliminate these proposed cuts before they took effect. On this basis, the CDF Action Council scored both as a “yes” vote.

### *Gains for Children and Families Blocked*

There were frequent direct attempts in Congress to block child improvements in 2010 for children and adults in need. Congress prevented extensions of support for vulnerable children and families that were in the Recovery Act. Unemployment insurance benefits were allowed to expire three times, harming not only unemployed adults but their children as well. The share of children with an unemployed or underemployed parent doubled between 2007 and 2010 to 18.3 percent. Some members also blocked additional federal assistance to protect or create jobs or expand tax credits for working families desperately trying to feed, house and clothe their children.

Congress also failed to pass the DREAM (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors) Act, which would have given many immigrant students who had already spent much of their life in the United States, the hope and opportunity they need to pursue a college education or to serve in the U.S. military. This would have been a critical step forward for tomorrow’s workforce in these challenging times.

### *Favoring the Powerful and Wealthy Over Powerless Children and the Poor*

Most disappointing and harmful for children was a December 2010 vote in which important gains for low income children in the Recovery Act were held hostage to continuation for two years of the unaffordable and profoundly unjust Bush era tax cuts for the wealthiest two percent of Americans. Since their enactment the Bush tax cuts overall have cost our nation nearly \$1.3 trillion. While the December bill included increases in the Earned Income Tax Credit, the Child Tax Credit

and fiscal relief for college students, it included an average tax break of \$104,000 for each millionaire household and changed the estate tax to benefit the very wealthiest families resulting in \$68 billion in lost revenue from this later change alone. Together these gains for the wealthiest Americans robbed desperately needed increased investments in programs to help poor families and children. The CDF Action Council scored this vote as a 'no' vote given that the needs of children were held hostage to protect the richest and most powerful Americans. Our wealthiest citizens should have been and must be asked to pay their fair share in taxes.

### *The AntiChildren Taxpayer Protection Pledge*

It is morally obscene for a nation with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) exceeding \$15 trillion to refuse to exercise common sense and moral decency and provide an adequate safety net for its most vulnerable children. The ever-widening income gap between the rich and poor is out of control and must be stopped. Something is awry when our 400 highest income earners made as much in 2008 as the combined tax revenues of 22 states.

The crippling income and wealth gaps convinced the CDF Action Council to include the "Taxpayer Protection Pledge" as an overarching vote against children and the nation's future in its 2010 Scorecard. Americans for Tax Reform created the pledge 25 years ago and "asks every candidate for elected office on the state and federal level to make a written commitment to their constituents to 'oppose and vote against tax increases.'" The CDF Action Council believes that the 212 Congress people who as of 2010 have committed to this irresponsible no-new-taxes pledge are abrogating their responsibility to the nation and sacrificing the well-being and future of millions of children and our entire nation on the altar of the privileged few. They protect the safety net for the wealthy, but leave the safety nets for the poor in tatters.

Poverty can have a long-term – even permanent – effect on children who lose the security of their homes, schools, neighborhoods and friends when families lose their homes and jobs, are forced to move in with others or into homeless shelters. When the stress becomes too much, some children are abused or neglected and move into foster care. The loss of safety amidst the turmoil of economic insecurity fuels parental and child hopelessness about the future. It's time to reverse course.

We need a nation that guarantees justice for all of our children and peoples. We need a public education system that educates all of our children for the future. We need to stop America's dream from vanishing for the next generation. We need to stop tax policies which favor the rich and take from the poor and middle class. We need to challenge those Members of Congress who vote to balance the budget on the backs of our babies and children. Children did not cause the deficit and must not be asked to pay to close it with their health, education, shelter and food.