

OPINION

Moving Forward with President Obama

Congress must invest in children

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

Americans committed to keep moving forward turned out in record numbers to vote for President Obama's re-election. But we won't be able to go forward until Congress sits down and makes the hard decisions to create a just budget that invests in children, our poorest group of Americans, and creates jobs for their struggling parents while making sure those who have benefited from huge tax cuts pull their weight.

Election exit polls have made clear that the majority of Americans—Democrats, Independents, and many Republicans alike—agree that the richest Americans and corporations need to pay their fair share.

For all those who voted, our work and duty is not done. We need to make sure to tell the President and Congress to "be very careful what you cut" and make our voices heard now and for as long as necessary.

Children, the poor and the middle class cannot afford more devastating cuts and instability as they continue to struggle

against hunger, homelessness, joblessness, and loss of summer school and regular school days as a result of this long economic downturn.



To move forward, America's security and prosperity depend on our children's ability to drive the economy of the future. If a majority of them cannot read and compute at grade level in fourth, eighth and 12th grade, we will not have a strong economy.

The leaders now facing crucial budget decisions must craft budget solutions that will protect the already porous safety nets on which so many children and families rely, and invest in the health, early childhood development and education of our children.

To achieve long term growth for America, any solution must: (1) protect investments serving children and low income families; (2) invest in children which will create desperately needed jobs; and (3) ensure that the wealthiest Americans and corporations pay their fair share.

The fundamental principle of protecting children and other vulnerable populations has been a cornerstone of deficit reduction since the bipartisan Balanced Budget Act of 1985. Every automatic budget cut mechanism of the past quarter

century has exempted core low-income assistance programs from any cuts triggered when budget targets or fiscal restraint rules were missed or violated.

The American people still strongly support this principle. Recent polling conducted by the Pew Research Center showed almost 60 percent of Americans oppose cutting spending for anti-poverty programs. A Public Opinion Strategies poll showed even larger numbers of likely voters oppose cuts to Medicaid (73 percent) or education programs (75 percent).

Eliminating the Earned Income Tax Credit now would increase child poverty 23 percent in the future. Since poor children are more likely to drop out of high school, they are less likely to find steady work as adults. Paying for each year of high school dropouts costs us more than \$125 billion over the course of their lifetimes.

Eliminating early education investments now would increase a little boy's chance of going to prison later in life by 39 percent. Incarcerating that child will cost us nearly three times more a year than it would have cost to provide him a quality early learning experience.

Cutting just \$4,000 of Medicaid and food stamps from a girl in a low-income

family negatively impacts her health and nutrition. This can lead to poor performance in school which increases her chances of getting pregnant as a teenager. And paying for teen pregnancies costs all of us \$10 billion a year.

Economists agree that investing in children promotes economic growth. For example, investments in education that raise high school graduation rates have been shown to yield a public benefit of \$209,000 per student in higher government revenues and lower government spending, and an economic benefit to the public purse that is 2.5 times greater than the costs.

With more than 16.1 million children in America – more than one in five of all children and more than one in three children of color – living in poverty, special efforts must be made to address the needs of these most vulnerable among us.

Rather than imposing strict austerity measures without regard for the human consequences, we must invest now in children to prepare them for the future and help create jobs.

Be careful what you cut. If our children are not ready for tomorrow, neither is America.

Marian Wright Edelman is President of the Children's Defense Fund.

Letter to the Editor

Victories for Equality

Election Day was joyful for the families in Washington, Maine and Maryland, who have won the freedom to marry the person they love – and by a vote of the people for the first time in history.

I'm also so proud of the people of Minnesota who successfully blocked a constitutional ban on marriage equality for the first time.

As more and more Americans are having conversations with gay and lesbian friends and family, they're coming to realize that this is not a political issue. This is about love, commitment and family.

There were a lot of firsts in the 2012 election. And we're ready for more.

Across the country, we have shown that we can win at the ballot, in the courtroom and in the legislature.

Now, it's Oregon's turn. Basic Rights Oregon is committed to leading the way to make Oregon the first state to overturn a constitutional amendment banning marriage.

We know that we are on the right path here in Oregon. Our outreach, just like that of the states who won on Nov. 6, is winning hearts and minds. And that is why this work must continue.

Jeana Frazzini, executive director of Basic Rights Oregon

Obama and Women Won

Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon, which engages in educational and electoral activity to promote the Planned Parenthood mission, celebrates the re-election of President Barack Obama and regaining a pro-women's health majority in the Oregon Legislature.

President Obama signed one of the greatest advancements for women's health in decades. On Election Day, women in America came together to tell politicians that they've gone too far. If you look at this as a war on women, then this election clearly shows that women won."

For the 2012 election cycle, Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon mobilized activists to fight back against unprecedented attacks on a woman's personal medical decisions.

The organization's political action committee, Planned Parenthood PAC of Oregon, conducted one of the state's most extensive voter-outreach programs to educate Oregonians about where candidates stand on women's health.

This year Planned Parenthood PAC of Oregon made 326,768 contacts with voters via direct mail and telephone; sent direct mail to 290,714 pro-women's health voters; completed 29,754 one-on-one telephone conversations; endorsed 50 candidates; and filled 440 volunteer shifts and recruited 14 interns.

Oregonians recognize that Planned Parenthood, family planning and healthcare reform are common-sense programs and smart investments.

We are so grateful for all of the elected officials and volunteer activists who have stood up for Planned Parenthood in our time of need.

Hopefully, politicians will get the message that they shouldn't interfere in personal medical decisions that should be left between a woman and her family, her faith and her doctor.

As we've seen in the 2012 election, attacking women's health is just bad politics.

Laura Terrill Patten, executive director of Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon

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