

OPINION

Don't Cut Our Kids Out of the Budget

Future depends on investing in children

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

Barack Obama won his reelection fight because Americans who are committed to moving forward turned out in record numbers to vote, especially in battleground states.



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 our kids can't read and compute at grade level, we won't have a strong economy.

Our leaders face crucial budget decisions. They must craft 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.

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. Last year, a Gallup poll found that 55 percent of Americans oppose cutting spending on 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).

Cutting children from the budget now will cost us all more in the long run.

On the other hand, 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.

Children constitute the poorest age group in the United States. More than 16.1 million children in America live in poverty

— more than one in five of all children and more than one in three children of color — so special efforts must be made to address the needs of these most vulnerable among us.

Poor children lag behind their peers in many ways beyond income: they are less healthy, trail in emotional and intellectual development, are less likely to graduate from high school and to find steady work as adults, and are more likely to head poor families. Every year we keep these millions of children in poverty costs our nation at least half a trillion dollars in lost productivity, poorer health, and increased crime.

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 aren't ready for tomorrow, neither is America.

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

Undeniable Victory on Election Day

NAACP poll finds voters were engaged

BY JOI C. RIDLEY

For the civil rights community, Election Day was an undeniable victory. Ballot initiatives promoting equality were passed in several key states and Minnesota's attempt to restrict voting rights was struck down. An NAACP swing state poll conducted in the days leading up to the election showed that African Americans were engaged on these issues, and offered a snapshot of the black electorate at this point in history.



The NAACP's polling found that a majority of African Americans support the Dream Act and marriage equality, both of which passed in Maryland. The data revealed majority support for marriage equality measures. Fifty percent of

African American voters favor a constitutional right for same-sex couples to marry, with 40 percent opposing it. Ninety-three percent of respondents favor the Dream Act, which allows undocumented youth to seek U.S. citizenship (71 percent strongly, 21 percent somewhat).

The poll, which interviewed 1,600 African American voters in Ohio, Virginia, Florida and Georgia also suggested that, despite their very high support for the Democratic Party with President Obama at the helm, African Americans could be convinced to vote for a Republican candidate.

Only 47 percent of respondents were "very enthusiastic" for the next Democrat candidate following President Obama and 15 percent are unsure of how enthusiastic they will be in 2016. Moreover, 14 percent of African Americans said they are more likely to vote for a Republican in the future if the candidate has civil rights issues on his or her agenda.

"This data reveals opportunities for the GOP to improve its relationship with our community. It suggests that the Democratic Party should not assume it will see the 2008 and 2012 levels of black turnout in 2016," said Benjamin Todd Jealous, President and chief executive officer of the NAACP.

Jobs and the economy topped the list of most important issues to African American voters, earning the vote of 60 percent of respondents. Ninety-five percent of respondents believe the federal government should engage in job creation opportunities for all Americans. Respondents also believe that the federal government has a role to play in education (95 percent), health care (96 percent), and job creation (96 percent).

However, support for the federal government is not support for government dependency. Eighty-one percent of respondents believe that success depends on self-reliance and determination, while

only 14% disagree.

"This poll paints a picture of how African American interests fit into our new political calculus," said Marvin Randolph, the NAACP's senior vice president for campaigns.

This calculus includes an African American voting bloc that made up more than 13 percent of the voting electorate for the last two presidential elections, according to national exit polls. The NAACP helped encourage this high turnout by registering more than 432,000 new voters and educating and activating 1.2 million voters — both historic highs for the Association.

"This data underscores the decisive role our community played in key battleground states," said Jealous. "People have said traditional America has died. In actuality, the real America, full of diverse opinions and values, has now risen. That real America is what our nation was built upon."

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The Portland Observer Established 1970

USPS 959-680

4747 NE Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd., Portland, OR 97211

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