



# FIRST FOCUS

MAKING CHILDREN & FAMILIES THE PRIORITY

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## A Quiet Voice National Survey Findings

**To:** Interested Parties

**From:** First Focus  
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Public and pundit reaction to the unveiling of the House Budget Committee Proposal and much of the budget debate so far has focused largely on seniors' issues and the proposed changes to the Medicare system. This aspect of this proposal is immensely unpopular as a number of public opinion surveys this week and last week attest, including this one. But there is another voice in this budget debate, a voice rarely heard by politicians in Washington, but a voice that finds advocates among average voters: the voice of children.

Proposed cuts to programs affecting kids prove every inch as unpopular as cuts affecting seniors. Indeed, 70 percent oppose the \$750 billion cut in Medicaid in the House Budget Committee Proposal. In a battery identifying a series of potential cuts that the Congress may consider in the broader budget debate, voters are more likely to hold harmless programs affecting kids than any other program on the chopping block.

In no way does this survey suggest voters are willing to trade cuts affecting seniors for cuts affecting children and vice versa. Voters recognize there is another option, specifically on the revenue side, as outlined by the President's budget speech. By a 62 to 24 percent margin, voters prefer raising taxes on those earning over a million dollars over cutting important programs. By the end of the survey, after voters are made aware of the scale of the cuts currently being considered, 72 percent prefer increasing taxes over cutting programs.

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This memorandum summarizes the results of a national survey of 1,024 likely 2012 voters taken April 13-18, 2011. In order to better reflect the changing lifestyle of the voting population, this survey includes a sample of 114 cell phone interviews. The margin of error for this survey is +/- 3.10 points at 95 percent confidence interval.

## Main Findings

- **Voters believe children in this country fare poorly.** This survey takes place in a context where voters are deeply concerned about children. A 58 percent majority of voters believe the lives of children in America have gotten worse in the last ten years, including a quarter (26 percent) who believe the lives have gotten much worse.
- **When provided context, voters oppose the House Budget Committee Proposal.** From the outset, voters are suspicious, as less than half support a “proposed budget for the next 10 years that will cut 6.2 trillion from the federal budget deficit (45 percent favor, 39 percent oppose). When provided a fuller and fair description of the details of the plan, support sinks: 37 percent favor, 56 percent oppose.
- **Voters strongly oppose the \$750 billion cut in Medicaid funding in the plan.** To be sure, the Budget Committee’s plans for Medicare drive much of this opposition and a majority of voters describe this proposal as unacceptable. But a 70 percent majority oppose the Medicaid cuts, 73 percent further oppose cuts in the Children’s Health Insurance Program (51 percent strongly oppose). Voters also oppose, by a 2:1 margin, a plan to provide governors more flexibility if it meant eliminating insurance coverage for some children (31 percent favor, 63 percent oppose).
- **Children’s issues hold up well relative to other potential cuts.** When provided a battery of potential cuts some have considered in this budget debate, voters clearly protect children. Indeed, the least popular cuts all directly affect children. Voters are as likely to oppose cuts in Medicaid as oppose cuts in Medicare.

**Figure 1: Support for Reductions in Programs**

	No Reduction	Minor Reduction	Major Reduction
K-through-12 education	61	27	10
Federal child nutrition programs that provide nutritious meals to low-income children in schools and other settings	54	34	12
The Children's Health Insurance Program, a federal health program for low-income children	51	37	11
Medicaid, a federal health program that provides care to low-income children, the elderly and the disabled	49	40	10
Medicare	49	41	9
Head Start, a program that helps pre-school children from disadvantaged backgrounds	48	37	14
Student loans, including Pell Grant scholarships for low and moderate-income college students	43	41	16
Unemployment insurance	35	42	22
Medical and scientific research	33	51	16
National defense	33	46	21
Job-training programs	28	52	19
Transportation funding for highway construction, modernization and high-speed rail	22	49	28
<p>I am going to read you a list of different programs that might be affected by efforts to reduce the federal budget deficit. After each one I read, please tell me whether you would support no reductions in this program, whether you would support minor reductions in this program or support major reductions in this program.</p>			

- **There are other choices.** Some politicians in Washington try to convince voters that the only choice facing us as a country is between unsustainable deficits and severe budget cuts. There are other options. A 72 percent majority describe eliminating loopholes and federal subsidies to corporations as acceptable, 63 percent accept eliminating the Bush tax cuts for families earning over \$250,000 a year and 64 percent oppose the House Budget Committee Proposal plan to lower the top tax bracket by a third.

Voters understand that at least part of the solution to the deficit is revenue-driven; more to the point, they strongly oppose slashing programs for the most vulnerable among us to protect (or lower) taxes for the rich and big corporations.

## Conclusion

To state the obvious, children in our country do not vote and do not contribute money to politicians. As a result, their voices are rarely heard in the corridors of power. For politicians eyeing fund-raising goals, it is easier to protect big corporations than children. However, voters in this survey have different priorities. They raise their voice on behalf of children and ask politicians to make different choices.