



Summer 2008
Newsletter

Viewpoint Viewpoint



We're Voting for Kids (And Why You Should Too)

Politics is an arena for grownups where adults get to rank the priorities and make the decisions. Even when pollsters talk to likely voters about their concerns, it's usually grownup issues that make the top of the list – issues like foreign policy, health care, and the country's economy. When most people think about children's issues in the political arena, what comes to mind first is education. But is there a difference between adult issues and children's issues when it comes to politics? Not really.

Anything that impacts working families – whether it be health care costs, stagnant wages, the rising price of gasoline, food and utilities, workplace raids of undocumented immigrants, or long overseas tours for our service men and women – should be thought of as a children's issue because every child's well being is dependent on the well being of his or her parents.

Every four years, our national election affords us a unique opportunity to bring issues that impact

children into the larger debate. Every year these issues become more and more important as federal spending on children continues to fall. In fact, a new report by the Urban Institute, "Kids Share 2008: How Children Fare in the Federal Budget," shows that by every measure, funding for programs that benefit children has been steadily declining since 1960. This decline is expected to continue over the next ten years – unless we demand change.

Of course, national issues always have a local impact, and so we work to address as many issues as possible on a local level. Last year, New Mexico Voices for Children released the New Mexico Children's Charter. It lists 20 outcomes that we would like to see accomplished over the next 20 years. This year, we're working on three of those outcomes: health care for all kids, quality childcare and early education for all kids, and a significant reduction in child poverty.

Health Care for all Kids

The United States is the only industrialized country in the world that does not provide routine, preventative health care for every child. More than 8 million American children are without health insurance. In New Mexico, we spend just 4 percent of our state budget on providing health care for kids even though we have the second highest percentage of children without insurance. The two federal programs that provides health care to kids are Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program (S-CHIP). When Congress tried to expand S-CHIP last year, they were unable to override President Bush's veto. Congress wanted to add just \$50 billion to the program, so another 3.2 million uninsured children could see a doctor. While \$50 billion sounds like a lot of money, it is less than one half of 1 percent of the federal budget.

Quality Care and Early Education

Another of the biggest challenges facing today's working families is the high cost of quality childcare and early learning programs. Early care and education programs like Head Start are essential if our country is to continue to compete on the global stage. Here's why: Our current economy is such that fewer and fewer families can get by on one paycheck. This has caused an enormous need for quality early care and education programs, but little has been done to address the need. This is particularly disturbing in light of recent research showing that the vast majority of our brain's development – 80 percent – occurs between the ages of zero and three. This is time of life when children need the most attention and stimulus in a safe and nurturing environment.

Families are also burdened with paying for childcare at a time when they can least afford it – when they are just starting out. Fulltime childcare costs more than college tuition but such programs get a fraction of the state and federal funding that our universities do. Without quality early care and education programs, our children are simply not ready to start school, making future success an uphill battle. Many of our Western European counterparts are way ahead of us in this measure and now consider early care and education just as important as the primary school years. They have invested public money accordingly. Since the U.S. added kindergarten to our public school system after World War I, we haven't really changed the way that we prepare kids for school. New Mexico's expenditures on early care and education make up less than 2 percent of the state budget.

Other Resources:

NM League of Women Voters: www.lwvnm.org
Every Child Matters Education Fund:
www.everychildmatters.org
First Focus: www.firstfocus.net
Voices for America's Children: www.voices.org

Important Dates:

Sept. 16: Step-Up-for-Kids Day (see Upcoming Events)
Oct. 7: Voter registration closes
Oct. 7: Absentee voting begins
Oct. 18: Early voting begins
Nov. 1: Absentee and early voting end
Nov. 4: Election Day

Child Poverty

Poverty is the single most important determinant for a child's future well-being and success. Relieving poverty will take a concerted effort and a multi-pronged approach because poverty has numerous causes that intersect to form a web. Children who grow up in poverty are less likely to receive health care and the best nutrition, and are more likely to get an inferior education, be exposed to illicit drug use, gang activity, and the violence that goes with them, and have a parent in jail. Thirteen million American children live in poverty and 2 million have parents in prison.

Living wages and work supports are two important ways to address child poverty. Even though it was raised recently, the federal minimum wage does not come close to a living wage. Women still suffer from wage inequality, and are more likely than men to be single parents and to live in poverty. What's more, most jobs that pay low wages do not offer employer-sponsored health insurance or paid sick leave. The U.S. also trails its Western European counterparts in terms of maternity and family leave.

These are just some of the issues we'd like you to consider before you go to the polls in November. There are many ways to find out how the candidates stack up on children's issues. Check out their website and voting records (if they've previously held office), and check our website for more voter information.

So long, farewell...

We are saddened to tell you about the departure of two long-time Voices employees. Felicia Griffin, who has served as our Development Director for six years, is leaving us this summer to pursue other opportunities. Lynda Chandler, who has worn every cap from Office Manager to Publications and IT Director over the past nine years, also leaves us this summer for hotter, more humid climates. You may have already heard that Kesi Perea, who was our Youth Link Program Director, left us earlier this summer. We wish them all success and happiness in their new and future endeavors.

Congratulations Eric! No, our E.D. isn't leaving, he's just taking on another role



Ever since our Executive Director Eric Griego won the primary for the state Senate District 14 seat (and because he'll be running unopposed in the general election), people have been asking us if he's leaving NM Voices for Children. The answer is a definitive no. Eric made his intention to run for office clear to our Board

of Directors before he was hired, and he has their full support. We hope he also has your full support.

New Mexico has a citizen Legislature. This means our senators and representatives are not paid for the work they do during either the legislative session or the interim when committees meet. They do get a small per diem to cover travel and lodging expenses, but beyond that they work essentially as volunteers. Unless they are retired or have some other means of financial support, our legislators all have fulltime jobs around which they

must juggle their legislative duties. They are teachers, lawyers, physicians, and even nonprofit employees. Some of our legislators even work for state government agencies, such as public schools, whose budgets are shaped in part by the Legislature.

Our Policy Director, Bill Jordan, will still be the face and voice of Voices at the Roundhouse. One of the great things about having Eric in the state Senate is that we know he will work to make New Mexico a better place for children and their families.

A Very Special Session

Despite dire predictions to the contrary, a great deal was accomplished in the just-concluded special session – and all of it was good for New Mexico kids and working families! Several issues that we've worked on for years - children's health care, childcare assistance, home heating assistance, and the working families tax credit - were all well funded:

- \$20 million was added to the program that provides health care to children who do not have insurance. Another \$10 million was designated for children with developmental disabilities, and \$2.5 million for behavioral health.
- \$7.2 million was injected into childcare assistance so that families living below

200 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL) will be able to receive it again. Seven years ago Governor Gary Johnson cut eligibility back so that only families making up to 100 percent of the FPL – which is just \$17,600 for a family of three – could qualify. Along with our allies, we fought for seven long years to get the original eligibility level restored. This is a major victory for working parents and their children, who will benefit from higher quality childcare.

- The working families tax credit, which we worked to create in 2006, was raised from 8 percent to 10 percent of the federal earned income

tax credit (EITC). This very successful poverty-reduction program is now even more effective.

- About \$2 million was added to the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) that helps low-income families pay their heating bills. This will be crucial as temperatures drop this winter and heating bills climb.

As always, we have numerous people to thank – our allies and partners, the legislators who supported these initiatives, Governor Richardson for his leadership, and YOU for your continued support. Together, we are making a difference for New Mexico's children.

New Publications Now Available!

From our Fiscal Policy Project: State of Working New Mexico 2008

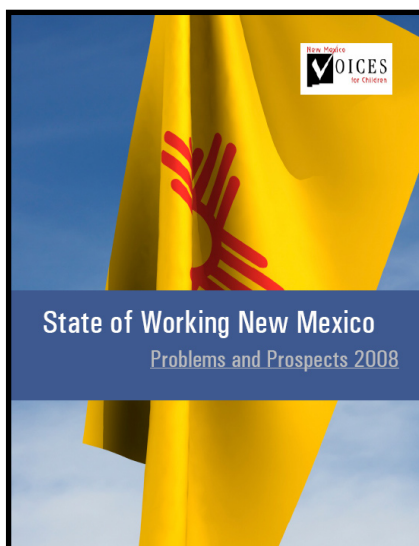
New Mexicans have seen their personal income rise faster than the national average over the past few years. Job growth has also been strong, but both seem to have peaked and are now slowing. Those and other indicators of workforce well-being are updated in this annual report.

Immigrants and the New Mexico Economy: Working Hard for Low Wages

The immigration debate can be emotional, so it's always a good idea to look at the facts – and the facts are that immigrants contribute to the state's economy by virtue of their presence in the labor force, and they receive very little in so-called transfer payments – Medicare, Social Security, unemployment benefits, etc.

New Mexico's Revenue Forecast: The Coming Drought

An analysis of the New Mexico Legislative Finance Committee's 2008 Post Session Review shows that the state's tax revenues will not keep



pace with New Mexico's economy or inflation, creating a budget shortfall as early as FY 2010, which begins in July 2009.

The Federal Economic Stimulus Package and the New Mexico Impact

While the federal economic stimulus package was meant to do good, it may have the reverse effect. New Mexico will lose about \$27 million in revenue due to the stimulus package's tax breaks for business.

From our Kids Count program:

The 2000 Census Undercount and What it Means for New Mexico

The state's population was undercounted in the 2000 Census by nearly 36,000 individuals, which meant New Mexico received \$110 million less in federal funds than it should have for vital programs like Medicaid and childcare. Unless the undercount is corrected for the 2010 Census, we'll have to live with funding shortfalls for another decade.

From our Youth Link program: 2008 Native Youth Agenda

Native-American youth face numerous challenges and have higher rates of poverty, suicide and obesity than do other New Mexican youth. Some of these disparities are documented in our first-ever Native Youth Agenda, a product of our Native Youth Voice program, which comes under our Youth Link program. The agenda, created with Native Soul Youth, a positive youth development program geared toward Native youth, offers possible solutions.

Look Who's Talking at Voices

Even the most seasoned parents find it difficult to talk with their teens and pre-teens about sensitive issues – like alcohol use, sex and Internet safety. **Can We Talk? New Mexico** – the newest addition to the Voices family of youth-development programs – helps parents open the door to communication around these and other important issues. "We operate on the belief that you are your child's first and best teacher – especially when it comes to instilling family values," said Program Director Dominic Cappello. "But we know that many parents need some strategies and supports when it comes to talking about certain topics."



Can We Talk? is based on the National Education Association's parent-child communication training programs. Besides workshops for both parents and youth, Can We Talk? New Mexico offers training for facilitators of parent workshops, support for after-school programs wanting to offer youth workshops, resources on parent-child communication, and a six-part online e-course. "The e-course is a fun way for parents and kids to begin this critical interaction," said Cappello.

You can find out more about this new program on the Voices website (www.nmvoices.org), the CWT website (www.canwetalknm.org) or by emailing Dominic Cappello at dom@canwetalknm.org.

Upcoming Events

Every Child Matters Education Fund is hosting a national **Step-Up-for-Kids Day** on Tuesday, Sept. 16. The event in New Mexico will be 2-4pm at the Children's Pavilion at the New Mexico State Fair grounds in Albuquerque. This non-partisan event will bring together child advocates, volunteers, and children, youth and families themselves to urge all candidates for office to support new investments in children. www.everychildmatters.org/nm.



Know a young person who has taken community service to a whole new level? Nominate them for our **Amy Biehl Youth Spirit Awards**. The annual award honors youth aged 13 to 26 who have made outstanding contributions to their communities through service or volunteer work. We're taking nominations now through 3pm on Wednesday, Sept. 24, 2008. You can download nomination packets from our website (www.nmvoices.org).

[org/abysa.htm](http://www.nmvoices.org/abysa.htm)). The awards ceremony is **Tuesday, December 2, 2008**, 6-8:30pm, at the KiMo Theater in downtown Albuquerque. Our keynote speaker is Emmy-nominated television and radio journalist Amy Costello. Amy spent five years traveling extensively across Africa, producing in-depth, documentary-style radio reports on child issues, including child labor, AIDS orphans, and children bound for adoptive homes in the U.S. Amy also visited Darfur to investigate allegations of genocide for the PBS television program *Frontline/World*. You can read more about her on our website.



All nominees receive recognition and a certificate at the awards ceremony. One honoree and one winner from each of the two age groups (13-18 and 19-26) will be selected to receive a \$1,000 scholarship and an award sculpture.

We also still have slots open for sponsors of the awards ceremony. If you're interested, please contact Ron Hidalgo at ronh@nmvoices.org or 505-244-9505.

Recent Events

The red carpet was rolled out in June as more than 400 youth and teens from all over the state traveled to Albuquerque for the **4th Annual Fame & Shame Awards**. Held again this year at the historic KiMo Theatre in Albuquerque, the event honored youths for their anti-smoking efforts and shamed Hollywood for its portrayal of tobacco use in youth-rated movies. The youths who were honored with the "Youth Kicking Tobacco's Butt of the Year" awards were Megan Lawrence (Clayton), First Place; Jonathan Martinez (Los Lunas), Second Place; and Lucero Montes (Belen), Third Place. Honorable

Mentions went to Martha Soto (Hatch) and Maria Quezada (Socorro). The annual event, complete with glitz and glamour, is a production of the kids in the statewide YEAH! Coalition. You can peruse and purchase photos from the event online at: www.abqphotographer.smugmug.com/

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Megan Lawrence (left) with Kesi Perea (right)
Photo by Ray A. Mares

New Mexico Voices for Children



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