



## Children's Advocacy Institute

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### **Budget reckoning: Let U.S. tax cuts trickle down to kids**

**By Bob Fellmeth\***

We Republicans believe in two things foremost: checks and balances, and paying our own way so we don't burden our children with our debts. Congressional tax cuts under President Bush average \$37 billion per year for California adults. The state gets only \$2.5 billion for a single year in federal help. The federal budget deficit estimate went up last week to \$400 billion and counting (a legacy of debts for our children).

Some of our Republican leaders contend that California's budget squeeze is the predicted comeuppance for three years of state gluttony. Sure, we have had the usual Democratic cockamamie spending for such things as \$1,000 to every kid scoring in the top 10 percent on STARS. But we rank near the bottom of the nation in education spending per child, have high latchkey rates and hardly extravagant child care; 1 million of our children have no health insurance; safety net support for impoverished children is at a record low since the 1960s; foster-care kids are still largely abandoned to the streets at 18; and higher education slots are fewer per student than in 1991.

Overall, if we spent the same percentage of personal income on our children as our parents did in 1978-79, it would be more than \$18 billion over what the governor proposes in his budget. We have been studiously ignoring the gradual erosion of general fund tax collection, including the growth of what is now \$28 billion in annual "tax expenditures" (special credits and deductions that require a two-thirds vote to end).

Our children are not awash in public largess. And we could close our UC system, high schools and prisons and still have a deficit. Now we have Senate Republican leader Jim Brulte declaring that any Republican who votes for any revenue increase will be excommunicated. The motto "extremism in the defense of self-indulgence is no vice" somehow lacks appeal. It is wonderful to draw a principled line in the sand, especially against "tax and spend." But the issue is not whether we tax ourselves more, but whether we take more from children to give to ourselves, or share some of it.

Here is a counterintuitive proposition: We raise an average \$18 billion per year in new revenue over the next 10 years (that would match one-half of California's new federal income-tax savings) but on three conditions: All of it is invested in our children; new spending (and tax expenditures) have rotating sunsets (and they end unless specifically reapproved); and 2 percent goes to fund independent evaluations of how well the expenditures are performing.

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So we Californians take half our federal tax cuts for ourselves, and we invest the other

half in our children. After all, they are the folks we are burdening with paying for our Social Security; and for property taxes on their home assessments 10 times what we seniors pay; plus now add in paying for our huge new federal deficit. We spend that newfound tax money at the state, not federal, level. Isn't that our point as Republicans? And we do not push so many billions forward (some as much as 20 years). Isn't that another of our points - we pay our own way?

As I recall, our Republican slogan during the last national election was "leave no child behind," not "leave no child unburdened."

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