

# "It's About Our Kids"

## Congressional Candidate Responses - 2008

1. HEALTH CARE SCHIP (State Children's Health Insurance Program) is a successful and popular children's health insurance program covering over 6 million children who would be otherwise uninsured. SCHIP funding expires in March 2009. States design their SCHIP programs (in Alaska, Denali KidCare) to meet their population's needs. Denali KidCare is a Medicaid expansion rather than a stand alone or separate SCHIP. The annual federal allotment formula has never provided enough federal funding for Alaska to cover the need.

What ideas do you have to ensure Alaska receives enough federal funding to cover its low-income children to 200% of federal poverty guideline (FPG), so the Denali KidCare program does not have to revert to the lower Medicaid Federal Medical Assistance Percentages (FMAP) and the state does not have to spend more in general fund match to finance program expenditures that should be covered by the federal government?

**Don Young:** Increasing the income eligibility for SCHIP means that more children who have fallen through the system's cracks will have access to important preventative screenings which save money in the long run. I have voted for and supported an expansion of this important program several times this Congress. Unfortunately a compromise has not yet been reached and despite bipartisan support, Congress has been unable to override the President's veto. I believe that including a sliding fee scale could ensure that the program would not be excessively expensive while still providing health care for more of Alaska's children.

**Fredrick David Haase:** I just can not give you an educated answer on this issue with out more input. Generally speaking I am against federal money and insurance, but that takes a back seat to the welfare of our children which are our nations most important people. If elected I assure you I will get educated and do what is best for our kids, I was one once.

**Mark Begich:** I strongly support covering all children by expanding State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) to 250 percent of the poverty level (\$66,000 for a family of four) and allowing families above this level to buy into SCHIP at a sliding scale.

2. CHILD CARE AND DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT (CCDBG) Currently, the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), the major source of federal funding for child care initiatives, authorizes the federal government to provide funds to states to help low-income families pay for child care and to strengthen the quality of child care.

What are your plans to help protect and expand the CCDBG?

**Don Young:** Over the years I have supported, voted for and signed on to letters to expand CCDBG. Working families need to know that when they leave for work each day that their children are well taken care of. CCDBG provides these families with the funds that allow them to enroll their children at high quality, safe and licensed child care facilities. No parent should have to sacrifice the safety of the care of their children because of the cost. With the average costs of

child care running between \$8000 and \$12000 a year, CCDBG is needed more than ever now in Alaska. Continuing to fund this block grant is important not only to the families but also to those working in the child care field as it improves the quality of services and funds programs for students before and after school. Block grants such as CCDBG are so effective because they place the money in the hands of the state, not those at an Agency in D.C.

**Fredrick David Haase:** I will need to assess this program before I could say.

**Mark Begich:** As the father of a young son, I know how critical quality child care is to a child's success. CCDBG will require significant new funding in the coming years to maintain service levels. I will work with the bipartisan Senate leaders Chris Dodd and Olympia Snowe to ensure the funding is there for this critical program. In addition, my Middle Class Tax Relief plan includes a proposal to double the current \$6,000 Dependent Care Credit to help cover child care expenses. I also proposed expanding the child tax credit to help new parents cover the "start-up costs" of caring for a young child by adding a \$1,000 tax credit for each of the first three years of a child's life in addition to the existing \$1,000 annual child tax credit.

3. HUNGER In 2009, Congress will review the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004. This legislation, which is set to expire on September 30, 2009, includes all the Federal child nutrition programs, including the School Breakfast and the National School Lunch Programs, the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC).

What would you do to ensure the continued support and expansion of these vital nutrition programs?

**Don Young:** I will continue to support these important programs as I have done in the past. With the state of today's economy and the uncertain costs of fuel and the impact that has on food prices, these nutrition programs are essential to Alaskans. I have long supported the efforts of Alaska's food banks and the good work they do in servicing our neighbors and know that without the Federal Government's support, many of these programs will be forced to shut down. The recently passed Farm Bill, which I voted for, included important reauthorization of the Emergency Food Assistance Program for local food banks, the Food Stamp Program, the Commodity Supplemental Food Program for low income seniors and the USDA Snack Program, which helps schools provide healthy snacks to students during after-school activities.

**Fredrick David Haase:** Not sure, but I think a good meal is essential to the education of our children.

**Mark Begich:** These are critical programs to ensure that every child has a healthy meal during school and at home. A key success has been the automatic enrollment of children from families that receive food stamps in the school lunch programs. I will strongly support efforts to expand these programs in the U.S. Senate. I will also work to encourage locally-grown and harvested foods in the program to ensure that Alaska children have familiar and healthy choices instead of packaged items that are shipped long distances.

4. **FAMILY SUPPORT** The Education Begins at Home Act was passed and will provide \$500 million in federal funds over three years to establish additional early childhood education services. These new funds, which represent the first dedicated federal funding in support of quality home visitation at the state and local level, will help states establish and/or expand home visitation programs. Parts of the monies also are earmarked for specific groups of children and families.

What actions would you take to expand on family support programs?

**Don Young:** In 2007 I worked to include the Heroes at Home program in the Defense Authorization bill. The Heroes at Home program brings professional parenting support and child development information to the homes of military families and is also included in the Education Begins at Home Act. Additionally, I was able to secure \$2.4 million for the Parents as Teachers which is currently in use at Ft. Wainwright.

**Fredrick David Haase:** I would need to know more on this issue to have an opinion. 3.9/19/2008

**Mark Begich:** Yes, I strongly support these programs. I am a strong advocate of early learning programs and universal, voluntary pre-K education. It is a cornerstone of my education plan where I call for a major federal investment to help states launch pre-K education programs. Study after study—and common sense—tell us that a key predictor of success in school is a child's readiness when he or she arrives at kindergarten. You can be assured that I will be a champion for this issue in the U.S. Senate.

5. **CHILDREN'S BUDGET** Senator Menendez recently introduced S. 3277, the "Children's Budget Act," which is a very simple piece of legislation that would require any future Administration, when it submits its budget, to gather all the different sources of federal funding for children's programs and show how the federal budget has impacted children's programs overall.

Do you support creating a Children's Budget? Why or why not?

**Don Young:** I would need to look at the bill further but what it aims to do, focus a spotlight on federal funding of children's programs is important. There are several federal agencies responsible for providing funds for our children but without some oversight and coordination, there is no real way to determine if Congress is adequately doing its job with regards to children. Far too often there is little communication between agencies and a bill such as this would help policymakers and agency employees make sure that the right programs are being funded.

**Fredrick David Haase:** Not sure

**Mark Begich:** With so many children's programs spread across many federal agencies I do think this would be helpful information as part of the budget process.

6. **CHILD TAX CREDIT** The Child Tax Credit is a \$1,000 per-child tax benefit intended to defray some of the costs associated with raising children. In general, tax credits can be either refundable or nonrefundable. If a credit is nonrefundable, it is available only to tax filers who can use it to reduce positive income tax liability. Thus, nonrefundable tax credits have no value for those with incomes too low to owe taxes, a group that includes millions of low-income working parents. In contrast, if a credit is fully refundable, a tax filer can receive a refund for the amount by which the credit exceeds his or her federal income tax liability, meaning that all households who meet the eligibility criteria for the credit can benefit. If a household has no federal income tax liability, it receives the entire credit as a refund. The Child Tax Credit falls in between these two categories; it is partially refundable. While the credit does benefit millions of families with incomes too low to owe taxes, millions of others are left out or qualify for only a partial credit. In total, some 6.5 million children in low-income working families will be ineligible for the Child Tax Credit in 2008, according to estimates by the Urban Institute-Brookings Institution Tax Policy Center. An additional 10.3 million children will receive less than the full credit amount.

Do you support improving the Child Tax Credit and if so, how would you do it?

**Don Young:** The Child Tax Credit should be made available to all families and should be fully refundable.

**Fredrick David Haase:** Yes by abolishing all individual income taxes.

**Mark Begich:** I support expanding the Child Tax Credit to help new parents cover the “start-up costs” of caring for a young child by adding a \$1,000 tax credit for each of the first three years of a child’s life in addition to the existing \$1,000 annual child tax credit.

7. **EARLY INTERVENTION** Research has shown critical brain development occurs before age three and that these programs help children reach their potential. However, funding to date does not support the current system. Infant Learning Programs, Early Head Starts and professional speech pathologist, occupational and physical therapist and educators are struggling to meet the growing needs of many of these families that go beyond basic educational and motor needs. Many of the children receiving or that could be receiving services from programs serving children 0-3 experience social emotional delays and a variety of behavioral challenges. Research has shown critical brain development occurs before age three and these programs have shown to help children reach their potential. However, funding to date does not support the current system.

What type of supports would you put in place to ensure early care and education, family support and child welfare programs have a quality and sustainable workforce so healthy social emotional and learning foundations are established for all children?

**Don Young:** I have long supported Early Start and Head Start programs and encouraged my colleagues to increase their funding levels. Access to education and health care at the earliest stages of development makes a difference in a child's future successes. Continuing to fund these programs is Congress' responsibility to our youngest citizens. In addition, it would benefit the state greatly if it were to implement a loan repayment program for Alaskans choosing to enter

certain professions including doctors, dentists, therapists and educators. We need to invest in people, not just more government in Alaska.

**Fredrick David Haase:** I recognize the need but the solution is with the parents and some parents aren't good parents but the worst parent is better than a government bureaucrat.

**Mark Begich:** I have been a strong supporter of early learning programs and my wife Deborah served on the Alaska Ready to Read, Ready to Learn Task Force and launched the ABC Read and Talk with Me Anchorage project. In addition to supporting federal support for universal, voluntary pre-Kindergarten, I also support expanded tax credits to help working families afford quality child care. I also support strengthening of the Family and Medical Leave Act so that families don't have to choose between earning a full paycheck and taking care of their children.

8. HOUSING Homeless Coalitions are re-focusing their efforts on securing stable housing so homeless individuals and families can then address other issues. The Federal Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Department provides funding for housing assistance, through Section 8 and other programs that assist with construction of specific kinds of congregate facilities. HUD also has imposed requirements for those living in federal housing complexes and housing assistance that eliminates those with felony convictions even though their time has been successfully served. The Section 8 voucher system has both time limits and waiting lists that work against families. Federal funding has been declining.

What do you propose to do to assist with the housing needs of homeless and working poor families? What would you propose to assist with the housing needs of those returning to communities after successful completion of their prison terms?

**Don Young:** I was successful in securing federal funds for the Salvation Army Family Enrichment Place at Chester Creek which includes the Cares for Kids provides safe haven for children, ages 0-10, who are unable to remain in their home environment, McKinnell House shelter for homeless two-parent families or single parenting fathers and the Older Alaskans Program provides home meal delivery, congregate meal sites, transportation and services to frail seniors and disabled adults. In addition, I secured funds last year for Akeela House and its re-entry program for those working towards returning to a productive role in society. I have also been supportive of Alaska's USDA Rural Development projects that help rural communities and individuals by providing loans and grants for housing and community facilities. It provides funding for single family homes, apartments for low-income persons or the elderly, housing for farm laborers, childcare centers, fire and police stations, hospitals, libraries, nursing homes and schools.

**Fredrick David Haase:** A convicted felon that has served his or her time needs to be supported not further hindered both for the good of the felon and the community.

**Mark Begich:** As mayor, I have worked closely with Habitat for Humanity, Cook Inlet Housing Authority, and Safe Harbor to help address the housing problems in Anchorage. At a national level, I support increased funding to help our nation's homeless and streamlining of federal programs to give more flexibility to local governments to address the issue. I also support new incentives to help Americans own their own home, such as tax-free Individual Homeownership Accounts that will allow families to save money for a down payment on their first home. I also support making permanent a refundable tax credit for first-time home buyers that is equivalent to an interest-free loan for 10 percent of the home's cost, up to \$8,000.

9. EITC (Earned Income Tax Credit) The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) sometimes called the Earned Income Credit (EIC) is a refundable federal income tax credit available for low-income working individuals and families. Congress originally approved the tax credit legislation in 1975 in part to offset the burden of social security taxes and to provide an incentive to work. When the EITC exceeds the amount of taxes owed, it results in a tax refund to those who claim and qualify for the credit. There is a limit to this credit. It continues to provide support and incentives for working individuals.

Do you support continuing EITC for the thousands of Alaskans who work hard but don't earn a high income, and want to keep more of their earnings? Why or why not?

**Don Young:** Yes. The more we can do to keep more in Alaskans' paychecks the better. The high fuel prices and the trickle down impact on all goods and services in Alaska means that the cost of living is going to continue to grow. The EITC makes a small but important difference in the lives of those Alaskans who are able to claim it.

**Fredrick David Haase:** Yes but I want to do away with the income tax on individuals and pay for it by having the federal government pay off the interest bearing notes we use as currency with non interest notes.

**Mark Begich:** Yes, the Earned Income Tax Credit is one of the most effective ways to help families get out of poverty. With skyrocketing energy and food prices, many working families are facing new economic challenges. I do support expanding the EITC to cover more children and families.

10. CHILD WELFARE Many child abuse and neglect prevention programs can be implemented by either the state or local governments. If local governments decide to undertake the programs, some of the expected taxpayer savings will not accrue directly to the local jurisdiction; rather, some of the savings will flow to the state system. A prime example is prevention programs that reduce crime: many of the benefits flow to the state system, not the local system. Thus, it has been argued, the incentives for local governments to pursue effective prevention programs do not align with the flow of benefits. It has been observed that unless this incentive system is fixed, there will be underinvestment in effective prevention programs on the part of local government. How would you propose to fix this problem?

**Don Young:** I believe that local is always best. Those on the front line have the best perspective and knowledge of how to serve their communities. However, without the financial means and benefits it is difficult for local governments to take on the responsibility of these programs. It would seem that legislative language is necessary to reflect that those who assume the risk and responsibility should also receive the incentives and benefits.

**Fredrick David Haase:** The local people need to be in control not the Federal government and to a lesser extent not the state government either We need to win this war on drugs by taking the profit out of drugs and put some intelligence into it.

**Mark Begich:** As mayor of Anchorage I have worked with many groups to increase our investment in prevention programs. Successful examples include Youth Court, Youth Employment in Parks, and the Anti-Gang and Youth Violence Policy Team. Each of these is

practical solutions focused on reducing youth violence. I would support efforts to increase local government investments in prevention programs. I also strongly support increased funding and support for the Community Oriented Policing Services.

11. Please share your top three priorities based upon the questions provided within this questionnaire.

**Don Young:** Health Care, Hunger, Early Intervention

**Fredrick David Haase:** Earned Income Credit (EITC), Hunger, Health Care  
*Comments:* The drop out youth are my biggest concern I would like to see a program that provide a local mentor an apprentice program for lack a better name.

**Mark Begich:** Health Care, Child Tax Credit, Early Intervention

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