



National Center for Children in Poverty
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NCCP STATEMENT:

RESPONSE TO PRESIDENT OBAMA'S FEB. 24 ADDRESS TO CONGRESS

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In his address to Congress February 24, President Obama laid out his domestic vision for America in light of one of the most severe economic downturns since the Great Depression. Many of the topics within the president's speech will have a direct affect on America's children and families:

Health Care

President Obama expressed a commitment to tackling comprehensive health care reform, which we believe is long overdue. Too many Americans are uninsured or underinsured, and with the decline of employer-based coverage, even many full-time workers lack adequate coverage. Half of all bankruptcies result at least in part from medical debt and most people who file for bankruptcy are insured (68%). High health care expenses have also contributed to the housing crisis: 1.5 million families annually have their homes foreclosed due to medical expenses. President Obama and Congress have already taken an important first step with the reauthorization of the State Children's Health Insurance Program which will cover an estimated four million additional children. Making sure that parents also have affordable health care promotes economic security and improved health for the whole family, since children are more likely to receive needed medical care when their parents are also covered. The goal of health care reform that includes behavioral health and prevention should be quality, affordable care for everyone.

Education/Early Childhood

President Obama identified education as one of the top priorities of his Administration, and acknowledged the critical importance of the early years in shaping education in his address. What science tells us about early brain development, along with what we know from [economic analysis](#), makes it clear that investing in high quality early care and learning is essential to reducing the achievement gap. Also critical are the supports necessary for healthy child development including supports and services for social emotional well-being. Attention to the most vulnerable is also a hallmark of the new administration's efforts in early childhood education. Resources have been made available for early intervention services for at risk young children as well as children with disabilities. The research suggests that intervening as early as possible with these children is key. In addition, parents need access to affordable child care in order to be able to find and maintain employment. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act already makes significant new investments in early childhood programs, including child care subsidies, Head Start, and Early Head Start. We encourage the President and Congress to

continue their support of high quality and affordable early care and learning that embeds the necessary support for social emotional development and child well-being.

Jobs (in Recovery package)

The President said at the outset of his address that the most essential element of his economic plan is creating jobs. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act will save or create an estimated 3.5 million jobs. Employment is the lynchpin of family economic security. But to be economically secure, parents need jobs that pay decent wages and provide necessary benefits, such as paid sick days, retirement, and health insurance. NCCP's research shows that a full-time job at the minimum wage is not enough to provide for a family. It takes an income of 1.5 to 3.5 times the official poverty level to make ends meet, depending on the local cost of living. We must ensure that new jobs are good jobs that enable families to succeed.

The National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) is the nation's leading public policy center dedicated to promoting the economic security, health and well-being of America's low-income families and children. Part of Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health, NCCP uses research to inform policy and practice with the goal of ensuring positive outcomes for the next generation.