

March 4, 2003

## **Double Budget Buzz Saw Aimed at New York's Children**

By Donna A. Lawrence

*Vice President, Children's Defense Fund (CDF) and executive Director, CDF - NY*

Both Governor Pataki and President Bush have their budget buzz saws pointed directly at New York's poorest children at the same time that they are promoting tax giveaways for millionaires and billionaires. Both the President's and Governor's budget and tax proposals mortgage our children's futures, giving money we don't have to those who need it least while dismantling and cutting investments for the most vulnerable children and saddling our children with mountains of debt. It is time for reasonable people to stand up against these misguided policies and say, "Stop all tax cuts for the rich and protect our children and our children's futures."

The irresponsible \$1.3 trillion 2001 President's tax cut unwisely and unfairly gives the top one percent of taxpayers with average incomes over a million dollars \$477 billion when fully phased in. The President's new 2004 tax plan adds another \$30,000 on average for each taxpayer in the richest one percent. Contrast that to what the person in the bottom one-fifth of taxpayers will get from the new tax plan – only \$6.

Governor Pataki refuses to acknowledge these windfalls for the rich and capture some portion of them to help remedy the state's fiscal woes. Even if the Governor imposes a temporary income tax on the portions of family incomes above \$100,000 to secure funds that could protect critical programs for children, these wealthy taxpayers will still receive a healthy reduction in their overall tax bill.

Instead, Governor Pataki let his budget buzz saw fly through the universal pre-K program, dropping 60,000 children from what educators and parents agree is a critical program. At the same time, President Bush aimed his attack at Head Start, with a radical proposal to dismantle the program that has helped more than 20 million children develop the skills they need to succeed in school.

The President's budget war against poor children didn't stop there. He unleashed his buzz saw on Medicaid proposing to block grant funds to states, thereby forcing children to compete with seniors and the disabled for already inadequate dollars. Governor Pataki sent in the double budget buzz saw announcing his plan to disrupt health care coverage for several hundred thousand children now, and thousands more in the future, by forcing them to transfer out of the Medicaid program simply because they turn six years old. The Governor's proposals would also harm some of the most vulnerable children, in need of significant mental health, home care, long term care, and other comprehensive services only available under Medicaid, and would delay coverage and access to care for sick children by eliminating the provision that now allows children to receive Medicaid coverage while their parents are getting the documents required for enrollment.

Hard as it is to believe, there's more. President Bush's budget would also cut 30,000 children nationwide from child care assistance this year – 200,000 over five years. He slashes after school programs, leaving 570,000 children home alone in the hours when children are most at risk of getting into trouble, and he imposes new bureaucratic barriers for children applying for school lunches.

Governor Pataki piles on with cuts to full-day Kindergarten, elimination of extended day-school violence prevention funding, and decreased funding for youth summer jobs.

Neither of these men seems to see the totality of the damage they will inflict on poor families. Those 60,000 children who lose pre-K will not have child care slots to go to because there will be no new federal funding for child care, and New York already has hundreds of thousands of children eligible for but not receiving child care assistance. Hunger is a major threat to poor urban and rural families in the state, but making school lunches harder to access will only make more children face their school day with empty tummies. A hungry child will not be able to concentrate and achieve the new standards imposed by the Bush administration's underfunded No Child Left Behind bill. The same failure will face the children who lose opportunities to get ready for school with Head Start.

New Yorkers are compassionate people. Look at the cooperation and generosity shown after 9/11. I cannot believe that most New Yorkers support the choices being made by the Bush and Pataki administrations -- choices that favor the rich over hard-working New York families and vulnerable children. The Children's Defense Fund trademarked mission, "Leave No Child Behind®" has been usurped and abused by these politicians who instead leave no millionaire, while leaving millions of children, behind.