

WARREN, PA

## Readers' Forum

**Budget cuts**

Dear Editor,

On March 17, the U.S. Senate and the House of Representatives passed budget resolutions that set the wrong priorities for America's law enforcement and children.

They would cut funding both for cops on the street and for Head Start, child care, aid to schools and after school programs, all critical investments proven to help kids get the right start so they become responsible adults instead of criminals.

For example, quality child care and pre-kindergarten programs like Head start are proven to help kids learn to get along with others, behave in class and start school ready to succeed. A 35 year study of the High/Scope Foundation's Perry Pre-school showed that excluding at-risk that they would grow up to be chronic lawbreakers by age 27. High quality pre-kindergarten and child care programs are also key in helping kids compete in a global economy. They're proven to improve language and math skills, high school graduation rates, earnings and productivity.

No wonder the 175 police Chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors and crime victims who make up the anti-crime organization fight crime: Invest in kids Pennsylvania have called for making sure all families have affordable access to good childcare and pre-kindergarten programs.

Currently Head Start is so under funded, it serves only six out of ten eligible children. The child care and development block grant can serve only one in seven children of the struggling working families who Congress has determined can't afford adequate child care without help.

Instead of expanding these investments to meet the need, this budget proposed five years of cuts in Head Start and other education programs, making it available to a steadily smaller portion of the population.

When the budget came to the Senate Floor last month, one of Pennsylvania's senators, Senator Arlen Specter, worked hard to improve it, staving off cuts in Head Start and other education programs until 2007. He also helped win a crucial amendment to preserve Medicaid health care for low-income children and families, including mental health and screening to identify children's hearing, visual and other problems so they can be addressed before they snowball. That amendment would also help protect foster care for abused and neglected children and childcare support for America's working families.

Now leaders in Congress are negotiating a "compromise" between the Senate Budget and an even worse House budget. Senator Specter is under intense pressure to accept even greater cutbacks in critical programs than already called for by the same budget.

Pennsylvania Police Officers and Sheriffs and their deputies arrest almost 104,000 young people a year for juvenile crimes. How many more crimes will be committed because there will be fewer children in Pennsylvania benefiting from Head Start, fewer people getting decent child-care while their parents work, and fewer children able to participate in afterschool programs?

We believe in balancing budgets, but we don't believe in false economics like these. Economists have concluded, for example that the Perry Preschool program saved \$17 for every dollar invested. Cutting investments that help kids get the right start actually squanders billions in tax dollars. If America doesn't pay now for both law enforcement and smart investments that steer children away from a life of crime, we will all pay far more later in tax dollars, crime costs and victim's lives.

In America, we have always sought to make the hopes and fortunes of the next generation better than the ones that came before. Five years of debilitating reductions in program proven to help kids get the right start in life would be a declaration of surrender, moving us backward toward more crime and a less productive nation.

That's why we are grateful for the courage Senator Arlen Specter showed in supporting these investments. If he stands his ground to oppose any final budget that doesn't include the key improvements he won on the Senate floor, Pennsylvania law enforcement leaders and crime victims will stand shoulder to shoulder with him.

Sincerely,

Larry E. Kopko,  
Sheriff