

ADVOCATES, VOTE!

Franklin Roosevelt said, *“Nobody will ever deprive the American people of the right to vote except the American people themselves—and the only way they could do this is by not voting.”*

The stock market is down, revenues are dropping, and there is no question that budget cuts are coming. At the same time, pollsters are busy probing the minds of voters and pundits are sharpening their sound bites. The commercials, mail fliers and phone calls are flooding in.

But when all the words are said and all the money spent, it's the individual voter who holds the power to decide who will lead our nation, our states, and communities into the future.

The stakes are too high not to vote. Our children's future will be directed by the philosophies and priorities of those we elect this year. From the presidential election to local elections, this is the year to get involved – know the positions of candidates, understand how the economic climate will impact budget decisions, be knowledgeable about the options and obstacles elected officials will face come January 2009. Who will help children and families? Do they plan to protect valuable programs during tough economic times? Do their spending priorities reflect your own priorities?

While the focus is on the presidential election, remember that change starts at a grass roots level. You need to impact local elections from the state legislature to town council to mayor. Whether you work with children or are a parent in need of services, voting for and knowing your elected officials enables you to voice your complaints. Remember – if you vote, they work for you.

Perhaps you feel that when it comes right down to it, all the candidates are the same, so why bother voting. Perhaps you don't think that any candidates will really change the current state of affairs. Well, democracy is a team sport....and spectators simply don't count. While how we vote is confidential, the fact that we have voted, or failed to vote, is public record. Elected officials know which individuals and demographic groups are voting, and those who vote are more likely to be influential in policy debates.

- **BE INFORMED:** Educate yourself and others about the issues. Pay attention to news reports and editorials about the campaigns. Visit candidates' websites and listen to debates.
- **BE ACTIVE:** Encourage like-minded groups in your community to work together to increase voter turnout. Organize rides to the polls, provide child care so parents can vote, and take a child to the polls so they can learn the importance of voting.

Non-voters are voiceless and can become victims of their own choice not to participate. Children are voiceless because they can't participate and can become victims of other people's choices. So this year, vote for children: give them a voice in their future.