



For Immediate Release:
December 7, 2011

Contact: Roberta Heine, heine@voices.org, (202) 380-1781
Casey Labrack, labrack@voices.org, (202) 380-1784

Candidates debate “the future” yet ignore children and issues affecting them
New report reveals little debate time has involved children’s issues, reviews candidate websites

WASHINGTON –With just 11 months until Election Day 2012, presidential candidates appear eager to debate the future *except* when it comes to the future generation or issues affecting them. Voices for America’s Children (Voices), the nation’s largest network of multi-issue child advocacy organizations, is working to change this.

“Today, Voices for America’s Children’s civic engagement project calls on all presidential candidates, debate moderators, and state and local campaigns across America to put our 74 million children into the spotlight,” said Roy Miller, chair of Voices’ civic engagement project and president of The Children’s Campaign in Florida.

Despite representing a quarter of the country’s population and 100 percent of its future, children’s issues commanded scarcely two percent of the attention in the first 10 presidential candidate debates to date and less of that in total discussion and debate time. That’s according to a new report released by the Child and Family Policy Center in Iowa, [Moving America’s Children Into the Spotlight: The Presidential Election As An Opportunity for Dialogue About America’s Future](#).

The Child and Family Policy Center conducted a content analysis of the transcripts from the first 10 Republican presidential debates, beginning with the Greenville, South Carolina debate on May 5 and concluding with the Spartanburg, South Carolina debate on Nov. 12, with other debates occurring in California, Florida (2), Iowa, Michigan, Nevada and New Hampshire (2). In all debates, the format was for moderators to ask questions for candidate response, sometimes with opportunities for candidates to raise issues with one another. In only one debate was time allotted to candidates for opening and closing statements. The Child and Family Policy Center (CFPC) is a member of Voices for America’s Children.

“The media has yet to raise questions of how candidates will work to improve the health, safety and well-being of America’s children and what they propose to do with the \$374 billion in federal funding currently directed towards these ends,” Charles Bruner, director of the Child and Family Policy Center and co-author of the report, said.

In addition to debate analysis, CFPC also reviewed the candidates’ position statements and ways they presented their policy views on their websites. With rare exception (see Appendix 3 of the report), there is no mention of such policy issues as early childhood education, child welfare, juvenile justice,

family economic security, or best ways to address the needs of children with disabilities. In several instances where children were mentioned, it was in the context of government spending and the debt that could be left for children to pay in the future.

“Addressing the nation’s debt is a serious priority,” said Roy Miller. “The question to the candidates is what options would they support to ensure the health, safety, and protection of the current generation of children in order to achieve that goal?”

The report was sponsored by Voices for America’s Children, a nationwide network of multi-issue child advocacy organizations as part of a larger civic engagement effort.

“The report clearly shows that children and the policy issues that affect their well-being have been relegated to the shadows of the presidential debates so far. Yet Americans think children are far too important to stay in the shadows for long and we are urging candidates and the media to change this conversation in upcoming debates,” said Voices for America’s Children’s President and CEO Bill Bentley.

###

Voices for America’s Children (Voices) is the nation’s largest network of multi-issue child advocacy organizations with members in 46 states, the District of Columbia and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The upcoming 2012 elections present child advocates with a unique opportunity to focus specific attention on children’s issues and educate candidates at all levels about the importance of these issues. Voices’ civic engagement project works with Voices members and other partners to put America’s 74 million children into the Election Day spotlight. Join us in speaking up for kids at www.voices.org. Voices is a founding member of the Children’s Leadership Council, a coalition of more than 50 leading national policy and advocacy organizations. www.childrenleadershipcouncil.com.

The Child and Family Policy Center (CFPC), a Voices member, was established in 1989 to “link research and policy on issues vital to children and families.” Since that time, CFPC has sought to educate policymakers and the public in Iowa on a wide array of child policy issues – child protection and juvenile justice, child poverty, early childhood education, healthy child development, and closing disparities in children’s opportunities for success. CFPC is a multi-issue, nonpartisan policy center that engages evidenced-based advocacy at the community, state and national levels.