



## **Poll: Children's issues concern Iowans** **Only the economy ranked higher in priority, says the survey to be released today at the Statehouse.**

By Lee Rood, Register Staff Writer 5/14/03

Only the country's ailing economy tops Iowans' concerns about children's health, education and protection, according to a poll to be released today by a national child-advocacy organization.

The poll of 600 Iowa voters showed children's issues ranked higher in priority than care for senior citizens, taxes, homeland security, crime and the environment, and that two-thirds of respondents felt Congress was not doing enough to tackle major youth concerns.

Every Child Matters, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit group, plans to release the poll results at a 10 a.m. news conference today at the Iowa Capitol as it launches an effort to woo presidential candidates leading up to the Iowa caucuses. The survey of voters, conducted in early May by Mason-Dixon Polling, an independent firm, mirrors findings of similar polls commissioned in a half-dozen other states, the group's founder said.

"Too often, children's needs are being

elbowed off the table," said Michael Petit, a former deputy director of the Child Welfare League of America and human services commissioner in Maine.

Financed by a variety of private grants, Petit's nonpartisan group is one of the first special-interest groups to carve out a presence in the state leading up to the Jan. 19 caucuses. Petit said the group intends to create more political "bounce" for children's issues nationally, beginning here and in New Hampshire, which holds the nation's first presidential primary on Jan. 27.

The group has purchased air time on public radio, printed 50,000 "I'm Voting for Kids" bumper stickers, and rented billboard space near the Des Moines airport that reads: "Running for President? Iowa votes for kids."

Dennis Goldford, a Drake University political science professor, said many special-interest groups will be clamoring for candidates' attention leading up to the primary election, which experts concur will focus

on the economy and terrorism. The smaller the turnout at the caucuses, the more successful some of those groups will be in getting candidates to pick up their agenda, he said.

Children's issues alone, however, likely won't carry much clout with voters unless they are made part of a larger vision to which middle Americans can relate.

"Yes," Goldford said, "they're important, but they've got to be part of a mix of issues attached to a broader theme."

Although Every Child Matters doesn't plan to endorse candidates, it does support specific pieces of legislation, such as the Leave No Child Behind Act.

The group plans to press candidates to lead a nationwide effort to prevent child abuse and neglect, create a universal children's insurance program, boost early child education and after-school programs, and reconvene the White House Conference on Children, Youth and Families that ended in 1980.