

# A CALL TO ACTION: SENATOR RUBIO'S ROLE IN ADVANCING GLOBAL CHILD WELLBEING

January 2025 will be a month of transitions in Washington with the start of a new Congress (the 119th) and the beginning of a new presidential administration. As a result of the November 2024 elections, Republicans retained a slim majority in the House of Representatives and gained control in the Senate. Once the presidential inauguration takes place on January 20th, Republicans will hold a government trifecta, having in the majority on both sides of the Capitol and in the White House. **Senator John Thune (R-SD)** has already been chosen as Senate Majority Leader but it is unclear whether **House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA)** will be able to retain his position as leader of the lower chamber. **Senator Chuck Schumer (D-NY)** and **Representative Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY)** will be minority leaders in each of their respective chambers.

The incoming Republican Majority is expected to immediately take up the issues of immigration and tax cuts and the Senate will seek to quickly confirm the new administration's **nominees** for Cabinet. One of the most powerful and high-profile Cabinet positions is Secretary of State, and **Senator Marco Rubio**, Republican senator from Florida, is expected to be confirmed easily for this role by his fellow senators.

While serving his three terms in Congress, Marco Rubio has served on the Foreign Relations Committee and headed up the Intelligence Committee. He is known as a foreign policy hawk who is tough on China but has also been supportive in the past of poverty-focused development and humanitarian assistance. While in office he has pushed for international basic education for girls, the global eradication of polio and malaria control.

This month, we will use social media to urge Senator Rubio to continue his leadership internationally on behalf of children when he is confirmed as Secretary of State.

## Background:

### Global Health and Children

**Great progress** has been made over the past 35 years cutting the rate of preventable under-five year old child deaths worldwide thanks in part to cheap yet impactful interventions costing just a few cents each such as **Oral Rehydration Therapy** and **Vitamin A supplementation**. **Childhood vaccines** including those protecting little ones against **polio**, measles, diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, pneumococcal disease and rotavirus combined with behavior change around clean water and sanitation, the promotion of exclusive breast feeding for the first six months of life, the preparation of nutritious food and the utilization of mosquito bed nets, skilled birth attendants and health facility delivery, all combined to save and reduce suffering for millions.

Since 2000, such interventions have achieved a 55% reduction in under five child mortality and a 45% drop in maternal mortality across the U.S. Agency for International Development's **priority countries**. Unfortunately, the COVID pandemic, misinformation about vaccines, the war in Ukraine and ensuing global fuel and food shortages, compounded by rapid inflation, has stalled this progress.

Today, **over 13,000 children** under five years of age die every day worldwide due to preventable disease and malnutrition and **47% of these deaths were of newborns**. Infectious diseases like pneumonia, diarrhea and **malaria** are among the biggest child killers, along with birth complications and asphyxia.

Senator Rubio has been a supporter of **polio eradication** and the role of the United States in ensuring children in the poorest countries have access to life-saving vaccines against the biggest child-killers. He has also supported robust funding for **malaria** control and investing in **international early childhood development**.

## International Basic Education

Primary education is one of the most impactful tools to break the cycle of poverty between generations. Basic education enables children to enjoy better health and greater earnings as adults and its benefits cascade to the next generation as well as it promotes child survival. For communities and nations, the more education their citizens receive, the more fuel is afforded to their economies, to their security and to their social cohesion. Globally, for every extra year of education there is an increase of **9%** in hourly earnings. More girls than boys are out of school in low-income countries, especially in areas of deep poverty or conflict.

Senator Rubio has been a longtime champion of international education for girls and recently was successful in introducing and passing into law the Reinforcing Educational Accountability in Development (READ) Act. The law will work to increase basic literacy and strengthen primary education systems in partner countries.

## Take Action:

- Write to Senator Rubio on X @**marcorubio** and thank him for his past commitment to global child survival and international basic education for girls.
- Congratulate him on his nomination for Secretary of State and urge him to continue his leadership on behalf of children worldwide once he is confirmed.
- Ask your friends and family to re-post your message and to tag @**marcorubio**.
- Please let the First Focus staff know if you receive a response.