



Circle of Protection
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Press Release

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Christian Leaders Unite to Protect Poor People in Budget Debate

Form "Circle of Protection" Around Programs for Poor People

Washington, DC, April 27, 2011 – Evangelical, Roman Catholic, mainline Protestants, African-American, and Latino Christian leaders have joined together to defend the lives and dignity of poor and vulnerable people in the current budget debate. The release of this joint statement marks the strongest and most unified Christian voice in the budget debate. Signed by more than 50 Christian leaders, it states:

"As Christian leaders, we are committed to fiscal responsibility and shared sacrifice. We are also committed to resist budget cuts that undermine the lives, dignity, and rights of poor and vulnerable people. Therefore, we join with others to form a Circle of Protection around programs that meet the essential needs of hungry and poor people at home and abroad."

In a press call today, heads of diverse Christian organizations said that politicians in both parties have failed to bring moral leadership to the budget debate. In the words of the Christian leaders:

"These choices are economic, political—and moral. As Christians, we believe the moral measure of the debate is how the most poor and vulnerable people fare. We look at every budget proposal from the bottom up—how it treats those Jesus called "the least of these" (Matthew 25:45). They do not have powerful lobbies, but they have the most compelling claim on our consciences and common resources. The Christian community has an obligation to help them be heard, to join with others to insist that programs that serve the most vulnerable in our nation and around the world are protected."

Congress will reconvene Monday, May 2, after a two-week recess. The FY 2012 budget and raising the ceiling on the national debt will top its agenda. According to the Christian leaders' statement:

"Budgets are moral documents, and how we reduce future deficits are historic and defining moral choices. As Christian leaders, we urge Congress and the administration to give moral priority to programs that protect the life and dignity of poor and vulnerable people in these difficult times, our broken economy, and our wounded world."

The leaders outlined eight principles for ethical decision-making that must be considered in a moral budget. These include protecting and improving "poverty-focused development and humanitarian assistance to promote a better, safer world" and ensuring that budget discussions "review and consider tax revenues, military spending, and entitlements in the search for ways to share sacrifice and cut deficits." They also call for a focus on creating jobs since "decent jobs at decent wages are the best path out of poverty, and restoring growth is a powerful way to reduce deficits."

The leaders said that it is the "vocation and obligation of the church to speak and act on behalf of those Jesus called 'the least of these.'" This basic principle has provided a unifying point for Christians that gets past the partisan politics dominating Capitol Hill. Plans are being made to hold political leaders accountable for

protecting programs that serve poor and vulnerable people and for using moral principles to make budget decisions.

For a full list of signatories and the complete statement, please visit www.circleofprotection.us

Speakers' Quotes:

“Approximately one in five federal dollars supports programs focused on helping hungry and poor people. With one in seven Americans currently living in poverty and more than one billion people worldwide barely surviving, this is not the time to cut vital programs for hungry and poor people in an attempt to cut the deficit—even though it must be reduced. We should, at a minimum, maintain our current level of effort to fight poverty, both at home and abroad.”

Rev. David Beckmann
President, Bread for the World

“A just framework for future budgets cannot rely on disproportionate cuts in essential services to poor persons. It requires shared sacrifice by all, including raising adequate revenues, eliminating unnecessary military and other spending, and addressing the long-term costs of health insurance and retirement programs fairly. The moral measure of this budget debate is not which party wins or which powerful interests prevail, but rather how those who are jobless, hungry, homeless, or poor are treated.”

Bishop Stephen E. Blaire
Bishop of Stockton and Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development,
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

“Evangelicals take seriously the clear teaching found in every part of the Bible that God loves and cares for the poor—and invites us to follow his example. Our nation honors God when we feed the hungry, heal the sick, clothe the naked and shelter the homeless, both at home and abroad. Protecting the poor should not be a partisan issue but rather a unifying value and shared commitment of all Americans.”

Galen Carey
Director of Government Affairs, National Association of Evangelicals

“Why should Christians care about what the national budget does to the poor? Jesus understood his ministry as one which called on the community, again and again, to respond to the poverty around them. In Luke 4 Jesus says, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me for He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.” These are words from Isaiah 61, and after reading them, Jesus announces that, in their hearing, that day these words were coming into being. These words of Isaiah were words spoken to the king - the governmental structure of his day. Jesus says my ministry is about announcing good news to the poor by calling on the nations of the world to do the justice that is good news to the poor. The Church has not always recognized the extensive presence in the bible of the call to economic justice in our national life. Sometimes we have gotten so concerned about our personal lives we have neglected this very point.”

Rev. Peg Chamberlin
President, National Council of Churches

“America faces tough choices about its long term fiscal health. We owe it to future generations to reduce the deficit, which threatens future prosperity for all -- and especially the poor. But *how* you cut a budget or reduce a deficit is also a moral issue. Poor and hungry people didn't get us into the current mess, and hurting them isn't the right way out of it. It's not only morally wrong, it ignores the bigger problem.”

Ambassador Tony Hall

Former Congressman (D-OH) and Executive Director, Alliance to End Hunger

“On April 4th, we commemorated the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., reminded that 43 years ago, he was on his way to Washington for the Poor Peoples' March to bring a message to lawmakers on behalf of the poor. Today, as Co-Facilitator of the National African American Clergy Network, I reaffirm Dr. King's message and implore congressional leaders to view the budget as a moral document of our nations core values. No one doubts the need for deficit and budget cutting measures. Yet, with almost 35 percent of African American children living in families that struggle to put food on the table, I urge congressional leaders to provide moral leadership and reorder budget reduction priorities in ways that do not fall disproportionately on African Americans.”

Dr. Barbara Williams-Skinner

Co-Facilitator, National African American Clergy Network

“We as a nation carry the moral responsibility of reconciling a commitment to deficit reduction with the Christian optics of bringing good news to the poor. As a Hispanic American Christian, I understand very well the challenge of breaking the bondage of poverty embedded in segments of the Latino community. We cannot sacrifice the poor and hurting on the altar of political expediency.”

Rev. Sam Rodriguez

President, National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference
Hispanic National Association of Evangelicals

“It was the faith community that coined the phrase ‘A budget is a moral document.’ Now a majority of the American people believe that is true. Budgets are not about scarcity; they are about choices—moral choices. And in a remarkable statement of unity, faith leaders from across the theological and political spectrum together now say you cannot choose to slash budgets and reduce deficits by causing even greater suffering for the poorest people—that is simply not acceptable to us. Our duty before God is to defend the people Jesus called ‘the least of these’ and, in this budget battle, we will.”

Rev. Jim Wallis

President and CEO, Sojourners

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The Circle of Protection is composed of more than 65 heads of denominations, relief and development agencies, and other Christian organizations. To download the pastoral letter, visit www.circleofprotection.us