



Circle of Protection
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Press Release

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CIRCLE OF PROTECTION: ANY BUDGET DEAL MUST PROTECT THE POOR

Christian Leaders Call for New Revenue to Protect Programs Serving Low-Income People

Washington DC, December 19, 2012 – As political leaders near a deal, religious leaders call for Republicans and Democrats to adhere to the basic moral principle of protecting programs that serve low-income people. The leadership of the [Circle of Protection](http://circleofprotection.us), representing a broad spectrum of Christian leaders, has released the following principles regarding the ongoing budget negotiations surrounding the fiscal cliff:

“Leaders of faith communities have come together to offer basic principles for the common good. We believe any budget proposal reflects our moral commitments as a nation. We ask our political leaders to adhere to five basic values in any negotiation.

1. Protect poor and vulnerable people as we reduce our deficits. Reducing massive deficits is indeed a moral issue, and *how* we do that is also a crucial moral question. We should reduce deficits in ways that do not increase poverty or inequality. Forming a “circle of protection” around low-income people will be our fundamental principle in evaluating any policy agreements to avoid the fiscal cliff and reduce long-term deficits.
2. Raise sufficient new tax revenue in a manner proportional to the capacity of the people to contribute. Those who have most benefitted from our nation’s economic success should contribute more in order to reduce the deficit and protect poor and vulnerable people at home and abroad.
3. Protect tax policies that effectively reduce poverty, including:
 - a. *The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Child Tax Credit.* These refundable credits reward work, promote economic mobility, and lift millions of low-income working families out of poverty every year.
 - b. *The charitable tax deduction.* Nonprofit organizations that serve the poor and needy, both faith-based and secular, provide critical services for the vulnerable and raise the quality of life for all. Preserving them is an essential part of protecting low-income people in any deficit reduction deal. The charitable tax deduction enables and incentivizes Americans to increase their support for a vibrant civil society that does not look to government to solve all its problems.
4. Slow the growth of our rapidly increasing health care costs. While we recognize that there is need for health care savings, a broad approach to finding savings and efficiencies should be employed that does not reduce access to needed care or negatively affect health outcomes. Any health care savings should avoid changes in Medicaid that harm low-income beneficiaries either directly (by cutting benefits or eligibility) or indirectly by shifting costs to states. Regarding Medicare, policymakers must shield beneficiaries of modest means from increased costs.
5. Find a bipartisan solution that seeks common ground for the common good. We believe the sacrifice should be shared widely, without asking those who have already suffered the most to sacrifice more. Either failing to address our long-term fiscal problems or doing so in a way that imposes substantial cuts

while the economy is still weak would be unhealthy for the economy and could risk higher unemployment with harsh consequences for many poor people.

Our desire is to help make space for good outcomes. We offer support and prayers for our political leaders as they tackle these difficult issues.”

Signers:

Leith Anderson

President, National Association of Evangelicals

David Beckmann

President, Bread for the World

Bishop Stephen E. Blaire

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

Peg Birk,

Transitional General Secretary, National Council of Churches USA

Ambassador Tony Hall

Executive Director, Alliance to End Hunger

Jim Wallis

President and CEO, Sojourners

Quotes:

Jim Wallis, President and CEO of Sojourners: “The faith community is going to be watching these final negotiations closely. I believe every conversation between the President and the Speaker must start with the fundamental assumption that programs that serve low-income people must be protected. The principles articulated by the Circle of Protection should be a moral starting ground for any deal that emerges. Reaching a compromise is important but it cannot compromise the poor and sell out our religious values.

Rev. David Beckmann: “We are praying that our nation’s leaders can agree on a compromise, and that it should explicitly exempt poor and hungry people from cuts. That exemption has been part of every deficit reduction deal for the past 25 years, and Congress and the President agreed on it again last year.”

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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. For more information, please visit www.circleofprotection.us.