



United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

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April 16, 2012

The Honorable Frank D. Lucas, Chairman
Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Collin C. Peterson, Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Lucas and Ranking Member Peterson:

On behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, I write to urge you to resist for moral and human reasons unacceptable cuts to hunger and nutrition programs. The committee has been instructed to reduce agricultural programs by an additional \$33.2 billion. In allocating these reductions, the committee should protect essential programs that serve poor and hungry people over subsidies that assist large and relatively well-off agricultural enterprises. Cuts to nutrition programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) will hurt hungry children, poor families, vulnerable seniors and workers who cannot find employment. These cuts are unjustified and wrong. If cuts are necessary, the committee should first look towards reducing and targeting commodity and subsidy programs that disproportionately go to large growers and agribusiness.

SNAP, also known as food stamps, helps feed millions of households; 76 percent of which include a child, senior, or disabled person and many include workers who cannot provide sufficient nutrition for their families. At this time of economic turmoil and growing poverty, the committee should oppose cuts in this effective and efficient anti-hunger program that helps people live in dignity.

If savings need to be achieved, cuts to agricultural subsidies and direct payments should be considered before cutting anti-hunger programs that help feed poor and vulnerable people. Given current high commodity prices and federal budget constraints, subsidies and direct payments can be reduced and targeted to small and moderate-sized farms.

As pastors and teachers, we remind Congress that these are economic, political and moral choices with human consequences. Prior to the House considering the budget resolution, the bishops offered several moral criteria to guide these difficult budget decisions:

1. Every budget decision should be assessed by whether it protects or threatens human life and dignity.
2. A central moral measure of any budget proposal is how it affects "the least of these" (Matthew 25). The needs of those who are hungry and homeless, without work or in poverty should come first.
3. Government and other institutions have a shared responsibility to promote the common good of all, especially ordinary workers and families who struggle to live in dignity in difficult economic times.

Congress faces a difficult task to balance needs and resources and allocate burdens and sacrifices. Just solutions, however, must require shared sacrifice by all, including raising adequate revenues, eliminating unnecessary military and other spending, and fairly addressing the long-term costs of health insurance and retirement programs. The House-passed budget resolution fails to meet these moral criteria. We join other Christian leaders in insisting "a circle of protection" be drawn around essential programs that serve poor and vulnerable people. I respectfully urge that the committee reject any efforts to reduce funds or restructure programs in ways that harm struggling families and people living in poverty.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephen E. Blaire".

Most Reverend Stephen E. Blaire
Bishop of Stockton
Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development