



United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

3211 FOURTH STREET NE • WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194 • 202-541-3000

WEBSITE: WWW.USCCB.ORG • FAX 202-541-3339

July 26, 2011

United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, we write to address the moral and human dimensions of the ongoing budget debate and, in particular, the debt ceiling measure now before the Congress. In light of growing deficits, Congress faces difficult choices about how to balance needs and resources and allocate burdens and sacrifices. We welcome the efforts of those who have offered serious plans and encourage other leaders to do the same. These choices are economic, political, and moral. This important national discussion requires wise bipartisan leadership, clear priorities, and moral clarity.

We write as pastors and teachers, not experts or partisans. We acknowledge the difficult challenges that the Congress, Administration and government at all levels face to get our financial house in order: fulfilling the demands of justice and moral obligations to future generations; controlling future debt and deficits; and protecting the lives and dignity of those who are poor and vulnerable.

As Catholic bishops, we lead a community that brings both moral principles and everyday experience to this discussion. We defend the unborn, feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, educate the young, welcome refugees, and care for the sick, both at home and abroad. As teachers, we offer several moral criteria to help guide difficult budgetary 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.

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.

In this letter we do not offer a detailed critique of the entire measure before the House, but we ask you to consider the human and moral dimensions of several key choices facing the Congress.

Letter to the U.S. House of Representatives

July 26, 2011

Page 2

We fear the human and social costs of substantial cuts to programs that serve families working to escape poverty, especially food and nutrition, child development and education, and affordable housing.

We also fear the costs of undermining international assistance which is an essential tool to promote human life and dignity, advance solidarity with poorer nations, and enhance global security. Such assistance supports a wide range of life-saving programs, including: drugs to combat diseases; assistance to poor farmers and orphans; food aid for starving people; aid to victims of natural disasters; and help to refugees fleeing for their lives. The House proposal will require massive cuts in all these areas. We support continuing reform of programs that serve poor people to make them even more effective.

The Catholic bishops of the United States continue to stand ready to work with leaders of both parties for a budget that reduces future deficits, protects poor and vulnerable people, advances the common good, and promotes human life and dignity.

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. Their voices are too often missing in these debates, but they have the most compelling moral claim on our consciences and our common resources.

Sincerely yours,



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



Most Reverend Howard J. Hubbard
Bishop of Albany
Chairman, Committee on International
Justice and Peace