



United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

3211 FOURTH STREET NE • WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194 • 202-541-3160
WEBSITE: WWW.USCCB.ORG/JPHD • FAX 202-541-3339

March 6, 2012

United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, we wish to address the moral and human dimensions of the federal budget. In the past year, Congress and the Administration have taken significant action to reduce the federal deficit, while attempting to protect programs that serve poor and vulnerable people. Congress will continue to face difficult choices about how to allocate burdens and sacrifices and balance resources and needs. We fear the pressure to cut vital programs that protect the lives and dignity of the poor and vulnerable will increase.

As Catholic bishops, we have tried to remind Congress that these choices are economic, political, and moral. We offer the following moral criteria to guide difficult budgetary choices:

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.

As you craft and debate a budget resolution and spending bills for Fiscal Year 2013, we hope these criteria will shape your choices. They will guide our assessment of the various proposals. We join with other Christian leaders in calling for a “**circle of protection**” around our brothers and sisters at home and abroad who are poor and vulnerable.

The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* teaches: “Just, efficient and effective public financing will . . . encourage employment growth, . . . sustain business and non-profit activities” and help guarantee “systems of social insurance and protection that are designed above all to protect the weakest members of society.” We do not offer a detailed critique of entire budget proposals, but we ask you to consider the human and moral dimensions of these choices.

Our nation has an obligation to address the impact of future deficits on the health of the economy, to ensure stability and security for future generations, and to use limited resources efficiently and effectively. 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.

We support proposals in the Administration’s Fiscal Year 2013 budget to strengthen programs that serve poor and vulnerable people, such as **Pell Grants** and improved **workforce training and development**. We also support proposals to restore cuts to the **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program**, as well as efforts to make permanent recent expansions of **low-income tax credits**.

Our Conference believes **safe and affordable housing** is essential for human dignity. We do not support the Administration’s proposal to increase the minimum amount of rent that can be charged to families receiving housing assistance. Minimum rent provisions affect the poorest and most vulnerable families--

they already struggle to live in dignity. We strongly oppose the Administration's proposal to eliminate funding for the **DC Opportunity Scholarship Program**, which provides vital assistance to poor families in the nation's capital in seeking out high-quality education for their children.

The "circle of protection" must extend to our country's **poverty-focused international assistance** programs. They promote human life and dignity, advance solidarity with poorer nations, and enhance global security. These programs save lives, treating and preventing disease, making farmers more productive, helping orphans, feeding victims of natural or man-made disasters, and protecting refugees.

The Conference does not support the entire foreign operations budget, but we strongly support poverty-focused international assistance. The Administration proposes to increase State and Foreign Operations funding by 2.4 percent, but cut lifesaving, poverty-focused programs by over one percent. Cuts may be necessary within the broader foreign operations budget, but they should not reduce poverty-focused international assistance. We ask Congress to increase support for poverty-focused assistance and to continue to reform international aid so it is even more effective for the poorest people in the poorest places on the planet.

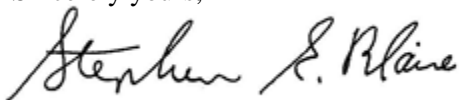
We are also very concerned with proposals to eliminate the "firewall" that currently exists between defense and nondefense spending. Elimination of this firewall would mean that poverty-related domestic and international programs would compete with other more powerful interests and less essential priorities. Likewise, reverting to a "security/non-security" distinction for Fiscal Year 2013 would threaten international development assistance.

Access to affordable, life-affirming **health care** that respects religious freedom remains an urgent national priority. Rising health care costs contribute in major ways to increased government spending. We warn against shifting rising health care costs to vulnerable seniors, people with disabilities, and those who are poor, without controlling these costs.

As pastors, we see every day the human consequences of budget choices. Our Catholic community defends the unborn, feeds the hungry, shelters the homeless, educates the young, and cares for the sick, both at home and abroad. We help poor families rise above crushing poverty, resettle refugees fleeing conflict and persecution, and reach out to communities devastated by wars, natural disasters and famines.

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. The Catholic bishops of the United States 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.

Sincerely yours,



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



Most Reverend Richard E. Pates
Bishop of Des Moines
Chairman, Committee on International Justice
and Peace



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United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

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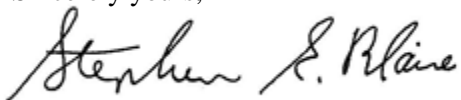
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