



Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development
Office of Domestic Social Development

FEDERAL BUDGET

February 2009

BACKGROUND

The Obama Administration is expected to release a proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2010 at the end of March or early April 2009. However, an outline with amounts for broad program areas is expected to be issued in late February and will allow Congress to begin its budget and appropriations work.

Since the beginning of the year, the Administration and Congress have been focused almost exclusively on the economic crisis in the United States and around the world. In January, Bishop Murphy, Chairman of the Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, urged Congress to make the lives and dignity of poor families and vulnerable workers central priorities as they debated and adopted an economic recovery package. Congress subsequently passed the largest economic recovery bill in American history. Several of the provisions will have an immediate and positive effect on the life of poor people and their families.

USCCB POSITION

A budget is in many ways a moral document reflecting the priorities of the nation. The Bishops' Conference advocates for a budget that guarantees adequate funding to assist those in greatest need and who are trying to care for their children, gain access to health care, or overcome hunger and homelessness. Prior to the inauguration of the new Administration and the 111th Congress, Bishop Murphy, chairman of the Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, wrote to Congress about the economic and financial crisis. The bishop offered a moral framework to guide the development of legislation designed to address the financial crisis. Bishop Murphy emphasized the human and moral dimensions of the crisis. He urged that any action taken on the financial crisis should protect families and workers, not just investors and corporations. The letter cited traditional principles of Catholic teaching, which address the proper role of the economy and market in a just society, to guide a national response.

In a society marred by deepening divisions between rich and poor, Scripture gives us the story of the Last Judgment (Mt 25) and instructs us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first. Pope Benedict the XVI, in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est (God is Love)*, reminded us that “[p]olitics is more than a mere mechanism for defining the rules of public life: its origin and its goal are found in justice, which by its very nature has to do with ethics. The State must inevitably face the question of how justice can be achieved here and now.” (#28)

Catholic teaching asserts that a fundamental moral measure of our nation's budget and economic policies is whether it enhances or undermines the lives and dignity of those most in need. Sadly, political pressure frequently leaves poor children and families missing in the national debate and without a place at the table. Our nation needs a genuinely bipartisan commitment to focus on the

common good of all, and on the special needs of the poor and vulnerable in particular. These are tough times. There are few easy choices. But there are some “right” choices. In a time of war, mounting deficits, and growing needs, our nation’s leaders must ensure that there are adequate resources to protect people who are poor and vulnerable.

ACTION

Urge your Senators and Representative

1. to prioritize programs that serve poor families and vulnerable workers in the federal budget and appropriations process (discretionary spending bills for housing, social services, and health care)
2. to reform the tax code, so that enough revenue is available to cut the deficit and to help meet the basic needs of poor families.

Continue to check for updates and alerts from the USCCB regarding potential action on the federal budget and spending bills.

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