



Office of the President

3211 FOURTH STREET NE • WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194 • 202-541-3100 • FAX 202-541-3166

Most Reverend William S. Skylstad, D.D.
Bishop of Spokane

March 3, 2006

Dear Senator:

As Congress takes on the annual duty of shaping and adopting a budget, I urge you once again to give priority attention to the needs of poor and vulnerable people both here and around the world. As President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, I want to remind you that budget decisions reflect not only economic policies, but moral choices as well. When setting national priorities, the Congress should seek genuine bipartisan commitment focusing on the common good of all, and especially the essential needs of the poor and vulnerable.

Providing an adequate safety net for poor and vulnerable families at home and promoting human development in poor countries are both fundamental moral obligations of a responsible society. These must not be neglected as Congress addresses essential priorities like homeland security and the defense of our nation, which can only be enhanced by wise investments to protect human life and dignity at home and abroad. We ask that you support maximum budget authority in those accounts that fund programs to assist poor families and vulnerable children.

One of the basic functions of government is to raise sufficient resources so that it can undertake efforts to promote the common good. When the basic requirements of human life and dignity for many in our country and throughout the world go unmet, it is essential that adequate federal revenues be available to help meet these basic needs. The deficits, which result from inadequate revenues, can be justified as a necessary response to serious circumstances. However, if government continues to spend far more money than it takes in year after year, it could seriously limit its ability to meet our moral obligations to respond to basic human needs now and in the future. Any new tax proposals should be evaluated in that light before being adopted.

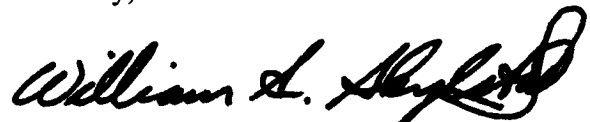
More specifically, Congress should shape and adopt a budget ensuring that adequate funding is available to help families escape joblessness, move beyond welfare, choose education for their children, gain needed health care coverage, and overcome hunger and homelessness. Our nation also has inescapable international responsibilities that clearly include increased investments in promoting peace, security and international development. In a globalized economy, stronger and more effective responses to the development and health needs of the poorest people on earth, like those in Africa, and our efforts to assist and protect refugees are moral imperatives.

March 3, 2006
Page Two

In his new Encyclical, God is Love, Pope Benedict XVI reminded us that: "The just ordering of society and the State is a central responsibility of politics.... Justice is both the aim and the intrinsic criterion of all politics. Politics 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)

As pastors and teachers, we are convinced that a fundamental moral measure of our nation's budget policy is whether it enhances or undermines the lives of those most in need. Unfortunately, political and economic pressures frequently leave poor children and families missing in the national debate and without a place at the table when decisions are made. These are tough times with 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 the lives and dignity of people who are poor and vulnerable both here at home and around our world.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "William S. Skylstad". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized initial "W".

Most Reverend William S. Skylstad
Bishop of Spokane
President