



Office of the President

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

January 24, 2006

United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Representative:

In December, as President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, I wrote to you expressing serious concerns about provisions in the budget reconciliation bill. The proposed changes in Medicaid, child support enforcement funding, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and agriculture conservation programs, in particular, could have a negative impact upon the most vulnerable in our nation.

Our Bishops' Conference is deeply disappointed that the final budget reconciliation conference agreement coming once again before the House of Representatives includes provisions in these areas which we believe could prove harmful to many low-income children, families, elderly and people with disabilities who are least able to provide for themselves. Because of these concerns, we ask you to oppose the budget reconciliation conference agreement.

Among the areas of most concern to us are:

- Increased Medicaid cost-sharing burdens and eroding federal benefit standards which can result in low-income children, families, pregnant women, elderly and those with disabilities not getting the care they need.
- Cuts to child support enforcement, which will mean collecting billions less in child support for children and families than under current law.
- TANF-related provisions, including:
 - immediate and significant changes in state TANF work rules (although additional proposals to increase hours worked per week were wisely abandoned) without providing sufficient additional funding needed to run work programs and provide child care. This will mean states may have to choose between cutting child care for low-income working families, reducing other services for low-income people, or cutting back on cash assistance for needy families;
 - policies that could have the effect of disadvantaging two-parent families and married couples; and
 - failure to restore TANF benefit eligibility to recently-arrived legal immigrants.

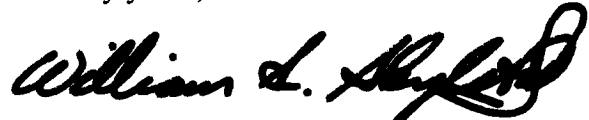
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- Cuts to key agriculture conservation programs, which will undermine efforts to promote soil conservation, improve water quality, protect wildlife, and maintain biodiversity.

We recognize that the bill also includes positive elements, such as additional funding for victims of Hurricane Katrina and a program to promote marriage and healthy families. We are also grateful that cuts to the Food Stamps program were dropped from the package. However, we believe that, overall, the impact of this bill will be to fail to meet the needs of the most vulnerable among us. Therefore, we urge you to reject the conference agreement and work for policies that put poor children and families first.

There are many challenges and much tumult in Washington that demand the attention of our leaders. However, an essential priority of government is to provide for the general welfare of its people, especially "the least among us."

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "William S. Skylstad". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "W".

Most Reverend William S. Skylstad
Bishop of Spokane
President