

May 25, 2010



Dear Senator/Representative,

We write to you about the urgent need to fund human needs programs. As faith-based organizations, we are committed to a nation in which all are able to meet their basic needs. Despite growth in GDP and job creation, millions of families continue to feel the pain left by the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression. Recognizing this serious need, **we request that Congress adopt a domestic discretionary spending level no lower than the President's FY 2011 budget, free of multi-year freezes and cuts.**

We urge Congress to take a holistic approach to addressing deficits and the long-term fiscal imbalance, which we consider a serious concern. Cutting human needs programs will not eliminate our deficits and will prevent our country from investing in a robust and sustained recovery. After almost a decade of cuts, human needs programs are still underfunded, and additional domestic discretionary spending cuts will bring further harm to millions of families, especially when unemployment remains high and the economy fragile.

The prophet Isaiah challenges us "*...to loosen the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke... to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter-- when you see the naked, to clothe him...*" (Isaiah 58:6-7). Driven by this mandate, congregations and faith-based service providers across the country provide assistance and charity on a daily basis to millions of vulnerable people across the country. However, despite this deep commitment to serving our communities, our effort alone cannot eradicate America's poverty. The federal government must exercise its full responsibility to that end.

We, the undersigned faith-based organizations, write to request that you keep this shared responsibility in mind as you consider the FY2011 budget and appropriations process. We urge you to weigh in with your colleagues to:

1. **Enact a domestic discretionary spending level no lower than the President's FY 2011 budget** and high enough to fund human needs programs adequately;
2. **Refrain from passing any multi-year cuts or freezes** on domestic non-security discretionary spending; and
3. **Take a holistic approach** in combating deficits and addressing the nation's fiscal future.

1. ***Enact a domestic discretionary spending level no lower than the President's FY 2011 budget and high enough to fund human needs programs adequately***

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Cutting human needs programs now could destabilize the economy's recent, but fragile growth, especially for families continuing to face hardship. Unemployment continues to hover near 9 percent and is expected to remain high for some time. According to recent estimates, in 2009 one in four children was poor and nearly a quarter of all households with children struggled to put food on the table. These times demand robust funding for human needs programs. Congress should enact a FY 2011 domestic discretionary spending level no lower than in the President's budget.

- Recent congressional budget resolutions and appropriations have failed to offset the harsh cuts human needs programs experienced since FY 2005. Thus, **many of the programs critical to assisting low-income populations are already operating at a deficit.**
- **A sustained economic recovery requires investments in human needs programs.** As the economy recovers, we cannot leave people behind and expect to compete successfully in the global economy. Social safety net programs generate economic activity, and good, sustainable jobs provide the most effective means to economic growth, government revenues, and deficit reduction.

2. Refrain from passing any multi-year cuts or freezes on domestic non-security discretionary spending

Congress must refrain from passing multi-year cuts or freezes to domestic discretionary spending for the following reasons:

- Non-security domestic discretionary spending makes up only a fraction of the federal budget, and **caps or freezes to this fragment of the budget will make little headway in addressing federal deficits.**
- **Freezing or cutting non-security domestic discretionary spending sounds fiscally responsible, but these measures underestimate the actual level of harmful program cuts**—programs that create jobs and help families overcome the economic downturn. While proposals to freeze spending may appear comparable to the President's budget, his budget creates additional space for domestic discretionary funding in FY 2011. It moves Pell Grants to mandatory spending, and funding for the decennial census will be unnecessary next year. Other proposals for freezes and cuts do not account for these and other distinctions, underestimating the resulting cuts.
- **Isolating non-security domestic discretionary spending would undermine the possibility of genuine bipartisan compromise to resolve the fiscal imbalance.** A comprehensive solution to the country's serious fiscal imbalance requires all sides to compromise. Targeting one fraction of the budget without addressing the other pieces or the revenue side allows certain parties to refuse compromise.

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3. Take a holistic approach in combating deficits and addressing the nation's fiscal future

Most economists, policymakers, and policy advisors agree that reducing federal deficits and addressing the government's future fiscal outlook will require a holistic approach with everything on the table.

- **Congress will have to examine areas other than just non-security domestic discretionary spending.** Congress will need to make cuts in other areas of the budget, like defense and mandatory spending as well as eliminate certain tax expenditures and institute targeted tax increases.
- **The solution will require a combination of spending cuts, revenue raisers, and changes to entitlement programs with all sides compromising.** Enacting one of these policies through the budget and appropriations process lessens the need for some members to compromise on the other issues, diminishing the chances for bipartisan agreement.

The absence of a budget resolution does not change the urgency that Congress approve a domestic discretionary spending level that adequately funds human needs programs. And it does not mitigate the harm that would come with multi-year freezes or cuts to important human needs programs.

While we understand the fiscal constraints Congress faces in a tight budget year, we also believe that deficit reduction should not be done on the backs of the most vulnerable populations. We thank you for your time and consideration and look forward to working with your office on this and other important issues in the future. If you have any questions, please contact Robert Francis at the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America at Robert.francis@clca.org, 202-626-7936 or Emily Alfano at the National Council of Jewish Women at emily@ncjwdc.org, 202-296-2588.

Respectfully,

American Friends Service Committee
Bread for the World
The Episcopal Church
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Interfaith Worker Justice
Jewish Council for Public Affairs
Leadership Conference of Women Religious
Mennonite Central Committee, Washington Office
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Council of Churches of Christ, USA

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National Council of Jewish Women

NETWORK: A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Washington Office

Union for Reform Judaism

United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries

The United Methodist Church – General Board of Church and Society