



A Faith Reflection on the Federal Budget March 2009

The federal budget provides Congress with the single greatest opportunity to reshape and reorder our nation's priorities. If we are to set a new direction for our country, the choices we make about how we generate revenues and spend our shared resources must place the common good above our own self-interest and must embrace a broader understanding of human security that provides hope, opportunity, and a place at the table for those who are marginalized. Grounded in our shared values of justice, stewardship and compassion, we support the President's efforts to reorder our national priorities and offer the following three principles as cornerstones to provide a firm and just foundation upon which to rebuild our economy and community.

- 1. Economic Opportunity for All:** In order to form a more perfect union, the preamble to the U.S. Constitution commits this nation to promoting the general welfare, including the welfare of the growing number of low-income families, veterans returning from foreign wars and people losing their jobs due to the recession. The well-being of our country is inextricably intertwined with the well-being of these populations. Our government has the responsibility to take action where families are most in crisis, both because it is the right thing to do morally and the smart thing to do economically.
- 2. Shared Commitment to Our Most Vulnerable:** The systemic problem of poverty requires a systemic solution. While the faith community is committed to provide services and care for vulnerable populations, we cannot solve our nation's hunger crisis through soup kitchens alone, nor solve the nation's affordable housing crisis through congregational shelter programs. We need the resources and leadership of the federal government not only to support the good work local non-profits are doing, but also to offer comprehensive and coordinated response to our nation's economic crisis. This response requires sufficient funding for human needs and social service programs in the federal budget.
- 3. Intergenerational Responsibility:** Our mismanagement of our nation's resources has brought us to the regrettable position where we must borrow from the future to meet current needs. As we increase near-term deficits through borrowing, we must use that money to address long-term human needs deficits to build a stronger, more just world for our children. Proper use of these borrowed resources can and should leave future generations not simply a legacy of debt, but rather a legacy of life and abundance.

In Proverbs (31.9) we are reminded of our responsibility to "*Speak up, judge righteously, champion the poor and the needy.*" Grounded in the aforementioned principles, we call on Congress to produce a budget that:

- **Provides a substantial investment of new funding for child nutrition programs.** While the President's request of \$1 billion/year in new investments for child nutrition programs is a substantial commitment, the undersigned organizations urge an investment of at least \$4

billion/year in new funding for child nutrition programs. This investment is necessary to enable authorizing committees to make critical improvements that would to increase program access and participation for vulnerable children. Additionally, Congress must continue to *fully fund WIC* during the annual appropriations process to allow the program to serve all eligible women, infants, and children. Together these two steps would be a down payment on President Obama's goal of ending child hunger in America by 2015.

- **Accommodates the possibility of comprehensive healthcare reform in the FY2010 budget,** enabling the authorizing committees to move forward with a plan that will reduce costs while improving quality and access. The current economic crisis makes this reform more urgent than ever, as the ranks of the uninsured swell and businesses struggle to stay afloat while still providing their employees with health benefits.
- **Includes a domestic discretionary spending cap high enough to restore capacity to human needs programs that have suffered years of cuts.** We affirm that numerous federal and state programs are effective in serving those in need and staving off the worst effects of poverty, and request that these programs be fully funded to address the needs of our country. We are grateful for the investments many of these programs received in the economic recovery package. However, this temporary infusion of funding was not intended to be sustained over the long-term, nor is it able to make up for years of under-funding. Not only do these programs address immediate needs that are more and more difficult to meet during this recession, but they also are necessary to reduce poverty and build economic security in the long-run. *We therefore respectfully request that the congressional budget resolution restore funding to programs such as affordable housing construction, Section 8 and 202 housing, adequate funding for LIHEAP, increased funding for child care supports, investment in the wage and hour division of the Department of Labor to prevent wage theft, and increases in job training and worker supports.* We also support *capitalizing the National Housing Trust Fund to address the affordable housing crisis that is afflicting every single congressional district.*

Now, more than ever, this economic crisis calls on us to develop a budget that balances the need for long-term fiscal sustainability with the need to maintain critical services in this time of economic crisis. Communities of faith are doing their part to serve the vulnerable, but we look to the government as a partner in funding necessary programs and addressing systemic economic problems. Too many Americans face harsh economic realities and are forced to make choices between competing human needs. Food bank resources are dwindling, vulnerable seniors choose between paying for home heating and obtaining prescription drugs, low-income renters are being evicted from foreclosed properties, and social service agencies are forced to turn people away. Today, as poverty and inequality continue to rise and service providers across the country struggle to meet demand, a federal budget that elevates human needs is more critical than ever.

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National Council of Jewish Women
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