

The Faithful Budget Campaign

September 27, 2011

Dear Congressional Leadership, Joint Select Committee Members, Appropriators and Members of Congress:

As heads of U.S.-based religious institutions and faith-based organizations we write to urge that implementation of the debt ceiling agreement not cause further hardship to vulnerable and impoverished individuals and families. Called to love and justice, we must reaffirm as a nation hallowed bonds of mutual concern to ensure that our struggling sisters and brothers receive the assistance they desperately need to live in dignity, and in some cases simply to live.

For this reason we urge you to ensure that people who are impoverished, hungry, homeless, disabled and elderly, both in the United States and abroad, are not asked to sacrifice what little they have. We believe the programs that serve them must be exempted from budget cuts by appropriators and in the recommendations of the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction.

While the debt ceiling agreement protects some poverty programs from the initial \$917 billion in cuts and future automatic cuts, vital lifelines such as the Women, Infants and Children Program (WIC), Head Start, low-income housing, and other initiatives serving vulnerable families also should be protected from reductions.

Humanitarian and poverty-focused foreign assistance, totaling only 1 percent of the federal budget, also must be preserved as a way to save millions of lives, build self-reliance among the world's most vulnerable, and serve the U.S. and global interest of helping build a more stable and secure world for all people.

We believe strongly in a shared commitment to meet our nation's fiscal challenges. Religious institutions in the United States play a vital role in serving vulnerable communities at home and around the world. The rate of individual American giving to charitable causes is exemplary, reflecting the values the American people hold dear. Private institutions, however, cannot do it alone without substantial public-sector investment. Alone, we cannot meet current needs, much less the need that would result from Congressional cuts to programs that serve people in need.

Accordingly, we urge members of Congress and the President, in the faithful exercise of their Constitutional duty to "promote the general welfare," to set aside all rancor and narrow partisanship and to strive for the highest level of cooperation, not simply the least common political denominator.

We urge policymakers to look with fairness at potential avenues toward fiscal health, with a focus on job creation, revenue, and reducing unnecessary and duplicative military spending, and not at the expense of those who can least afford additional cuts to their life necessities.

Indeed, we are concerned that sharp reductions in federal spending at this time of high unemployment and fragile recovery will put millions more people out of work, not only at federal, state and local government levels, but also in the private sector. We believe our country would be better served – and the deficit reduced in the years ahead -- by a united national commitment to job creation now. Investment in job creation will create the conditions for a robust economy, bring renewed hope and security to millions of Americans, and result in increased revenues.

Thank you for your consideration of our appeal on behalf of our sisters and brothers struggling to overcome hardship and poverty. In the months ahead we are committed to educating our clergy and congregations about government's moral responsibility to protect the most vulnerable and act for the common good.

Please be assured that our prayers, and the prayers of people of faith across the country, will be with you and with all who undertake the important work of public service.

Sincerely,

Father Arturo Aguilar
Regional Director
Missionary Society of St. Columban

The Very Reverend William Antone, OMI
Provincial
Missionary Oblates

The Reverend David Beckmann
President
Bread for the World

The Reverend Geoffrey A. Black
General Minister and President
United Church of Christ

Kim Bobo
Executive Director
Interfaith Worker Justice

The Reverend Jennifer Butler
Executive Director
Faith in Public Life

J. Ron Byler
Executive Director
Mennonite Central Committee U.S.

Sister Simone Campbell, SSS, J.D.
Executive Director
NETWORK, A National Catholic Social
Justice Lobby

The Reverend Canon Peg Chamberlin
Executive Director, Minnesota Council of Churches
President, National Council of Churches USA

Shan Cretin
General Secretary
American Friends Service Committee

The Reverend Edward M. Dougherty, MM
Superior General
Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers

Sister Pat Farrell, OSF
President
Leadership Conference of Women Religious

Bishop Larry M. Goodpaster
President of The Council of Bishops
The United Methodist Church

Rabbi Steve Gutow
President
Jewish Council for Public Affairs

The Reverend Mark S. Hanson
Presiding Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

The Right Reverend Giles P. Hayes, OSB
President
Conference of Major Superiors of Men

Nancy K. Kaufman
Chief Executive Officer
National Council of Jewish Women

The Reverend Dr. Michael Kinnamon
General Secretary
National Council of Churches USA

The Reverend John L. McCullough
Executive Director and CEO
Church World Service

Sister Janice McLaughlin, MM
President
Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic

The Reverend A. Roy Medley
General Secretary
American Baptist Churches USA

The Reverend Peter Morales
President
Unitarian Universalist Association

Stanley Noffsinger
General Secretary
Church of the Brethren

Dr. Walter L. Parrish, III
General Secretary
Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc.

The Reverend Gradye Parsons
Stated Clerk
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Diane Randall
Executive Secretary
Friends Committee on National Legislation

The Most Reverend Katharine Jefferts Schori
Presiding Bishop and Primate
The Episcopal Church

The Very Reverend Thomas H. Smolich, S.J.
President
Jesuit Conference

Sam Stanton, MKLM
Executive Director
Maryknoll Lay Missioners

Dr. Sayyid M. Syeed
National Director
Islamic Society of North America

Dr. Sharon E. Watkins
General Minister and President
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Bishop John F. White
Ecumenical & Urban Affairs Officer &
Endorsing Agent
African Methodist Episcopal Church