

July 13, 2011

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator McConnell:

We write as heads of U.S.-based religious institutions and faith-based organizations to share our grave concern and dismay that the ongoing conversations and negotiations regarding our nation's budget may yield an outcome that places individuals and families struggling with poverty at risk of even further hardship while shielding the wealthiest in our nation from any additional sacrifice. Our faith traditions are diverse, but we are united in the conviction that God calls us to protect the vulnerable and do justice to those in need and all God's children.

Because of our overwhelming and deep concern for those who have no voice at the budget negotiating table, **we are requesting an urgent meeting with you** to lift up our conviction that assistance for low income and vulnerable people here and abroad must be exempted from budget cuts. We are also asking for a meeting with President Obama and plan to hold a press event where we will present the need to address the fiscal challenges of the day in a way that affirms justice and paves a sustainable path for the future.

We are deeply troubled that spending cuts to vital domestic, international, and environmental service programs are under consideration as part of the ongoing discussions about the deficit. While we believe strongly in national fiscal responsibility and shared sacrifice by those with adequate resources, we believe policymakers must look fairly at all programs, including military spending, and examine all other avenues toward fiscal health, including job creation and increased revenues. Over the coming weeks, we will mount a major public campaign within our faith communities to oppose cuts to programs that serve low-income and vulnerable people at home and around the world. ***We would like to stand with you on this vital issue, and invite you to stand publicly with us as we speak to our communities.***

People who are served by government programs – those who are poor, sick, and hungry, older adults, children, and people with disabilities – should not bear the brunt of the budget-cutting burden. Economic disparities in our nation are both symptomatic of our current fiscal situation and one of its causes. Thus, cuts to programs that serve the neediest not only violate the core values of our nation, but also place us on a path of even greater economic peril. ***They have suffered enough and increasing their level of deprivation would be a terrible injustice.***

As a people, we are in a moment of crisis and decision. We join in a belief that good stewardship is essential to the health of our communities, our ministries, and our nation. We do not wish to leave a legacy of debt to our children, nor do we believe that a legacy of poverty and underinvestment is any better.

Our houses of worship, movements, and institutions are committed to the long-term work of responding to this fiscal challenge and healing the wounds from which our nation is suffering, both through our anti-poverty and direct services ministries, and through our ministries of public witness, education, and advocacy. We are committed to educating our clergy and congregations about government's moral responsibility to protect the most vulnerable, even as we also work to meet need and reduce hardship in our own communities. ***But as houses of worship and communities of faith, we alone cannot meet the current need, much less the increased hardship that would result from severe cuts in federal, and consequently, state programs. We need the public-private partnership that has for decades enabled us as a nation to respond to desperate need, both human and environmental.***

We know the nation faces difficult decisions, so we join as citizens, as well as faith leaders, to urge that the solutions to the current fiscal quagmire be just, while improving the economic situation for those who are vulnerable and reducing disparity and injustice in this nation.

We look forward to meeting with you in the days ahead and to working with you to reach a solution that not only protects the future, but also the present. Please be assured that our prayers are ever with you and with all who undertake the costly work of public service.

Yours sincerely,

Bishop John White
Ecumenical and Urban Affairs Officer
African Methodist Episcopal Church

Bishop George W.C. Walker, Sr.
Senior Bishop
African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church

Shan Cretin
General Secretary
American Friends service Committee

Ruth Messinger
President
American Jewish World Service

The Reverend David Beckmann
President
Bread for the World

The Reverend Dr. Sharon E. Watkins
General Minister and President
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
in the United States and Canada

Bishop Thomas L. Hoyt, Jr.
Senior Bishop
Christian Methodist Episcopal (C.M.E.)
Church

Mr. Stanley Noffsinger
General Secretary
Church of the Brethren

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

The Very Reverend Thomas P. Cassidy, SCJ
President
Conference of Major Superiors of Men

The Most Rev. Katharine Jefferts Schori
Presiding Bishop and Primate
The Episcopal Church

Rev. Mark S. Hanson
Presiding Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Kim Bobo
Executive Director
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National Director
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The Very Reverend Thomas H. Smolich, S.J.
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Rabbi Steve Gutow
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Jewish Council for Public Affairs

Sister Mary Hughes, OP
President
Leadership Conference of Women Religious

Marie Dennis
Director, Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
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J. Ron Byler
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Bishop Larry M. Goodpaster
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