



Hill Notes February 2008 Putting the Poor First...



1) In the federal budget: A central moral test of society is how poor families and vulnerable people are treated. There are over 36 million people (12 percent of the population) living in poverty in our nation. Priority for poor and vulnerable members of our society can be shown in how the nation spends resources in the budget and in how laws are written programs designed that target poor and vulnerable people.

On February 4, 2008, the Bush Administration released their proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2009 and recommended cuts to several important programs serving poor and vulnerable people. Congress has begun the process for considering its Budget Resolution for Fiscal Year 2009, which will establish the parameters for federal taxes and spending for next year.

Why are the bishops concerned about the budget of the federal government?

A budget is a moral document reflecting our national priorities. Congress should structure a budget that guarantees adequate funding to assist those trying to care for their children, gain access to health care or overcome hunger and homelessness. The bishops stated in *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* that “economic decisions and institutions should be assessed according to whether they protect or undermine the dignity of the human person.” (#76)

Given the difficult fiscal situation and limited resources and the bishops oppose spending cuts to programs, do the bishops support growing the deficit or raising taxes?

One of the basic functions of government is to raise sufficient resources so that it can safeguard human rights and promote the common good. When the basic requirements of human life and dignity for many go unmet, it is essential that adequate federal revenues be available to help meet these basic needs. Deficits, which result from inadequate revenues, can be justified as a necessary response to serious circumstances. However, if government continues to spend far more money than it takes in year after year, it could seriously limit its ability to meet our moral obligations to respond to basic human needs now and in the future.

Are there cut in specific domestic programs which the Catholic community opposes?

Although spending in Medicaid, Medicare and SCHIP is growing, Congress should resist cutting services or reducing reimbursement to providers which limit the number of patients they see or ends their participation. Rather, a driving force for the increase in Medicare, Medicaid, and SCHIP is rising health care costs, which should be addressed in the broader context of health care reform.

On domestic discretionary programs, Congress should allocate sufficient resources in the budget resolution to fund domestic discretionary spending at an appropriate level. USCCB supports programs that strengthen the safety net, not weaken it. Programs that serve poor families, vulnerable people, and low-wage workers should be prioritized. Specifically, major cuts should be resisted in key programs such as child care assistance, the Community Services Block Grant, the Social Services Block Grant, the Community Development Block Grant, Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, nutrition programs including WIC, Section 8 housing vouchers, housing for the elderly and persons with disabilities, and programs serving families who are homeless.

2) *By passing the Pregnant Women Support Act (H.R.3192 and S.2407):* Tragically, each year over one million unborn children never see the day of their birth. Too many women wrongly believe abortion is their only option. Studies have shown that for approximately three out of four women choosing abortion, their belief they cannot afford a child was one of the key reasons. An important step toward supporting pregnant women is to help them overcome poverty. The poverty rate for people (parent, children, etc.) living in households headed by a single female is thirty percent compared to twelve percent of the general population in the United States.

Catholic teaching affirms the right to life for every person- born and unborn - and insists every life is sacred and has inherent dignity. The Bishops' Conference consistently and unequivocally supports laws and programs that encourage childbirth and adoption over abortion and that work to address poverty, provide health care, and offer other assistance to pregnant women, children, and families.

Do programs included in the Pregnant Women Support Act already exist?

Some of the programs cited in the Pregnant Women Support Act do exist, such as child care assistance and the WIC Nutrition program, but the bill would help reach out to low-income pregnant women and increase funding for those programs so more people could be served.

However, some of the provisions in the bill particularly related to health care, such as prohibiting insurance companies from considering pregnancy a “pre-existing condition” for new enrollees and codifying the current regulation offering states the option to extend SCHIP coverage to unborn child, are new.

Abortion is a “controversial” political issue. Won’t this bill further polarize Congress?

The Pregnant Women Support Act (H.R. 3192 and S. 2407) is a common-sense solution that people on all sides of the political debate can support. All of us should prevent women from being pressured toward abortion in this country and to offer concrete help to mothers and young children. The Pregnant Women Support Act would provide information and resources to pregnant women who want to continue their pregnancy and need resources. The bill would also fund the collection and reporting of abortion surveillance data and report on reasons why women choose to have an abortion.

Does this legislation fund programs or services contrary to Catholic moral principles?

No. This bill does nothing that is contrary to Catholic teaching and morality. S. 2407 and H.R. 3192 are the only comprehensive bills that provide alternatives to abortion and aid to women without compromising Catholic moral principles.

For more information:

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