



A Faith Reflection on the Federal Budget

The federal budget is a moral document that reflects and shapes our country's priorities. Congress should craft it based on the needs of all. In Proverbs (31.9) we are reminded of our responsibility to *"Speak up, judge righteously, champion the poor and the needy."* While we must work to address growing deficits, the federal budget should reflect a government that provides hope, opportunity, and a place at the table for all, especially for poor and hungry people. The Interreligious Working Group on Domestic Human Needs (DHN) advocates for a just and sustainable budget to protect critical programs and support fiscal restraint while protecting the most vulnerable among us. We must not balance the budget on the backs of the hungry and poor, especially as even more previously middle-income families are finding themselves falling into the same straits. DHN's budget priorities are grounded in three values that together ensure a just foundation upon which to strengthen the economy and our democracy.

1. **Shared Commitment to Meeting Immediate Needs for the Most Vulnerable:** The faith community is committed to serving vulnerable populations, but we need government action to end hunger and poverty in the United States. With an official unemployment rate still above 8 percent, and even higher for minorities, thousands of households are left with no place to call "home," and families in every community are struggling to meet basic needs. We must not neglect the very programs that allow these families to survive the recession and live in dignity. ***Congress has the responsibility, even as it pursues long-term deficit reduction, to adequately fund critical human needs and social service programs: it is both a moral issue and an economic necessity.***
2. **Economic Opportunity and Justice for All:** Economic opportunity is a value that defines our nation, but it continues to go unrealized as a result of the current economic crisis. As President Obama stated in his 2012 State of the Union Address, *"We can either settle for a country where a shrinking number of people do really well, while a growing number of Americans barely get by. Or we can restore an economy where everyone gets a fair shot, everyone does their fair share, and everyone plays by the same set of rules... What's at stake are American values. We have to reclaim them."* Even before the recession, too many families were struggling to make ends meet, unable to lift themselves out of poverty. The federal budget must not only respond to families in crisis, it also must strengthen our long-term commitment to meeting human needs and providing social service programs to address the underlying causes of poverty and inequality that afflict our nation. ***We urge Congress to make the long-term investments needed to reduce and eventually end poverty. This requires access to high quality education, sustainable jobs with living wages, and policies that help families build assets.***
3. **Intergenerational Responsibility:** The gap between revenues and spending coupled with escalating health care costs and demographic shifts threaten our fiscal future. We cannot leave our children a legacy of rising debt but neither can we leave them a legacy of rising poverty and diminished opportunities as educational programs, adequate housing, health care, nutrition programs, and community services become less available. Congress must make it a priority to reduce the nation's long-term deficits while protecting the most vulnerable among us. We must pay for the services and investments our country needs through an equitable tax system. ***As the economy continues to recover, we urge Congress to craft a federal budget that balances long-term***

fiscal discipline with the need to sustain critical services and elevate human needs and put our country back on solid fiscal ground so the next generation is not overburdened with both poverty and debt.

OUR BUDGET PRIORITIES

1. Protect programs that serve the most vulnerable.

- Social safety net programs, such as nutrition and housing programs, unemployment insurance, and refundable tax credits, which make up only 14 percent of the federal budget, are indispensable and must be held harmless. Cuts to these programs will threaten the stability of our communities, weaken the economy by taking money out of the pockets of middle and low income families, and do little to reduce the deficit. In fact, our nation's slow recovery dictates that these programs are needed now more than ever.
- Low-income programs help stimulate the economy by putting money directly into local economies quickly.

2. Invest in the Economy by:

- Creating good, sustainable jobs, emphasizing public/private partnerships where possible;
- Focusing job training and job creation on the individuals and distressed communities hardest hit by the recession and on industries that are most needed for this country's future, including health care, renewable energy, infrastructure, education, and childcare;
- Expanding workplace protections so that all individuals can know the dignity of a good job; and
- Preparing the next generation of workers by improving child welfare, child support programs, low-income tax credits, and education.

3. Take a balanced and responsible approach to deficit reduction that:

- Avoids the harmful consequences of sequestration, a blunt budget tool that does not allow Congress and the Administration to make thoughtful decisions about where to invest our nation's tax dollars;
- Gives scrutiny to both military and non-military spending;
- Does not disproportionately rely on spending cuts over revenues;
- Preserves the integrity of safety net programs — like Medicaid and SNAP — to ensure that poor and middle income families are able to meet their most basic needs; and
- Recognizes that all deficit reduction enacted over the past year has come from discretionary spending cuts. This portion of the budget makes up a fraction of the federal budget. Further deficit reduction must instead address the true causes of our deficits: rising health care costs, unpaid for tax cuts, the cost of fighting two wars, and the economic recession.

Congress must craft the federal budget, a moral document, to ensure that all are able to live in dignity and participate in the nation's economy; that all federal programs — military and non-military — are examined for their efficient and effective responses to the actual needs of the nation; and that those whose income and wealth make them most able to support the shared needs of the whole society are called upon to do so. Our faith traditions command us to look after those who are most vulnerable to the nation's action or inaction. We urge you to do the same.

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Bread for the World
Church of the Brethren
Disciples Justice Action Network (Disciples of Christ)
The Episcopal Church
Faithful Reform in Health Care
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Interfaith Worker Justice
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Mennonite Central Committee, Washington Office
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