



United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

3211 FOURTH STREET NE • WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194 • 202-541-3160

WEBSITE: WWW.USCCB.ORG/JPHD • FAX 202-541-3339

February 27, 2015

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

As Chairs of the Catholic bishops' Domestic and International Committees, we wish to address the moral and human dimensions of the federal budget. The budget resolution for Fiscal Year 2016 will require difficult choices. We urge you to protect programs that serve poor and vulnerable people at home and abroad, and we offer the following moral criteria to guide you:

1. Every budget decision should be assessed by whether it protects or threatens human life and dignity.
2. A central moral measure of any budget proposal is how it affects “the least of these” (Matthew 25). The needs of those who are hungry and homeless, without work or in poverty should come first.
3. Government and other institutions have a shared responsibility to promote the common good of all, especially ordinary workers and families who struggle to live in dignity in difficult economic times.

We support the goal of reducing future unsustainable deficits, and believe our nation has an obligation to address their impact on the health of the economy. A just framework for the federal budget, however, cannot rely on disproportionate cuts in essential services to poor persons; it requires shared sacrifice by all, including raising adequate revenues, eliminating unnecessary military and other spending, and addressing the long-term costs of health insurance and retirement programs fairly.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states:

Certainly, it is the proper function of authority to arbitrate, in the name of the common good, between various particular interests; but it should make accessible to each what is needed to lead a truly human life: food, clothing, health, work, education and culture, suitable information, the right to establish a family, and so on. . . . Each human community possesses a common good which permits it to be recognized as such; it is in the political community that its most complete realization is found. It is the role of the state to defend and promote the common good of civil society, its citizens, and intermediate bodies. (Nos. 1908-1910)

The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* teaches that “In order to respect both [the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity], the State’s intervention in the economic environment must be neither invasive nor absent, but commensurate with society’s real need” (No. 351). Solidarity recognizes that each of us is connected, and we all have the responsibility to care for one another, particularly those who are poor and vulnerable. The principle of subsidiarity recognizes that issues facing human beings should be addressed at the appropriate level of society with the capacity to do so. The community charged with acting should be willing and able to meet its obligations, and respected by other levels of society as we collectively work for the common good. We urge you to approach the budget process honoring these principles.

Budget Control Act caps and sequestration have imposed severe limitations on non-defense discretionary spending, which includes many domestic and international poverty-focused programs, making it difficult to provide needed goods and services to people and families struggling to survive. As a result, millions of people are needlessly put in harm's way and denied access to lifesaving and life-affirming services. Congress should replace these harmful policies with thoughtful and responsible alternatives that achieve the desired deficit reductions while protecting programs that serve our brothers and sisters in need.

We also caution against using the reconciliation process to achieve savings with restrictions to health care, nutrition, income security, or other antipoverty programs. The bishops have devoted their efforts to addressing the morally problematic features of health care reform rather than repealing the law.

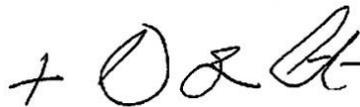
As pastors, we see every day the human consequences of budget choices. Our Catholic community defends the unborn, feeds the hungry, shelters the homeless, educates the young, and cares for the sick, both at home and abroad. We help poor families rise above crushing poverty, resettle refugees fleeing conflict and persecution, and reach out to communities devastated by wars, natural disasters and famines. In much of this work, we are partners with government, and our combined resources allow us to reach further and help more. Our Church presence in every state and throughout the world allows us to serve in some of the most remote and marginalized communities. Our institutions are locally rooted and trusted by local populations.

The moral measure of the federal budget is not which party wins or which powerful interests prevail, but rather how those who are jobless, hungry, homeless, or poor are treated. Their voices are too often missing in these debates, but they have the most compelling moral claim on our consciences and our common resources. The Catholic bishops of the United States stand ready to work with leaders of both parties for a budget that reduces future deficits, protects poor and vulnerable people, advances the common good, and promotes human life and dignity.

Sincerely yours,



Most Reverend Thomas G. Wenski
Archbishop of Miami
Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice
and Human Development



Most Reverend Oscar Cantú
Bishop of Las Cruces
Chairman, Committee on International Justice
and Peace