



Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development
Committee on International Justice and Peace
Committee on Migration

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September 30, 2013

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, we write to address the moral and human dimensions of the ongoing federal budget debate. Congress and the Administration face serious and consequential budgetary decisions in the days and months to come regarding appropriations for Fiscal Year 2014 as well as the debt ceiling. These choices are economic, political, and moral. We urge wise bipartisan leadership and moral clarity in crafting a plan to ensure the government continues to operate and meet its responsibility to protect human life and dignity, care for poor and vulnerable people at home and abroad, and advance the universal common good. Additionally, responsibly completing a budget deal according to our principles allows Congress to continue the essential task of immigration reform.

We write as pastors and teachers, not experts or partisans, to bring both moral principles and everyday experience to this discussion. The Catholic community defends the unborn, feeds the hungry, shelters the homeless, educates the young, welcomes refugees, and cares for the sick, both at home and abroad. In many instances, the government is a partner with the Church and its ministries in accomplishing this work.

We again offer moral criteria to help guide difficult budgetary decisions:

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” (Mt 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.

A just framework for future budgets 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. As Cardinal O’Malley and Archbishop Lori explain in their September 26 letter, access to health care may also be compromised by recent threats to conscience rights in health care.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* unambiguously states it is the proper role of government to “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” (no. 1908). In our country today, millions of Americans struggle to meet these basic needs, through no fault of their own, as a result of an economy that continues to fail to create sufficient economic opportunities. Last year, the poverty rate remained at a 20-year high, over 1 in 5 children lived in poverty, and 49 million Americans were food-insecure at some point. Over four years after the recession, 23 million Americans--over 13 percent of the country--remain unemployed or underemployed.

Throughout the world, millions rely on the United States for lifesaving food, medicine, and support. In Syria, violence seriously threatens the lives of two million refugees and four million internally displaced persons, half of them children. Over five million receive HIV/AIDS medication as a result of PEPFAR, and thousands of children receive vaccinations. This work must continue, and human needs must be met.

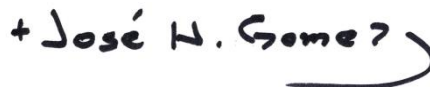
Pope Francis recently commented, “You can’t govern without loving the people and without humility! And every man, every woman who has to take up the service of government, must ask themselves two questions: ‘Do I love my people in order to serve them better? Am I humble and do I listen to everybody, to diverse opinions in order to choose the best path?’ If you don’t ask those questions, your governance will not be good.”

In 2011, we welcomed bipartisan action which averted a federal government shutdown and the hardship that would have come with failure to reach agreement. The Catholic bishops of the United States stand ready to work with leaders of both parties for a budget that reduces future unsustainable deficits, protects poor and vulnerable people, advances the common good, and promotes human life and dignity.

Sincerely yours,

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Most Reverend Stephen E. Blaire
Bishop of Stockton
Chairman, Committee on Domestic
Justice and Human Development

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Most Reverend José H. Gomez
Archbishop of Los Angeles
Chairman, Committee on
Migration

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Most Reverend Richard E. Pates
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