



United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

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May 19, 2017

United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

As Congress prepares to undertake the fiscal year 2018 budget process, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) reaffirms that the federal budget is a moral document with profound implications for the common good of our nation and world. The budget requires difficult decisions that ought to be guided by moral criteria that protect human life and dignity, give central importance to “the least of these” (Matthew 25), and promote the welfare of workers and families who struggle to live in dignity.

The Catholic Church teaches that it is the role of the state to promote the three pillars of the common good:

1. Respect for the fundamental and inalienable rights of the human person (1907);
2. Promotion of human development that makes “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” (1908); and
3. Defense of peace, “the stability and security of a just order,” that uses morally acceptable means to promote the security of society and its members (1909).

Our Conference has long supported the goal of reducing future unsustainable deficits that would harm all citizens, especially those who are poor. This goal can only be achieved through a comprehensive approach that requires shared sacrifice, including raising adequate revenues, eliminating unnecessary military and other spending, and addressing fairly the long-term costs of health insurance and retirement programs. A just framework for sound fiscal policy cannot rely almost exclusively on disproportionate cuts in essential services to poor and vulnerable persons.

Sharp increases in defense and immigration enforcement spending, coupled with simultaneous and severe reductions to non-defense discretionary spending, particularly to many domestic and international programs that assist the most vulnerable, would be profoundly troubling. Such deep cuts would pose a threat to the security of our nation and world, and would harm people facing dire circumstances. When the impact of other potential legislative proposals, including health care and tax policies, are taken into account, the prospects for vulnerable people become even bleaker.

Accounting for about one-third of worldwide military expenditures, U.S. defense spending far exceeds that of any other nation. The United States spends as much as at least the next eight nations combined, many of them our allies. Our nation continues to increase spending on nuclear weapons, despite the moral imperative to verifiably disarm from this class of indiscriminate weapons. Military force should only be employed in a just cause as a last resort within strict moral limits of proportionality, discrimination and probability of success. The brave men and women of our military deserve our support and profound gratitude as well as prudent consideration of the stress of repeated deployments over the years.


Our nation should elevate diplomacy and international development as primary tools for promoting peace, regional stability and human rights, not adopt deep cuts to these budgets. The USCCB has repeatedly called for robust diplomatic efforts to end longstanding conflicts in a range of countries, including Syria and Iraq. It is hard to reconcile the need for diplomacy and political solutions with significant cuts to the State Department budget.


The reconciliation process should not be used to achieve savings through cutting health care, nutrition, income security, or other anti-poverty programs. The bishops have devoted their efforts to addressing the morally problematic features of health care reform while insuring that all people have access to health care coverage.

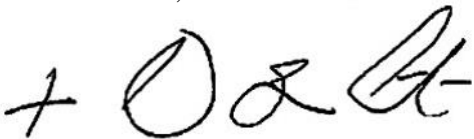
The human consequences of budget choices are clear to us as pastors. Our Catholic community defends the unborn and the undocumented, feeds the hungry, shelters the homeless, educates the young, and cares for the sick, both at home and abroad. We help mothers facing challenging situations of pregnancy, poor families rising above crushing poverty, refugees fleeing conflict and persecution, and communities devastated by wars, natural disasters and famines. In much of this work, we are partners with government. Our combined resources allow us to reach further and help more. Our institutions are present in every state and throughout the world, serving some of the most marginalized communities and enjoying the trust of local populations.

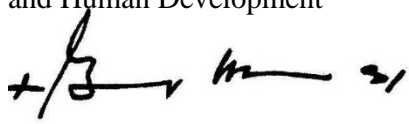
The moral measure of the federal budget is how well it promotes the common good of all, especially the most vulnerable whose voices are too often missing in these debates. The Catholic Bishops of the United States stand ready to work with leaders of both parties for a federal budget that reduces future deficits, protects poor and vulnerable people, and advances peace and the common good.


Sincerely yours,

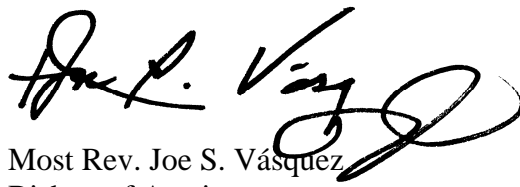
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His Eminence Timothy Cardinal Dolan
Archbishop of New York
Chairman, Committee on Pro-Life Activities

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Most Rev. Frank J. Dewane
Bishop of Venice
Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice
and Human Development

+ 
Most Rev. Oscar Cantú
Bishop of Las Cruces
Chairman, Committee on International Justice
and Peace

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Most Rev. George V. Murry, SJ
Bishop of Youngstown
Chairman, Committee on Catholic Education

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Most Rev. Christopher J. Coyne
Bishop of Burlington
Chairman, Committee on Communications

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Most Rev. Joe S. Vásquez
Bishop of Austin
Chairman, Committee on Migration