Some specific cuts in the budget passed in February by the U.S. House are:

- **218,000 young children** would not be able to receive Head Start services.
- **11 million patients** would lose health care at Community Health Centers over the next year, with **3.2 million losing** care in the next few months; **127 health center sites** would have to close, and **7,434 jobs** would be lost.
- **9.4 million low-income college students** would lose some or all of their Pell grants.
- More than **8 million adults** and youth would lose access to job training and other employment services.
- **81,000 low-income people**, mostly seniors and some children, would no longer receive food packages.
- **1.2 million poor households** in public housing (two-thirds of whose members are elderly or have a disability) would see maintenance and repairs on their apartments deteriorate.
- **10,000 people** with significant long-term disabilities would lose their rental assistance; most of these would lose their homes.

A budget is a moral document because it reflects our moral priorities.¹ For years Catholic theology has taught the responsibility of government for the local, national, and global common good, its duty to protect and lift up the poor and vulnerable, and the obligation to raise sufficient resources to accomplish its duties. In our current fragile economic situation, morally responsible budgeting means: a) insuring adequate revenues to meet overall needs; b) protecting the vulnerable; and c) reducing expenditures through a balanced approach to all services of government so that “we the people” share in reduced benefits according to our means.

What is immoral in proposed budgets?

1. Immoral is not raising revenues (yes, taxes) when we have spent years unwisely cutting taxes, especially for the wealthy, and incurring expenses and debts without assuming fiscal responsibility (post-9/11 security, two wars, Medicare Part D, etc.). Perhaps both parties and the Administration could come together around a National Defense and Security Tax Act to pay for our wars, their aftermath in veterans’ care, the Transportation Security Agency, and paying down our past due security bills comprising much of our massive deficit.

2. Immoral is cutting domestic programs targeted to people with low-or-no-incomes—those who are unemployed, hungry, homeless, and without medical care. (See sidebar.)

3. Immoral is cutting international poverty-focused development and humanitarian assistance to the world’s destitute, starving, and war-ravaged peoples.³ Surveyed Americans think we spend 10 – 15 percent of our budget on foreign aid to the poor and this is too high. So politicians pander to that mistaken belief. The reality is: we spend less than one percent of our budget on the world’s poor, among the lowest shares of developed nations. The budget passed by the U.S. House would cut that by 50 percent!

4. Immoral is cutting or freezing only domestic or international discretionary programs while more than two-thirds of the federal budget goes untouched and the possibility of increasing revenues is taken off the table.

Yes, we have a national deficit problem needing serious attention and widespread participation in its remedy. But, no thanks, not on the backs of those here or abroad who can least afford to pay the bill for the “goodies” of benefits and tax-cuts which we have all enjoyed. Start instead with cutting waste, closing tax loopholes and subsidies, stopping unneeded arms programs, and ending tax breaks for the top earners.

Finally, deficit and debt are only part of our challenges. They rank behind the woes of millions of Americans without jobs and 43 million people living in poverty—the highest number in 51 years.

ENDNOTES

1 “The spending choices of Congress have clear moral and human dimensions; they reflect our values as a people.” Letter to the members of the U.S. House of Representatives, February 14, 2011, by Bishop Stephen E. Blaire, Chairman of the Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development on behalf of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).


3 See letter of February 14, 2011 to the members of the U.S. House of Representatives regarding poverty-focused international assistance from Bishop Howard Hubbard, Chairman, Committee on International Justice and Peace, USCCB, and Ken Hackert, President, Catholic Relief Services.