

## INTERRELIGIOUS WORKING GROUP ON DOMESTIC HUMAN NEEDS

April 29, 2004

Dear Budget Conferees,

As you continue to work to reach a final agreement on the FY 2005 budget, we, as representatives of communities of faith, urge you to ensure that the budget reflects a commitment to meeting the needs of the most vulnerable among us and provides for the common good of all. **Specifically, we call on you to adopt a final budget conference report that, 1) protects programs that serve those in or near poverty and, 2) includes responsible limits on tax cuts.**

The federal budget is a reflection of our values as a society. We remain deeply concerned by the values represented by a budget that disproportionately emphasizes reductions in spending for programs that serve low-income populations while extending tax cuts for those least in need of assistance. We are particularly troubled by provisions in the House-passed budget resolution that would effectively require cuts to Medicaid and other entitlement programs. These cuts will only add pressure to state budgets that have already reduced services and benefits for the neediest among us and will likely add to the number of the uninsured. The Senate budget resolution included an amendment which removed the reconciliation instructions requiring cuts to entitlement programs. We urge you to stand by this principle and exclude any such cuts from the final budget conference report.

In addition, we remain opposed to severe, long-term cuts to domestic discretionary programs that will reduce the availability of services, such as housing assistance, child care, and job training, on which working families depend. Our faith communities can attest to the real and direct impact of these cuts as congregations and non-profit organizations struggle to meet increasing demand for services.

Even more troubling is that all of these spending reductions are imposed while tax cuts - overwhelmingly benefiting the most affluent - are extended. This reflects a fundamental imbalance in the budget process that must be addressed by implementing the full "pay-as-you-go" rules as included in the Senate budget resolution. These rules fairly require that both new spending and new tax cuts be "paid for," so that the burden of deficit reduction is shared. Without this balanced approach, tax cuts will only continue to add to the nation's debt and force even further reductions in programs such as education, environmental protection, housing, and health care in the future. We urge you to include the full Senate "pay-as-you-go" provisions in the final budget agreement.

As people of faith, we continue to affirm the role and responsibility of government to care for those in need and believe that policy decisions must be judged in light of their impact on the most vulnerable in society. From this perspective, we cannot support a budget that prioritizes tax cuts that overwhelmingly benefit the most affluent over real investments in programs and services that promote greater opportunity and economic

security for all Americans. We call on you instead to support policy that reflects the common good of all – avoiding cuts to vital human needs programs and implementing fair pay-as-you-go rules – to ensure that the critical needs of our society are met in FY 2005 and into the future. If you have questions or concerns, please contact Carolynn Race at the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) at (202) 543-1126.

Sincerely,

Call to Renewal

Central Conference of American Rabbis

Church Women United

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office

National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd

National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA

NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Washington Office

Union for Reform Judaism

Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations

United Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministries