

WITNESS IN WASHINGTON WEEKLY

The Washington Office of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

April 28, 2008

This week's messages are—

- Urge Senators to Act on Jubilee
 - Protect Medicaid from Harmful Cuts
 - Reprint: Iraq - *"Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God"*
 - Isaiah 51:4-6 - Justice for a Light to the People
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Urge Senators to Act on Jubilee

Today, the world's most impoverished countries spend more than \$100 million each day in debt payments to wealthy governments and financial institutions like the World Bank and IMF. In countries where the majority of the population lives on less than \$1 per day, this money should be spent on clean water, basic health care, and education, not sent to the world's wealthiest financial institutions.

The Jubilee Act for Responsible Lending and Expanded Debt Cancellation (S.2166) is the most important piece of debt legislation to come before the US Congress in the past 7 years. The Jubilee Act will expand access to debt cancellation to countries that need it to fight extreme poverty.

On April 16, the Jubilee Act passed the U.S. House of Representatives by a more than two thirds majority vote, and is currently under consideration in the US Senate! This presents us with a historic opportunity to take a big step forward in the fight against debt and for economic justice.

But we must act quickly! Because this is a presidential election year, there are not many working days left on Congress' calendar, and most of these are scheduled before the end of June.

Please take action by calling your Senator TODAY

Join us as we call on the Senate to pass the Jubilee Act and break the chains of debt for the world's impoverished countries (additional information below the call script).

Please take the simple steps below:

1. Find out who your Senators are by inputing your zip code at the Presbyterian Church (USA) Action Center - <http://capwiz.com/pcusa/dbq/officials/>.
2. Call the Capitol switchboard at 202-224-3121.
3. Ask to be connected to your Senator's office. The receptionist will answer. Introduce yourself as (your name), a constituent from (city, state).
4. I am calling today to urge Senator _____ to co-sponsor the Jubilee Act, S2166. This bill, which passed the House of Representatives on April 16, would expand eligibility for debt cancellation to 24 additional impoverished countries so that the money can be used for health care, clean water and education. I urge Senator _____ to co-sponsor this important legislation. (You can stop there, or add an additional sentence about why this issue is important to you).
5. Be sure to thank the receptionist when you are finished.

General Assembly Guidance:

In 1998, the General Assembly called upon presbyteries and congregations to support the goals of Jubilee 2000 by sending statements of support to key policy makers in the U.S. government and multilateral lending agencies. The resolution endorsed and supported the "definitive cancellation of international debt in situations where countries with high levels of human need and environmental distress are unable to meet the needs of their people. . . in a way that benefits ordinary people and facilitates their participation in the processes of. . . debt relief." (*Minutes*, 1998, p. 676)

Protect Medicaid from Harmful Cuts

Last summer 2007, the White House bypassed Congress and issued seven new Medicaid regulations, which change the rules for how states receive federal funding for Medicaid. Medicaid is the low-income health care insurance system for poor children and their families, pregnant women, older adults, and people with disabilities, who would otherwise have no health coverage. It is a shared program, paid for in part by the federal government and in part by the states, which each administer their own state-wide programs. Together, these new regulations will strip an estimated \$50 billion in federal funds for Medicaid over the next five years.

Because states are required to balance their budgets, and because these rule-changes shift many Medicaid costs onto the states, the changes will result in significant cuts that will have a rippling effect throughout the economy,

resulting in a loss of jobs, wages, and business activity, not to mention reduced access to health care for recipients of Medicaid. If states want to continue serving those who are currently enrolled in Medicaid, they will have to cut elsewhere in their budgets or shift more costs onto the Medicaid beneficiaries.

In defense of these new regulations, the White House, through the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), contends that there are “blatant abuses of the Federal-State partnership,” i.e. states are cheating the federal government. However, state governors of both parties argue the states have addressed the abuse problems and the new rules would unfairly deprive them of funds. Further, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities has released a [new study](#) arguing that the “rules make major changes in Medicaid policy that have no connection to the Administration's claims of fraud and abuse.”

Last week, the House overwhelmingly passed H.R. 5613, a bill to put a hold, or moratorium, on these harmful regulations. The vote was 349-62, well beyond the two thirds majority needed to overturn the already-threatened Presidential veto. Now, it's time for the Senate to do the same.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) last week, granted fast-track status to this important bill, which means that it will skip the committee of jurisdiction and go straight to debate on the Senate floor this week. The legislation would delay the implementation of these regulations until April 1, 2009. Some of the more harmful effects of the new rules are:

- prohibiting states from using federal Medicaid funds to help pay for physician training,
- placing new constraints on Medicaid reimbursements to hospitals and nursing homes operated by state and local governments, and
- limiting coverage of rehabilitation services for individuals with disabilities and mental illnesses.

Additionally, the bill would provide \$25 million annually for efforts to fight Medicaid fraud.

Call 1-800-828-0498, or click <http://capwiz.com/pcusa/issues/alert/?alertid=11308416> to send emails to your Senators.

General Assembly Guidance:

In 2002, the 214th General Assembly, in its *Resolution on Advocacy on Behalf of the Uninsured*, directed the Washington Office to “urge the expansion of Medicaid to insure more low-income and fixed-income persons, including the recently uninsured.”

Reprint: Iraq - "Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God" - Matthew 5:9

Urge your senators to cosponsor legislation introduced by Pennsylvania Senator Robert Casey (S. 2130) that would organize a diplomatic offensive in the Middle East to talk with Iraq's neighbors and help bring an end to the war in Iraq. The legislation has support from both Republicans and Democrats in the Senate.

This non-binding "Sense of the Senate" resolution urges the administration to:

- Organize a diplomatic offensive with bilateral, regional and international dimensions to facilitate the safe withdrawal of U.S. troops.
- Appoint a presidential envoy for the Middle East.
- Seek a greater United Nations role in Iraq.
- Provide greater humanitarian assistance to Iraqi refugees and to lead the development of a regional framework to resolve refugee issues.

Click <http://capwiz.com/pcusa/dbq/officials/> to find your members of Congress and send the following message.

Sample Email:

I write today to urge you to support legislation that could bring peace to Iraq. There needs to be a concerted diplomatic effort directed at all the countries of the region to establish the conditions for peace.

Please cosponsor legislation introduced by Pennsylvania Senator Robert Casey (S. 2130) that would organize a diplomatic offensive in the region to talk with Iraq's neighbors and help bring an end to the war in Iraq. This legislation, which has bipartisan support, offers at least a first step on a path that could lead to peace for a region tragically torn with violence and pain.

General Assembly Policy:

The 2004 General Assembly stated that "Despite the moral cloud surrounding the military invasion of Iraq and growing concern about the loss of life on both sides of the conflict, there is widespread agreement that the United States bears a legal and moral burden for the reconstruction of Iraq. Many people feel this burden can only be carried out properly and successfully through full cooperation with the international community, especially the United Nations."

The Assembly urged "the United States government to move speedily to restore sovereignty to Iraq, to internationalize the reconstruction efforts without penalty to those nations that chose not to endorse the US-led invasion, and to

recognize the United Nations as the body most suitable to facilitate the transition to peace, freedom, and participatory governance in Iraq.”

Isaiah 51:4-6 - Justice for a Light to the People

Listen to me, my people,
and give heed to me, my nation;
for a teaching will go out from me,
and my justice for a light to the peoples.
I will bring near my deliverance swiftly,
my salvation has gone out
and my arms will rule the peoples;
the coastlands wait for me,
and for my arm they hope.
Lift up your eyes to the heavens,
and look at the earth beneath;
for the heavens will vanish like smoke,
the earth will wear out like a garment,
and those who live on it will die like gnats;
but my salvation will be forever,
and my deliverance will never be ended.

Help Us Help You!

To support the work of the Washington Office, send a contribution to:

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Individual Remittance Processing
P.O. Box 643700
Pittsburgh, PA 15264-3700.

Designate the Washington Office, ECO # 865714.

Or click here to give online: <http://www.pcusa.org/washington/support.htm>

Thank You.

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