

WITNESS IN WASHINGTON WEEKLY

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

May 5, 2008

This week's messages are—

- Help Protect the Future of US Global HIV/AIDS Funding
 - Call on Congress to Pass Low-Income Targeted Stimulus Bill
 - Urge Your Representative to Support Funding for Security and Humanitarian Aid in Darfur
 - Isaiah 56:1-5 - Salvation is for All Who Obey
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Help Protect the Future of US Global HIV/AIDS Funding

Please contact your Senator today and voice your support for the reauthorization of U.S. global AIDS assistance. The current reauthorization bill will provide \$50 billion over five years for essential global health programs. It will help to ensure lifesaving prevention, treatment, and care for millions of people who urgently need it.

THE ISSUE:

Previously, we asked you to contact your Member of the House of Representatives to support the reauthorization of the US program on global HIV/AIDS, including \$50 billion to fight not just AIDS, but also tuberculosis and malaria.

The bipartisan Lantos-Hyde bill cleared the House with more than three hundred votes. Its companion bill in the Senate, the Biden-Lugar bill, was voted out of committee over a month ago by an 18-3 margin. Both the House and Senate bills are similar regarding provisions important to many in the faith community related to disease prevention, sex trafficking, the conscience provision and the Global Fund. There is a lot of behind-the-scenes activity to perfect some of the language and also address concerns raised by seven Senators who have put a hold on the bill. This hold may jeopardize its passage since floor time for extended debate in the Senate is very limited.

Because the bill is essentially stalled at this point, it is important that something be done to encourage Senators to take action.

We need your help now to urge the full Senate to consider its version of the bill to reauthorize the U.S. global AIDS program. Unless the Senate moves fast on this, we could lose crucial momentum! Then, once the bill passes the Senate, we can use the process of reconciling the House and Senate versions to address a few remaining problems with this critically important legislation.

Please contact your Senator today. With your voice we have a shot at providing \$50 billion over five years for these essential global health programs! Help us ensure lifesaving prevention, treatment, and care for millions of people who urgently need it.

TAKE ACTION:

Contact your Senators today, and tell them that you want them to contact the Senate Leadership in support of this bill. It's simple:

Call (202) 224-3121, and ask for the office of each of your Senators. If you don't know who they are, click <http://capwiz.com/pcusa/dbq/officials/> to find your Senators.

WHAT TO SAY:

May I speak to the staff person who handles aid to poor countries? My name is _____, and I am a constituent of Senator _____. I am calling to urge him/her to contact Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell in support of the AIDS reauthorization bill that recently passed the Foreign Relations Committee, S 2731. This bill will provide lifesaving programs to those most in need, as well as make great strides in protecting orphans and other vulnerable children. Can I count on Senator _____ to urge Senate leaders to bring this bill to the floor as soon as possible?

Remember, you don't need to be an expert to make these calls. Just speak from your heart!

MORE INFORMATION:

- 10% of the total amount of the funding for U.S. AIDS programs in the bill is reserved to meet the needs of orphans and vulnerable children.
- This bill makes some headway in terms of ending violence against women and girls by building on successful programs that have been proven to slow violence in conjunction with HIV/AIDS.
- This bill will make some progress toward providing access to doctors and nurses to people living with HIV/AIDS and suffering from tuberculosis and malaria.
- The bill would not increase spending by 200% as some have claimed. Current U.S. spending on global AIDS is \$6 billion a year, which would be

\$30 billion over five years. This bill does increase the authorization for funding, but only to \$37 billion for AIDS, which is 27% more than \$30 billion. The total amount, \$50 billion, is 66% higher than current spending, but it is important to note that this total includes \$9 billion for essential programs to fight TB and malaria. In addition, roughly \$4 billion of the U.S. contribution to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria would go to TB and malaria programs, for a total of \$13 billion to help address these deadly diseases.

General Assembly Guidance:

The 215th General Assembly (2003) voted to:

6. Encourage congregations and national and local AIDS networks to
 - a. educate their constituencies about the global pandemic by holding educational events or writing articles about the issue;
 - b. engage in advocacy efforts, such as the World Health Organization's (WHO) Massive Effort Against the Diseases of Poverty (Malaria, HIV/AIDS, and Tuberculosis) and to increase funding for prevention strategies and to make affordable medications available to countries in the developing world.
7. Direct the Stated Clerk to write a letter to the president of the United States, calling upon the United States government to allocate greater resources towards addressing the epidemic and poverty that fans it, as well as prevention and affordable treatment initiatives recommended according to the WHO Massive Effort, and to show flexibility regarding trade agreements and intellectual property rights so that life-saving drugs can be available to all affected populations...
9. Request the Presbyterian Washington Office and the Presbyterian UN Office to support advocacy efforts to address the massive effort against the diseases of poverty, and the need to make affordable medication available to countries in the developing world."

Call on Congress to Pass Low-Income Targeted Stimulus Bill

In testimony before the Senate Finance Committee in January, the Director of the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO) told Congress, "The most effective types of fiscal stimulus... are those that direct money to people who are most likely to quickly spend the bulk of any additional funds provided to them." In other words, providing fiscal aid to those on the lower end of the income scale best stimulates the economy, because we can be sure that they

will spend it right way on necessities. It has the double benefit of staving off recession and putting more resources into the hands of poor families to meet immediate needs.

Families are hurting more and more, and low-income families in particular, as their monthly budgets are eaten up by the rising costs of essentials: when they fill their car's gas tank, when they pay their home-heating bill, and when they fill their grocery cart. Stagnant wages and rising unemployment make it nearly impossible for families to meet these higher costs. Now more than ever, low-income families need relief.

In January, advocates had hoped that Congress would target the first stimulus package to low-income families who not only would be hit hardest by the economic slump, but would also spend most of their benefit. The hope was that this first package would include temporary increases for Food Stamps, unemployment insurance, home energy assistance and other targeted, direct service benefits that were certain to be spent and get that extra federal money flowing in local economies. Unfortunately, the first stimulus bill did not include this vision.

The first stimulus package provided some business tax incentives and rebate checks for wage earners in most income categories, with an extra bonus for families with children, and also a small rebate for some low-income older adults and veterans on fixed incomes. However, a recent AP-AOL Money & Finance poll shows that 59 percent of those surveyed expect to use their rebates to pay bills and reduce debt. Reducing debt is an excellent goal, and these rebates will help many folks deal with the credit crunch, but economists forecast that debt reduction does not stimulate the economy the way consumer spending would. Americans who have been unable to meet basic needs are the ones most likely to inject cash into the economy, stimulating recovery.

The first round of checks from the \$168 billion February stimulus package began arriving in taxpayers' bank accounts as early as last week, and already some members of Congress are talking about a second stimulus package that would include extensions to some of the low-income programs that were left out of the first round of stimulus.

Congress should act quickly to enact a second stimulus package that targets relief to low-income families. Specifically, this package should include assistance for nutrition, unemployment insurance, home energy assistance, and aid to states for Medicaid and other programs that serve vulnerable people. Click <http://www.pcusa.org/washington/targeted.htm> for more information about the need for this package.

Now is the time to tell your members that you support a stimulus targeted for low-income families.

Call- in Day: Wednesday, May 7: (888) 460-0813

Or click <http://capwiz.com/pcusa/issues/alert/?alertid=11322561> to send a message to your members of Congress, urging a second stimulus package that will target relief to those in the most need.

What to Say When You Call:

My name is _____ and I live in [town, state]. I believe that a society - especially one as wealthy as ours - has a responsibility to share resources for the common good, and to care for children, elders, and others who are the most vulnerable among us.

I am calling because I think Congress should pass a second stimulus package that includes a boost in funding for nutrition programs, an extension on Unemployment Insurance benefits, more funding for low-income energy assistance, and increased aid to states to keep their CHIP, Medicaid, Child Care and other important programs serving people in need.

Can I count on your boss to push for this kind of stimulus package?

Thanks for your time.

General Assembly Guidance:

In 1948, the General Assembly of the PCUSA wrote, "the present inflation must be minimized. Its potentially harmful effect reach[es] every segment of our society. The inflationary cycle cannot be allowed to run its course. Already it is causing suffering and if unchecked it will inevitably head to more widespread suffering and unemployment and may issue in a devastating depression."

When the Presbyterian Church adopted a contemporary Confession of Faith in 1967, it stated that "the reconciliation...through Jesus Christ makes it plain that enslaving poverty in a world of abundance is an intolerable violation of God's good creation. Because Jesus identified himself with the needy and exploited, the cause of the world's poor is the cause of his disciples... A church that is indifferent to poverty, or evades responsibility in economic affairs, or is open to one social class only, or expects gratitude for its beneficence makes a mockery of reconciliation and offers no acceptable worship to God" (The Confession of 1967, 9.46).

Acting on such convictions of faith, Presbyterian General Assemblies over the years have expressed frequent concern for the economic well - being of the nation, the fairness of our economic system, and especially, the needs of the poor.

In 1971 the General Assembly asserted "that justice demands that everyone have the material conditions necessary for...physical and social existence..." It called for a guarantee to every American of an income or the opportunity to earn one "large enough to provide for basic needs and to sustain every person's participation, with dignity, in society..." (PCUS, *Minutes*, 1971, p. 146).

Urge Your Representative to Support Funding for Security and Humanitarian Aid in Darfur

Recently, the United Nations World Food Program announced that it will cut half its food supplies to the people of Darfur because of a lack of funds and relentless attacks on its convoys. Millions of Darfuris depend on this food supply. Without it, they will be pushed even closer to edge of starvation.

Congress is preparing to vote on a bill that will significantly increase funding for humanitarian aid and peacekeeping in Darfur. Your representative needs to hear from you. Please write to your Representative and tell him or her to support funding for security and humanitarian aid in Darfur.

Additional funding for Darfur can bring hope to the thousands who have weathered half a decade of genocide. It can provide peacekeepers with training and equipment to protect Darfuri civilians. It can deliver disaster and famine assistance to families desperately in need.

Click <http://capwiz.com/pcusa/issues/alert/?alertid=11321351> to tell your member of Congress that we must meet our obligation to the people of Darfur. Urge your representative to fully fund peacekeeping and humanitarian aid to Darfur.

With the United Nations World Food Program cutting its food aid to Darfur, the clock is ticking faster and louder than ever - action must be taken quickly to try to fill this crucial gap.

General Assembly Guidance:

The 217th General Assembly (2006) urged the Presbyterian Church, (USA) to "use its influence in every possible way to advocate for positive change in Darfur and all of Sudan." The Assembly continued, "We call upon the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to take all other steps it may deem appropriate, and to bring all reasonable influence to bear on the Sudanese government to take the necessary steps to restore peace, stability, and community in all regions of Sudan, but particularly in the region of Darfur, which has been, and continues to be, subject to the extremes of human rights atrocities and genocide."

Isaiah 56:1-5 - Salvation is for All Who Obey

Thus says the Lord:

Maintain justice, and do what is right,
for soon my salvation will come,
and my deliverance be revealed.

Happy is the mortal who does this,
the one who holds it fast,
who keeps the sabbath, not profaning it,
and refrains from doing any evil.

Do not let the foreigner joined to the Lord say,
"The Lord will surely separate me from his people";
and do not let the eunuch say,
"I am just a dry tree."

For thus says the Lord:

To the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths,
who choose the things that please me
and hold fast my covenant,
I will give, in my house and within my walls,
a monument and a name
better than sons and daughters;
I will give them an everlasting name
that shall not be cut off.

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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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