

# WITNESS IN WASHINGTON WEEKLY

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

April 30, 2009

This week's messages are-

- Update on the Budget
  - Urge Congress to Make U.S. foreign Assistance More Effective!
  - Don't Forget to Register: Churches for Middle East Peace Conference
  - Psalm 9: 5-12 -- The Lord Judges with Equity
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## Update on the Budget

Yesterday, the House and Senate both approved a compromise Budget Resolution that had been the subject of much negotiation between the Chambers in the last few weeks. The House and Senate had each passed Budget Resolutions, but they differed on a number of points. Negotiators split the difference on many of those differing provisions while keeping military spending at the same level:

- Total domestic discretionary spending -- for education, infrastructure, environment, science, health programs, employment programs, and many government benefits -- will be \$8 billion lower than the president's request. (The Senate agreed to add \$3 billion and the House agreed to cut \$5 billion from their original resolutions.)
- The international affairs budget will be \$2 billion lower than the president's request. (The Senate accepted a \$2 billion cut, and the House agreed to add \$3.3 billion to its resolution.)
- The joint resolution does not include the increased estate tax exemption that would have cost taxpayers \$91 billion over ten years and would have benefited only 0.25 percent of individuals who die in a year.
- Military spending was set at \$686 billion by both chambers.

The joint resolution also includes special fast-track, or "reconciliation" instructions for funding universal health care reform and student lending reform. Reconciliation allows a simple majority to pass legislation and avoid the possibility of a Senate filibuster (which requires 60 votes to break). The Democratic leadership has indicated it would prefer not to use reconciliation and that health care and student lending reform should move through regular processes. The House approved the conference report in the morning of Wednesday, April 29, by a vote of 233-193 while the Senate followed suit in the afternoon of the same day with a vote of 53-43.

Now the process moves on to Appropriations. The Budget Resolution that just passed is a non-binding agreement between the Chambers that sets the overall caps for spending in Fiscal Year (FY) 2010. Now members of the Appropriations Committees will divide those caps among the various programs and priorities in their jurisdictions. Final spending bills usually come before members of Congress in the fall.

### **General Assembly Guidance:**

The 207th General Assembly (1995) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) called on Congress "to defeat any proposals that base budget or deficit reductions primarily on the services provided to children, families, the needy, and the homeless" and urged strengthening of federal commitments to these groups. The Assembly also called on Congress "to insist on a government that follows ethical values of justice for the poor, welfare for children, hospitality to the stranger, and assistance to the disadvantaged." (*Minutes*, p. 718)

Earlier, the 197th General Assembly (1985) "reaffirms opposition to further increases in military spending and supports cuts in expensive weapon systems." (*Minutes*, p. 673)

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### **Urge Congress to Make U.S. foreign Assistance More Effective!**

Imagine---or remember---a world where a first-class stamp costs four cents. John F. Kennedy has just been inaugurated as president, the Berlin Wall has just been built, and a gallon of gas costs 27 cents. That's the way the world was in 1961.

Today a stamp costs 42 cents and gas costs a little bit more than 27 cents a gallon. The Berlin Wall fell 20 years ago. And we just inaugurated the first African-American president. The world has changed.

As Christians and Americans we believe it's the right thing to do to help hungry and poor people around our world. But we're operating within a system created nearly 50 years ago.

We need to bring our country's foreign aid system into the 21st century. Bread for the World's 2009 Offering of Letters is asking members of Congress to make foreign assistance more effective in reducing hunger and poverty in today's world. We need a better coordinated, more efficient approach to providing aid. Fixing foreign aid will allow the money we spend to go further and help the people who need it the most.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), together with Bread for the World, is urging Congress to make poverty reduction a primary goal of our foreign assistance, and elevate global development as an instrument of U.S. foreign policy alongside defense and diplomacy.

Development works. But we can make it work even better.

Today, children avoid contracting life-threatening malaria because they have received bed nets that protect them from mosquito bites.

Today, people with HIV and AIDS receive life-saving medication and are able to live productive lives and raise their children.

Today, farmers are learning modern skills to allow them to increase their yields and supplement their incomes to become self-reliant.

As Christians, we know that peace is more than the absence of war. It requires building strong, healthy relationships, supporting people and communities working hard to provide a better life for their children, and removing the barriers to human dignity and fulfillment. That's the work of U.S. foreign assistance and the goal of global development. That's our opportunity and our challenge.

Every year, churches and campus groups across the United States send handwritten letters to their members of Congress. Writing a heartfelt letter is a prayerful, reflective and personal way to seek God's justice for hungry people. When we join with our congregations or campus communities, we raise a strong voice.

Members of Congress receive thousands of emails per week, but handwritten letters are unique. They virtually guarantee that your senators or representative will take note of your opinion. Even a few handwritten letters can influence his or her actions and votes.

### **Send a Handwritten Letter Today!**

Put your name and address at the end of your letter AND on the envelope, so your members of Congress know that you are one of the people they represent.

*Ask for specific action, using the sentence below or your own words:*

"Please work to bring U.S. foreign assistance up to date and ensure that development is elevated as a national priority, alongside defense and diplomacy, in our foreign policy."

*Give reasons why. Examples are:*

U.S. foreign assistance is governed by a law signed by President John F. Kennedy in

1961. With a new president and new Congress, this is an important opportunity to modernize and improve foreign aid.

Many development assistance programs already make a difference. But the large number of federal agencies and offices involved in distributing aid demands a more coordinated system.

As a global leader, the United States must elevate development within our foreign policy to help create a better, safer world.

Send your letter to Congress.

*Put each letter in a separate envelope and address it. Send your letter to:*

Sen. \_\_\_\_\_

U.S. Senate

Washington, DC 20510

Rep. \_\_\_\_\_

U.S. House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

*Sample Letter:*

Date

Dear Sen. \_\_\_\_\_ or Dear Rep. \_\_\_\_\_,

I'm asking that you make something our nation has been doing well even better.

Aid from the United States already helps low-income nations reduce hunger and poverty. But our nation's foreign assistance programs are seriously outdated and need to be better coordinated in order to be more effective. It is time for Congress to look at making poverty reduction a primary goal of foreign assistance.

Please work to bring U.S. foreign assistance up to date and ensure that development is elevated as a national priority, alongside defense and diplomacy, in our foreign policy. This will ensure more economic opportunities in low-income countries and help poor people lift themselves out of hunger and poverty.

Sincerely,

Your Name

Your Address

**General Assembly Guidance:**

The 2002 General Assembly voted to call upon the United States government to

- a. direct 0.7 percent of GNP to international development assistance;
- b. adopt a combination of policies to bring relief to poor countries, including changing trade rules and cancelling unpayable debt, in addition to economic development assistance; and
- c. target aid funds repairing and building healthcare, education, and social welfare institutions and program, giving priority to small-scale, community-based organizations;

The 1996 General Assembly adopted "Hope for a Global Future: Toward Just and Sustainable Human Development" as policy for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.):

"Just and sustainable human development is the comprehensive enhancement of the quality of life for all, present and future; it necessarily involves the integration of economic, social, political, cultural, ecological, and spiritual dimensions of being.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) seeks just and sustainable human development because the church believes that God wills the fullness of life for all people. Yet the conditions necessary for such fullness are sorely lacking today for a large part of the human family. Just and sustainable human development requires policies and efforts undertaken intentionally to achieve these conditions.

The purpose of development assistance is to equip people and communities through financial and technical means to implement their own plans for just and sustainable development."

For the complete policy Hope for a Global Future: Toward Just and Sustainable Human Development, see PC (USA), 1996, pp. 524-587.

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### **Don't Forget to Register: Churches for Middle East Peace Conference**

Israeli-Palestinian Peace: Hope for Things Unseen

June 7-9, 2009

Please join us in Washington, D.C. on June 7-9, 2009 at the Kellogg Conference Center and Hotel at Gallaudet University in Washington, DC.

You will be informed and inspired by speakers including Danny Seidemann, Michael Kinnamon, Trita Parsi, Daniel Levy, and Amjad Attalah. You'll be empowered by learning how to be an effective advocate for peace in the Holy Land. And, you'll have an opportunity to impact policy directly on Capitol Hill by educating your elected officials about the need for a just and lasting resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. You will make a difference.

The recent Gaza crisis demonstrates the urgent need for U.S. engagement to bring about a just and lasting resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The 111th Congress and the Obama Administration provide a new opportunity to help Israelis and Palestinians stop the tragic cycles of spiraling violence and diplomatic stalemate and move forward on a path toward peace. Your elected officials need to hear from American Christians who care about the two peoples of the Holy Land and expect robust U.S. diplomatic action in 2009.

Click <http://www.cmep.org/> to register and for more information.

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### **Psalm 9: 5-12 -- The Lord Judges with Equity**

You have rebuked the nations, you have destroyed the wicked;  
you have blotted out their name forever and ever.  
The enemies have vanished in everlasting ruins;  
their cities you have rooted out;  
the very memory of them has perished.

But the Lord sits enthroned forever,  
God has established a throne for judgment.  
The Lord judges the world with righteousness;  
and judges the peoples with equity.

The Lord is a stronghold for the oppressed,  
a stronghold in times of trouble.  
And those who know your name put their trust in you,  
for you, O Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you.

Sing praises to the Lord, who dwells in Zion.  
Declare God's deeds among the peoples.  
For the one who avenges blood is mindful of them;  
God does not forget the cry of the afflicted.

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### **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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