

WITNESS IN WASHINGTON WEEKLY

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

June 3, 2009

This week's messages are-

- Take Action: June is Torture Awareness Month
- We need to Re-examine U.S. Trade policy
- Memorial Day Re-Cap
- What's Next for the Federal Budget?
- 2 Corinthians 6:3-10 -- Faithfulness in Ministry

Take Action: June is Torture Awareness Month

June 26th is United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture. A few years ago, religious and human rights organizations in the United States declared the month of June to be Torture Awareness Month as a way to provide greater visibility to this issue and provide an opportunity for coordinated actions across the country.

Since January 2006, the more than 250 religious organizations comprising the National Religious Campaign Against Torture have worked together to end U.S.-sponsored torture. During 2008, the religious community advocated for a Presidential Executive Order ending torture. It happened. On January 22, President Obama issued an Executive Order halting torture.

Now the task is to make sure that U.S.-sponsored torture never happens again. To accomplish this goal, our nation needs to put safeguards in place to prevent its recurrence. We will better understand what safeguards are needed if we have a comprehensive understanding of what happened - who was tortured, why they were tortured, and who ordered the torture. As a nation we need the answers to those questions. Therefore, the National Religious Coalition Against Torture is calling for a Commission of Inquiry to investigate U.S. torture policies and practices. To bolster this call, NRCAT is asking people of faith to endorse the statement "U.S.-Sponsored Torture: A Call for a Commission of Inquiry."

Please go to the National Religious Coalition Against Torture for more ideas of what you and your congregation can do to commemorate Torture Awareness Month.

http://www.nrcat.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=298&Itemid=219

General Assembly Guidance:

The 217th General Assembly (2006) approved the following:

Affirm that the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) opposes the use of torture and all forms of 'cruel, inhuman, or degrading' interrogation by all agencies, employees, or agents of the United States government, and all foreign governments and/or combatants, and supports the application of the Geneva Conventions to all enemy soldiers and the humane treatment with due process for all combatants held by U.S. forces anywhere in the world, and supports the provisions of the Bill of Rights and the principles of judicial review and congressional oversight over Executive branch operations, now including counterterrorism, Homeland Security, and domestic surveillance programs, both classified and publicly acknowledged. (*Minutes*, pp. 50-51, 867)

The same Assembly also approved:

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) petitions the Congress of the United States to convene an investigative body with the independence, stature, and broad investigative powers of the September 11th Commission to inquire into whether any official or officer of the United States government bears direct or command responsibility for having ordered or participated in violations of law in the mistreatment of persons detained by the government of the United States at Guantanamo Bay, Abu Ghraib Prison, or elsewhere or in transporting persons into detention in nations with known records of brutality and torture ; to publish its findings and, if appropriate, to recommend the appointment of a special prosecutor if one has not been previously appointed.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) petitions the attorney general of the United States to obtain the appointment of a special counsel with full authority to investigate and prosecute any official or officer of the United States government who bears direct or command responsibility for having ordered or participated in violations of law in the mistreatment of persons detained by the government of the United States at Guantanamo Bay, Abu Ghraib Prison, or elsewhere, or in transporting persons into detention in nations that have known records of brutality and torture.

We need to Re-examine U.S. Trade policy

Prior to his election, President Obama declared that he would re-examine U.S. Trade policy, even revisiting the North American Free Trade Agreements (NAFTA). Since taking office, the President has not only reversed the review of NAFTA but is also working toward passage of trade agreements made by the Bush Administration.

Ron Kirk, the President's trade representative, has indicated that the President is pushing for a trade agreement with Panama. Yet Panama is listed by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development as one of 30 tax haven jurisdictions for multinational corporations. Although Panama committed to international standards of bank secrecy, it has not implemented those standards.

More critical is the fact that movement on the Colombia Free Trade Agreement will depend upon the difficulty the Administration faces in approval of the Panama FTA. In approving any agreement with Colombia, the President and Congress will be faced with that nation's persecution and murdering of human rights defenders and labor activists.

Ask your Congressperson to encourage the President to keep his pre-election promise of re-examining U.S. Trade Policy. Senator Sherrod Brown (D-OH) and Rep. Mike Michaud (D-ME) have authored the Trade Reform, Accountability, Development and Employment (TRADE) Act to be introduced into Congress. It provides an excellent vehicle for such a review.

Click <http://capwiz.com/pcusa/issues/alert/?alertid=13456986> to send a message to your members of Congress urging them to co-sponsor this important legislation.

General Assembly Guidance:

The 215th General Assembly (2003) approved actions to:

- Support efforts to strive toward international cooperation based on fair trade , respect for diversity, and common concerns for a peaceful, just, and sustainable world.
- Oppose multinational actions and trade agreements that elevate rights of corporations over the right of governments and indigenous peoples to pass and enforce laws that preserve the public good and protect their citizens, economies, and environments.
- Call on the U. S. trade representative to withdraw from any further negotiations on the proposed FTAA until there has been full public disclosure of its proposed text, open public debate, and a place at the negotiating table for representatives of the diverse sectors of civil society who would be affected by this agreement.
- Petition the federal government to refuse to sign any new trade and investment agreements , such as the proposed FTAA, that include investor-state provisions, where corporations can directly sue governments for lost profits ("regulatory takings").
- Demand that all trade agreements incorporate workers rights, human rights, food safety, and environmental standards, and that they allow governments and sovereign indigenous peoples to regulate corporations to protect the common good.

Memorial Day Re-Cap

After a whirlwind of bill-passing two weeks ago, Congress finished the work it needed to get done before the Memorial Day recess. This week, Congress returns to Washington after a week off. Following, please find a brief summary of some of the legislative activity that preceded the Memorial Day recess.

- On Wednesday, May 20, President Barack Obama signed the Helping Families Save Their Homes Act (S. 896), legislation that will help many homeowners successfully meet mortgage payments and avoid foreclosure.
- On Friday, May 22, the president signed the Credit Card Accountability, Responsibility, and Disclosure (CARD) Act (H.R. 627), formerly known as the Credit Cardholders' Bill of Rights. This bill will protect consumers by significantly reforming credit card lending practices. The final bill also included a completely unrelated amendment making it legal to carry firearms in national parks and wildlife refuges.
- The House and Senate have each passed a supplemental spending bill to cover the cost of the war in Iraq and Afghanistan through the rest of 2009. Differences between the House and Senate versions will be worked in conference after Congress returns from the Memorial Day recess.

General Assembly Guidance:

In 2006, the 217th General Assembly approved "A Reformed Understanding of Usury for the 21st Century" in which it advocated "change of state and federal policies and legislation that allow lenders to take advantage of either the naïveté or financial plight of borrowers..." (*Minutes*, 2006, p. 805)

What's Next for the Federal Budget?

This week, as Congress returns from the Memorial Day recess, the appropriations process - when Congress assigns spending levels for government programs - will go into full swing. The process begins when the House and Senate Appropriations Committees allocate "top line", or maximum spending levels to the 12 appropriations subcommittees (i.e. Defense, Labor, etc.), a process known as 302(b) allocations. This is the point at which the Appropriations Committee chairs can decide to change federal spending priorities. The PC(USA) signed a letter urging the Appropriations Committee chairs in the House and Senate to shift money from the military budget to the domestic and international affairs-related subcommittees.

Once the 12 subcommittees have been told how much money they can spend, they will begin to work out the specific allocations for the federal departments and

agencies under their jurisdiction. Even though the president has outlined details on how he wants money to be spent, the appropriations subcommittees can significantly change spending levels based on the priorities of members of Congress and their constituents. The Washington Office will monitor this process and update Presbyterians when input and action is needed, but it is always a good time to let your elected officials know what your priorities are.

General Assembly Guidance:

In 1979, the 191st General Assembly "reaffirm[ed] the actions of previous General Assemblies pertaining to the elimination of poverty and unemployment, to equitable taxation, and to the continuing shift of national priorities from an excessive preoccupation with military superiority to bold and imaginative initiatives for peace, health and welfare." (*Minutes*, UPCUSA, 1979, p. 292)

Later, in 1985, the 197th General Assembly "reaffirm[ed] opposition to further increases in military spending and support[ed] cuts in expensive weapon systems." (*Minutes*, PC(USA), 1985, p. 673)

2 Corinthians 6:3-10 - Faithfulness in Ministry

We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see—we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

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Thank You.

Published by the Witness in Washington Weekly advocacy program of the Washington Office, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 100 Maryland Avenue, NE Washington D.C. 20002, (202) 543-1126 www.pcusa.org/washington. For more information about the content of this article, please email us at ga_washington_office@pcusa.org. If you would like to receive this information directly, please go to <http://capwiz.com/pcusa/mlm/signup/>.