

# TALKING POINTS

## FOR YOUR USE IN PREPARATION FOR MONDAY, MARCH 26 LOBBY DAY VISITS

*As people of faith, we urge you to defend people struggling to live in dignity by funding programs that protect vulnerable populations here and abroad. Enact a faithful federal budget that serves the common good, provides robust funding for people struggling to overcome poverty, and exercises proper care of the earth.*

### *Domestic Poverty*

#### **1. At a minimum, maintain current funding levels for domestic anti-poverty programs.**

- Nearly all the deficit reduction over the past two years has come from cutting appropriated spending. Programs that address poverty and hunger cannot take any more cuts.
- Every major bipartisan deficit reduction package of the last 25 years has adhered to the principle that deficit reduction must not increase poverty or inequality. Congress must continue to follow that principle today.

#### **2. Preserve the current structure of low-income entitlement programs like SNAP (formerly Food Stamps), the EITC, and Medicaid.**

- Some have proposed turning SNAP and Medicaid into block grants. One of the most effective features of SNAP and Medicaid is that funding automatically rises and falls with need. Under a block grant, states receive a set amount of funding every year, limiting the ability of these programs to respond to sudden increases in need and ending the guaranteed assistance these programs now provide.
- While poverty and unemployment have risen in the last three years, programs such as SNAP have kept household hunger rates from increasing further; the program is working as intended.
- When Congress considers the expiration of the 2001 and 2003 Tax Cuts this year, it should make permanent the 2009 improvements to the current Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Child Tax Credit. These credits kept 9.2 million families from falling into poverty in 2010.

#### **3. Replace the \$1.2 trillion across-the-board spending cuts with a balanced approach that protects programs for hungry and poor people from cuts.**

- Because the Super Committee on deficit reduction could not come to agreement, the federal government faces \$1.2 trillion in across-the-board spending cuts (known as the “sequester”) starting in January 2013. While many key programs like SNAP, Medicaid, the EITC, and the Child Tax Credit are protected, many other programs like WIC, Head Start, low-income housing, poverty-focused foreign assistance, and international food aid will be subject to a 9% cut. People struggling to overcome poverty, or who have found themselves plunged into poverty as a result of the Great Recession, already suffer enough.
- Congress must seek wise and far-sighted ways to reduce the nation’s long-term deficits while protecting the most vulnerable among us. Every major bipartisan deficit reduction group in the last two years has concluded that additional revenues must be part of any deficit reduction plan.

#### **The social safety-net is working.**

- Low-income programs keep people out of poverty. In 2010, the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Child Tax Credit lifted *9.2 million people out of poverty*. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly Food Stamps) kept *4.4 million people out of poverty*.
- Without social safety-net programs, the percentage of people living in poverty in 2010 would have been *twice as high*.
- *85% of SNAP benefits* go to households with incomes at or below the poverty line, including millions of working poor families.

#### **Low-income programs promote economic mobility.**

- A majority of EITC recipients *only receive the benefits for one or two years* before moving onto higher income brackets.
- The average length of time a participant stays on SNAP is *nine months*, and they must first meet stringent income and work requirements.

### **Low-income programs are not causing our deficit problems.**

- *Just 14% of the federal budget goes to social safety-net programs (excluding health insurance and Social Security).*
- Today's large deficits are driven by the Great Recession, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the 2001 and 2003 tax cuts.

### ***International Aid***

#### **1. Increase funding for humanitarian and poverty-focused international assistance by at least 10 percent.**

Many faith-based and humanitarian organizations, including InterAction, the largest alliance of U.S.-based international nongovernmental humanitarian organizations, are calling for at least a 10 percent increase for 2013.

**U.S. humanitarian and poverty-focused international assistance represents less than 1 percent of the federal budget and saves millions of lives every year.** This assistance funds solutions whose benefits to life, global health, education, prosperity and development far exceed their costs. Even with a 10 percent increase, poverty-focused aid will still constitute less than 1 percent of the U.S. budget.

#### **U.S. humanitarian and foreign assistance:**

- Has helped reduce the number of people living in extreme poverty by 400 million since 1990.
- Feeds 46.5 million each year of the world's most vulnerable children, women and men with emergency food aid.
- Provides 5 million schoolchildren annually with school lunches.
- Saves 3 million lives each year through immunization programs.
- Prevents more than 114,000 infants annually from being born with HIV. Provides 3.2 million people with antiretroviral treatment, and 600,000 HIV-positive pregnant women with antiretroviral prophylaxis.
- Helped bring safe drinking water sources to 1.3 billion people over the last decade.
- Helped 750 million people receive sanitation for the first time.
- Could save more than 1 million lives each year by funding programs that focus on adequate nutrition during the 1,000-day window from pregnancy to age 2.

**Humanitarian and poverty-focused international assistance is vital to global human and economic security** – robust, well-targeted aid will save millions of lives, prevent conflict, build self-reliance among the world's most vulnerable people, lay the groundwork for economic growth, save money and help to create a more secure world. U.S. aid's benefits far exceed its cost.

**Protecting poverty-focused foreign assistance increases U.S. national security:** Research shows that for every 5 percent drop in income growth in a developing country, the likelihood of violent conflict or war within the next year increases by 10 percent. Poverty-focused foreign assistance is an important, strategic investment that saves our country from costly interventions later.

### ***God's creation***

**1. Care for God's Creation sustainably and responsibly.** Make budget choices that protect air, water, and land – the entirety of Creation – that they might be preserved for future generations.

- Environmental protection programs are under attack, both from budget cuts and from policy riders that seek to undermine decades' worth of sound environmental policy. Congress must reject making policy changes through the budget process and ensure continued commitments to landmarks, such as the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts.
- National policy must ensure the needs of vulnerable communities – including communities of color and low-income communities – are prioritized, recognizing that environmental injustices disproportionately impact these communities.