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Budget foes, unsatisfied, to fast through Easter

Richard Yeakley Religion News Service | Apr. 15, 2011

Sojourners founder the Rev. Jim Wallis speaks during an interfaith prayer vigil in front of the U.S. Capitol in 2008. (CNS)

WASHINGTON -- The congressional budget compromise reached last week did not go far enough for some progressive Christian leaders who have vowed to continue their liquid-only fast in hopes of a ?better budget.?

Sojourners founder Jim Wallis and Ambassador Tony Hall, executive director of the Alliance to End Hunger, say the poor stand to lose the most in the $38.5 billion in budget cuts, and plan to continue protesting by fasting through Easter.

?This compromise represents the interests of all those who make big campaign contributions but betrays the poor and vulnerable,? Wallis said, referring to the 11th-hour compromise brokered Friday night April 8.

?This compromise has only strengthened my resolve to continue fasting, and we call for any person of faith or conscience to keep joining the fast and spreading the word.?

The two activists were joined in their budget protest by more than 36,000 fasters who vowed to pray and advocate for the poor as Washington attempts to get its fiscal house in order.

No one at Sojourners anticipated the massive response to the hunger fast, spokesman Tim King said, noting that it was ?the largest fast of its kind in recent U.S. history.?

?The budget issue really energized and mobilized the faith community,? Wallis said. ?It is our vocation as the people of God to protect the poorest and most vulnerable.?

The left-leaning budget campaign has its critics, however. Mark Tooley, president of the conservative Institute on Religion and Democracy, chided Wallis and others for misusing the holy season of Lent and Easter.

?It is inappropriate to use a Christian holiday for a political gain,? said Tooley, who said the purpose of Lent was self-reflection and self-denial, not activism.

Although Hall and Wallis have given up all solid food for only water and juice since they began their fast on

March 28, participants are allowed to fast in whatever manner they choose. A group of 28 congressional Democrats are fasting a day at a time until Easter.

Wallis rejected the idea the U.S. is strapped for cash, and accused lawmakers of simply spending money in the wrong areas.

?A budget is a moral document, it expresses morals and priorities. It says who?s important and who is not,? Wallis said. ?The fast will end at Easter, but the battle for a moral budget will continue in the days ahead.?

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