NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Posturing over the 'fiscal cliff'

Pat Perriello | Nov. 29, 2012 NCR Today

Initial hopes that there would be a quick deal to end the "fiscal cliff" crisis are fading fast as positions harden [1] . The plan now seems to be to go over the fiscal cliff and then pick up the pieces. We are told that this fiscal cliff is actually a curb or a slope. The damage will not be so bad, and it can be fixed with a retroactive deal.

My question is, Why would we want to adopt such a position? Why did we have an election? A few things were clear despite the attempts to call it a status-quo election. I think there were at least three significant expectations on the part of the American people. First, as Democrats have been saying, there is agreement to raise taxes on the wealthy. Second, there is also agreement that, as President Barack Obama has been saying, there must be a balanced deal that includes meaningful spending cuts. Finally, there is an absolute expectation that the members of Congress need to grow up, stop acting like spoiled children and get things done for the sake of the country.

So far, there seems to be little movement in any of these directions. With some exceptions in the Senate, which is not where the real problem lies, Republicans still do not appear ready to move on taxes. As the *Wall Street Journal* article [1] suggests, Democrats are feeling their oats and have determined not to budge on entitlements. Finally, both parties are posturing all over the media, determined to blame the other side, and insisting Jan. 1 is not a significant deadline.

Is this the best we can do? We basically know what the deal is. As some have pointed out, Majority Leader John Boehner has in the past offered $800 billion in revenues, and the president has requested $1.6 trillion. That produces an easy compromise of $1.2 trillion. The issue on entitlements is less clear, but there are many ways to make cuts without damaging the integrity of programs like Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security. While it is true that the details of such a deal are not likely to be worked out by the end of the year, a deal can be struck containing the necessary parameters that would avoid the plunge off the cliff.

Democrats, especially those calling themselves progressives, need to avoid being as recalcitrant as conservative Republicans have been. They were elected not to have entitlement programs remain harmless, but to ensure that any necessary changes be consistent with the mission of these programs. Their job is to protect the poor, the elderly and the middle class.

The public did not trust Republicans to make cuts in these programs but did believe Democrats would handle necessary cuts in a fair and equitable fashion, causing the least pain possible. The real danger is that if Democrats don't act responsibly, conditions will worsen, and it will be the Republican proposals such as a voucher program for Medicare that will rule the day.

So here we are, with Washington acting irresponsibly. Why should any of us be surprised? Because it is not good enough. Maybe we can survive a brief trip over the cliff in January, but that should not be necessary. There is every reason to expect and demand that this job be done now and not later. That was why the cliff was constructed in the first place.

The hope is that responsible adults are acting quietly behind the scenes to produce a deal that will meet the

needs of our country at this time. The sooner that deal is brought forth and passed, the sooner the politicians in Washington can go back to playing their political games. Right now, the stakes are too high for games.

Source URL (retrieved on *07/23/2014 - 11:22*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/posturing-over-fiscal-cliff

Links:
[1] http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887324469304578145070404196206.html?mod=WSJ_WSJ_US_News_6