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Sequester on the Poor

John McCarthy | Mar. 11, 2013 NCR Today

I?m growing a little tired of the media?s portrayal of the sequester: Washington bureaucrats getting laid off. We are only fooling ourselves if we fail to see the devastating effects the sequester will have on society?s most vulnerable. While everyone will have to tighten the budgetary belt with across-the-board spending cuts, the results of the sequester will hurt the poor disproportionately hard.

If Catholics continue to idle as these cuts go into effect we are not only turning our backs on each other, we are turning our backs on our Gospel commission to care for the ?least of these? among us. Four million elderly seniors, who depend on federally assisted programs like Meals on Wheels will go without food. About 600,000 women and children would be forced off of the Department of Agriculture?s Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). Nearly 125,000 families will be put out onto the streets as HUD voucher programs, which provides rental-assistance to poor families, is gutted. 100,000 formerly homeless people, who are reintegrating into society would be removed from their current housing?potentially pushing them back onto the streets.

Proverbs 31:9 calls us to ?Open [our] mouth, judge justly, defend the needy and the poor!? This is not a time for political games to get in the way of our communal service to the marginalized. If political leaders are going to find a compromise, Catholics must reshape the debate and remind them that the workers being furloughed are often the lowest on the pay scale. Reductions in these paychecks might be the difference between sending their child to preschool, and putting food on the table.

Sequester is not a palatable alternative to responsible spending. It is a return to the ?I?ve got mine, and the rest of you are on your own? politics of the past. When the political finger-pointing stops, hopefully we can find a budgetary value that reflects our faith?one that understands we do best when we?re all doing well together.

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