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Budget battles crush the poor

Tony Magliano | Oct. 14, 2013 Making a Difference

When Jesus said, "The poor you will always have with you," he must have had the insensitivity of the U.S. Congress in mind.

While most members of Congress continue to cater to their wealthy supporters in the form of huge tax breaks, tax loopholes, deregulation, the Wall Street bailout and corporate welfare, they largely ignore the welfare of the poor.

This insensitive, immoral economic atmosphere invites the rich to constantly feast while the poor are thrown crumbs. The recent Sunday Gospel parable of Lazarus and the rich man speaks volumes here.

According to Bread for the World [1], a highly dedicated anti-poverty Christian organization, there are 49 million people in the United States -- including one in five children -- who do not have enough to eat.

Yet the Senate's version of the farm bill cuts $4 billion from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which helps feed poor Americans, and the House of Representatives passed a bill that cuts $40 billion from SNAP, according to Bread for the World.

Regarding global poverty and hunger, life-saving projects like the McGovern-Dole School Feeding Program, which feeds more than 5 million schoolchildren, and the P.L. 480 Food Aid Program, which feeds 46.5 million of the world's most vulnerable adults and children, could suffer severe financial cuts, according to Bread for the World.

In a recently released report by the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization titled "The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2013 [2]," there are 842 million people estimated to be suffering from chronic hunger throughout the world.

The richest nation on earth should be doing more, not less, to alleviate the pain of hunger.

Economist Jeffrey Sachs, special adviser to U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on the Millennium Development Goals, told me that total annual development assistance from economically advanced nations to the world's poor is approximately $125 billion.

According to Sachs, to meet the basic needs of the more than 1 billion people living in extreme poverty -- those lacking adequate food, water, sanitation, medical care, housing and education -- would require wealthy nations to give an additional $90 billion to $100 billion per year.

That would come to about $220 billion total per year, which is just 50 cents per $100 of gross domestic product. This is "not a heavy lift," Sachs said.

Official U.S. development assistance is $30 billion, which is only 0.19 percent of the United States' GDP. Sachs further explained that annual U.S. development aid for the world's poor should rise at least by another 0.3

percent of GDP, or roughly an extra $50 billion per year. This could easily be funded by cutting the military budget by less than one-tenth.

Please email and phone your congressperson and two U.S. senators (Capitol switchboard: 202-224-3121) and urge them not to cut any domestic poverty-focused assistance programs -- like SNAP -- and to transfer, as economist Jeffrey Sachs advised, $50 billion from the military budget to programs designed to end extreme poverty throughout the world.

In light of World Food Day, which is Wednesday, this is the perfect time to lobby on behalf of the poor and hungry.

Following his election, Pope Francis said [3] to a gathering of 5,000 journalists, "How I would like a church that is poor and for the poor."

We can begin to make this wonderful dream come true by giving a little of our time and effort to urge Congress to protect the poor and eliminate extreme poverty.

[Tony Magliano is an internationally syndicated social justice and peace columnist. He is available to speak at diocesan or parish gatherings about Catholic social teaching. His keynote address, "Advancing the Kingdom of God in the 21st Century," has been well received by diocesan gatherings from Salt Lake City to Baltimore. Tony can be reached at tmag@zoominternet.net [4].]

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