



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## What Christian Leaders are Saying About the Tax Bill's Passage

**Washington, D.C., December 20, 2017** – Christian leaders from all the families of U.S. Christianity expressed concern that Congress' passage of the tax bill will be followed by efforts to cut programs and support for people living in poverty. Below are statements from leaders of the Circle of Protection. The statements follow a [letter](#) the Circle of Protection sent to members of Congress recently, which reads in part:

*"We oppose cutting low-income programs to pay for tax cuts that disproportionately benefit the wealthy. Tax reform must be undertaken in such a way as to strengthen and empower low and moderate-income families and small businesses."*

As Christian leaders, our concern is always about how legislation impacts the poor and most vulnerable. We will continue to pray, mobilize, and advocate on behalf of our neighbors in poverty.

### Quotes from Circle of Protection leaders:

**U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops:** "Today, Congress passed its tax reform legislation, *The Tax Reform and Jobs Act*, and it has been sent to the President to consider. The legislation achieves some laudable things, like doubling the standard deduction, which will help many struggling families avoid tax liability, expanding the use of 529 education plans, and increasing the child tax credit. However, the Act contains a number of problematic provisions that will have dramatic negative consequences, particularly for those most in need. Among other things, the Joint Committee on Taxation indicates that the bill will eventually raise taxes on those with lower incomes while simultaneously cutting taxes for the wealthy. This is clearly problematic, especially for the poor. The repeal of the personal exemption will cause larger families, including many in the middle class, to be financially worse off. The final bill creates a large deficit that, as early as next year, will be used as a basis to cut programs that help the poor and vulnerable toward stability. The legislation is also likely to produce up to a \$13 billion drop in annual charitable giving to nonprofits that are relied upon to help those struggling on the margins. This will also significantly diminish the role of civil society in promoting the common good. As the President considers the tax bill before him, we ask that he take into account the full consequences of its provisions and work with Congress to remedy them before signing a tax bill into law."

**National Council of Churches:** "This tax plan cannot be biblically defended. Words of warning from Holy Scripture serve to remind us that over time those in power who steal from the poor will weaken the body politic and invite chaos. Most certainly, cutting programs the poor depend on, just to pay for tax cuts for the wealthy, is reprehensible. "Oppressing the poor in order to enrich oneself, and giving it to the rich, will lead only to loss (Proverbs 22:16, NRSV)." The National Council of Churches prays our elected leaders heed these ancient words of wisdom which bear witness even today. Our lawmakers have a responsibility to care for the entire citizenry, not just those with the means to influence tax policy."

**Leith Anderson, President, National Association of Evangelicals:** "What are our next hopes after tax reform? The rich and richer will be generous to the poor and poorer. The Congress will protect children, the disabled, elderly, needy and other vulnerable Americans against future budget cuts. Compassion will be both a liberal and a conservative value."

**Dr. Barbara Williams-Skinner, Co-Chair, National African American Clergy Network:** "We are told that corporate profits today are about \$2.3 trillion; the stock market is at an all time high and that unemployment is at 4% or nearly full employment. Economists of all political persuasions agree that there is no guarantee that the "trickle down" notion that corporations with lower tax rates will invest in American jobs



and spur economic growth. What other reason would there be for taking from the poorer and giving to the richer, who do not need a tax cut except greed? What a shameful and immoral way of snatching milk and bread off the table of low income people just days before Christmas!”

**Jim Wallis, President and Founder, Sojourners:** “The treatment of the poor and vulnerable is lifted up in the Bible more than 2,000 times. And it is these people, the ones our Scriptures call us to protect and serve, who will be most hurt by the results of this disastrous tax bill. The bill suffers from deeply immoral logic: to blow a hole in the deficit by giving huge tax cuts to the rich and corporations, that will ultimately be paid for by the poor—literally on the backs of their children and their future—is indefensible. This is a shameful hypocrisy, callous calculation, and immoral act. It is an offense to God who hears the cry of the poor. As the book of Isaiah says, “woe to you legislators of unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people.” It is the duty and responsibility of the government to give aid to the oppressed and downtrodden, not to siphon wealth away from them to pad the pockets of the rich.”

**David Beckmann, President, Bread for the World:** “This tax bill is part of a 1-2 punch. President Trump and congressional leaders have already announced plans to follow this tax cut, mainly for high-income people, with a big push to cut more than \$2 trillion from social programs for low- and middle-income people.”

**Rev. Dr. Iva E. Carruthers, General Secretary, Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference:** “This bill will inflict multilayered suffering upon many Americans. It will necessitate the cutting of funds from programs which help America’s struggling masses: black and brown people, women, children, the elderly, and the disabled. The bill will also result in an additional 13 million people losing health care . . . Quality of life is not, or should not be, a partisan issue; the lives and needs of American citizens are not Liberal or Conservative, but are, rather, human. This tax “reform” act sets in motion a series of legislative actions that will further rob people – some who are already poor and some close to abject poverty – of the capacity to earn a decent living in this nation. Historically, the country’s wealth has been created by the very people who stand to suffer most from this tax “reform” act. The process and passage of this legislation bears the mark of this history. It too has been accomplished out of a spirit of unGodly callousness and greed. There is something deeply wrong with this narrative which points to the very soul of America.”

**John Ashmen, President, Association of Gospel Rescue Missions:** “After passing a historic tax reform bill, it is the hope and prayer of members of the Association of Gospel Rescue Missions, nationwide, that Congress will now engage in an unprecedented, persistent monitoring of the ongoing conditions of our most vulnerable citizens—particularly hungry and homeless individuals and families, and those unable to afford proper medical care. We hope and pray that, as concerned legislators, they will quickly introduce amending measures as soon as they see inequities, and that they do more to protect the religious freedom and gift income of nonprofit organizations that are working so hard to relieve the government’s burden.”

**Commissioner David Hudson, The Salvation Army National Headquarters:** “The Salvation Army is able to serve almost 25 million people each year across the United States due to the generosity of fellow Americans and our strong partnership with Federal and State governments. The government has encouraged that generosity by creating a tax code that supports charitable giving. The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (S. 1) in its current form will undermine this incentive and increase need. While we appreciate the goal of decreasing taxes and simplifying the tax code, we recognize that this plan does not benefit those in or close to poverty nor organizations like ours who meet human needs in His name without discrimination.”

**The Episcopal Church:** The Episcopal Church is deeply troubled by the passage of this tax bill which places political and corporate interests above the love and care of our neighbors. Over the long term, this legislation will raise taxes on the poor in order to pay for permanent tax cuts for corporations and Americans who can afford to contribute more. Economists agree that this bill will plunge our nation further into debt, and we are concerned that this tax cut will serve to justify future funding cuts for programs that feed the hungry, house the homeless, care for the sick, and provide education for our children. Our Church supports efforts to reduce economic disparities in the United States, and we will vehemently oppose any cuts to programs that help our neighbors meet their most pressing needs. The Bible calls on Christians to care for each other, and we believe



that while imperfect, the federal government is one of many necessary and effective tools to care for the poor and vulnerable in this country. We take seriously the understanding of St. John Chrysostom who wrote: "This is the rule of the most perfect Christianity, its most exact definition, its highest point, namely, the seeking of the common good . . . for nothing can so make a person an imitator of Christ as caring for his neighbors."

**Rev. Carlos L. Malavé, Executive Director, Christian Churches Together:** "Leaders of more than 39 Christian communions in our country have been saying for more than 10 years that our economy and priorities must be reordered. The biblical teaching about God's special concern for the poor demands that any stimulus and economic recovery plan must make the pressing needs of vulnerable and low-income Americans a priority. We must ensure that all families have access to the basic needs of food, health care, and housing. We must correct racial disparities and structural injustices that undermine families, especially in low-income communities. In order to protect and uplift vulnerable families, there must be the right mix of the following: an increase in the Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit; a just minimum wage; well funded SNAP program, increased unemployment insurance; and other proven investments that reward work. Based on the call of the Old Testament prophets and the gospel of Jesus, any tax reform legislation that neglects the well being of the poor is unacceptable and fail to reflect our Christian moral principles."

**Sister Donna Markham, OP, PhD, President and CEO, Catholic Charities USA:** "Throughout the tax reform negotiations CCUSA has urged you to adopt a tax reform proposal which prioritizes individuals working their way out of poverty, fosters family economic stability, promotes a culture of charitable giving and promotes access to affordable housing. . . As it stands, the bill fails to make these investments and provides only small and temporary relief for low-income and working families. CCUSA stands ready to work with you to make these meaningful investments. As you move forward, we urge you to reject efforts to use the deficit created by this bill as a pretext for even greater cuts to programs for low-income communities. Instead we urge you to address the shortcomings in this bill and recommit yourselves to the bipartisan solutions needed to lift people out of poverty." (Letter to Congress, December 19, 2017)

**Diane Randall, Executive Secretary, Friends Committee on National Legislation:** "Congress' vote to pass such an unconscionable and irresponsible tax bill is gravely disappointing, violating fundamental Quaker values of equality, stewardship and economic security. Nearly every independent analysis shows this bill will leave federal deficits and debt soaring with minimal economic growth or job creation. This will harm tens of millions of people throughout our country, while giving corporations and wealthy individuals excessive benefits. That Congressional leaders are using these self-inflicted deficits to call for cuts and harmful changes to critical programs like Medicaid, SNAP (formerly food stamps), and SSI is nothing short of immoral. These very programs enable struggling families to make ends meet and help parents to provide a better future for their children. Surely, this is the common good that government can and must provide to foster equality, opportunity and a strong society. Members of Congress should search their hearts for what they will do to assure that the tax cuts they give to the wealthy do not require cutting basic assistance and opportunity programs for struggling families."

**Rev. Amy E. Reumann, Director, Advocacy, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:** "A tax policy that serves the common good will be evaluated by how it prioritizes the health, well-being and the future prospects for those most vulnerable in society. The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act fails this test. Lutheran Christians should vigorously make their opinions known to their members of Congress and call for a swift commitment to children, the working poor, those living with disabilities and seniors in 2018."

**Rev. Dr. Leslie Copeland-Tune, Director, Ecumenical Poverty Initiative and Ecumenical Advocacy Days:** "Congress has again put their own selfish ambition and political power above children, the elderly and the poor. They are ready to do marvelous things for the rich and well off and to further demoralize and vilify the poor and vulnerable . . . This tax bill will increase the national deficit by more than \$1.5 trillion dollars, while favoring the richest in our nation and corporations on the backs of the poor, the elderly, children and the most vulnerable. It will end health care coverage for 13 million people by removing the individual mandate, destabilizing the market and making health coverage premiums cost prohibitive. In addition, congressional leaders have already made it known that they are driving up the debt so that they can cut safety



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# Press Release

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net programs like Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid—programs that provide support for those who Jesus called ‘the least of these.’ This is unacceptable and immoral. We will continue to mobilize and stand against any and all efforts to undermine safety net programs and we will have no choice but to remember this legislative malpractice and recklessness disregard of the most vulnerable during the midterm elections next year.”

*The Circle of Protection is a coalition of many and diverse Christian leaders working together for help and opportunity for hungry and poor people in the United States and around the world. [www.circleofprotection.us](http://www.circleofprotection.us)*