

GOP Budget Proposal: Faith Leaders Say It Is 'Immoral' And 'Irresponsible'

Posted: 03/21/2012 8:36 pm

By Annalisa Musarra

Religion News Service

(RNS) Faith leaders and poverty experts Wednesday (March 21) called the new House GOP budget proposal "immoral" and "irresponsible."

The budget released the previous day by Rep. Paul Ryan, R-Wis., included deep cuts to programs that would unfairly burden the poor, middle-income families and senior citizens, said the Rev. Thomas Kelly, who participated in a phone conference with the media.

"Using the deficit as an excuse to pursue a radical agenda that punishes the poor is simply dishonest and immoral," said Kelly, a Catholic priest and Ryan's constituent, on the call hosted by the Center for American Progress.

The Republican blueprint calls for cuts to Medicaid and other programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program -- also known as SNAP, or food stamps -- and would turn them into block grant programs, putting states in charge of tailoring them to local needs.

The cuts also aim to reduce the nation's deficit by \$4.4 trillion during the next 10 years.

"There is a way to reduce the deficit and ensure that those who are struggling get the helping hand they need," said Lisa Sharon Harper, director of mobilizing at Sojourners, a progressive Christian nonprofit.

But Tad DeHaven, budget analyst at the conservative Cato Institute, said faith leaders, rather than criticize politicians such as Ryan, would do better to support efforts to send federal dollars to states, where local problems are best addressed by local people.

It's easy to demand more federal dollars "but we've had these programs for years now that are supposedly going to end poverty -- yet it still exists," he said.

Ryan's office said his plan "repairs the safety net" and is "empowering."

According to Melissa Boteach, director at Half in Ten, a campaign that works to reduce poverty, it is Obama's budget that invests in a safety net to protect the poor from falling below the poverty line, not Ryan's.

"I think that the president's budget shows that poverty reduction and deficit reduction don't have to be a mutually exclusive objective," she said. "We hope (poor families) don't fall because there won't be much to catch them there under the new House Republican plan."

Harper said the Obama budget, "while not perfect," embraces different priorities.

"It seems like his budget is more open to the things the people of faith care about than the budget that was put forward yesterday."