

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

DEAR MEMBERS OF CONGRESS, We write to you as religious leaders seeking justice for millions of vulnerable and dispossessed people in our Nation. As Bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America we represent diverse regions but speak with one voice about the fundamental responsibility of the government, as an expression of the will of the people, to protect the least of its citizens and provide for the poorest in our society. In this spirit we ask specifically that you oppose any attempt to move forward on the budget reconciliation measures now before Congress.

Cuts to mandatory spending called for in the reconciliation package would decrease valuable assistance to millions of low-income families, children, elderly and people with disabilities. Even as the number of people living in poverty and without insurance has increased dramatically in the past five years, the last few tragic weeks in the Gulf Coast area have put a face, indeed, thousands of new faces, on poverty in the heart of our society. Programs such as Food Stamps, Medicaid, the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) help to keep struggling families together and assist low-income working families in moving to higher economic ground. This is not the time to cut such important programs while using the cuts to pay for tax breaks for those who don't need them.

The Biblical record is clear. The Scriptural witness on which our faith tradition stands speaks dramatically of God's concern for and solidarity with poor and oppressed communities while speaking firmly in opposition to governments whose policies place narrow economic interests driven by greed above the common good. Jesus speaks and acts unequivocally on behalf of those on the margins of society. St. Paul writes forcefully about the importance of community and expands the definition of those we call brothers and sisters in Christ. As Americans open their homes to embrace neighbors from Gulf Coast states, as non-profit and religious organizations provide relief services, we strongly urge you to reflect on your role as a government official in providing for the least in our society and ask that you oppose any attempt to move forward with the budget reconciliation process.

Peace Be With You,

BISHOP MARK S. HANSON,
Presiding Bishop,

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

ALABAMA

Bishop Ronald B. Warren

ALASKA

Bishop Ronald D. Martinson

ARIZONA

Bishop Michael J. Neils

ARKANSAS

Bishop Floyd M. Schoenhals

CALIFORNIA

Bishop Murray D. Finck

Bishop David G. Mullen

Bishop Dean W. Nelson

COLORADO

Bishop Allan C. Bjornberg

CONNECTICUT

Bishop Margaret G. Payne

DELAWARE

Bishop H. Gerard Knoche

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Bishop Ronald B. Warren

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Bishop Michael A. Last

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KANSAS

Bishop Gerald L. Mansholt

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Bishop James R. Stuck

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Bishop Paul J. Blom

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Bishop Edward R. Benoway

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Bishop Margarita Martinez

U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS

Bishop Margarita Martinez

SLOVAK ZION SYNOD

Bishop Wilma S. Kucharek
(CT, IL, MI, NJ, NY, OH, PA)

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREE-
MENT—CONFERENCE REPORT TO
ACCOMPANY H.R. 2744

Mr. GREGG. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that at a time to be determined by the majority leader, in consultation with the Democratic leader, the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of the conference report to accompany H.R. 2744, the Agriculture appropriations bill. I further ask unanimous consent that there be 2 hours of debate equally divided between the majority and minority and that upon the use or yielding back of time, the Senate proceed to vote on the adoption of the conference report, all without intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

EXPRESSING APPRECIATION FOR
THE CONTRIBUTION OF CHINESE
ART AND CULTURE

Mr. GREGG. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Foreign Relations Committee be discharged from further consideration of S. Con. Res. 56 and that the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. The clerk will report the concurrent resolution by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A concurrent resolution (S. Con. Res. 56) expressing appreciation for the contribution of Chinese art and culture and recognizing the Festival of China at the Kennedy Center.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the concurrent resolution.

Mr. GREGG. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the concurrent resolution be agreed to, the preamble be agreed to, the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table, with no intervening action or debate, and that any statements relating to this measure be printed in the RECORD.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The concurrent resolution (S. Con. Res. 56) was agreed to.

The preamble was agreed to.

The concurrent resolution, with its preamble, reads as follows:

S. CON. RES. 56

Whereas mutual cultural understanding and appreciation helps to advance the overall bilateral relationship between the United States and China;

Whereas Chinese cultural achievements have enriched the world for over 5,000 years;

Whereas Chinese artists both in China and in the United States have excelled in music, dance, fashion, theater, film, and the visual arts;

Whereas the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts is hosting a month-long celebration of Chinese cultural contributions at the Festival of China in October 2005;

Whereas the event, with more than 50 performances and exhibitions and over 800 artists, will be the largest festival in the history of the Kennedy Center;

Whereas the Kennedy Center characterizes the Festival of China as the "the largest celebration of Chinese performing arts in American history";

Whereas events like the Festival of China, along with efforts to promote educational and scientific cooperation between the United States and China, further mutual understanding between our two societies;

Whereas publicly- and privately-funded exchange programs and other forms of Sino-American contacts foster positive relations; and

Whereas cultural events like the Festival of China help strengthen diplomatic, commercial, and political cooperation between the United States and China: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Senate (the House of Representatives concurring), That it is the sense of Congress that—

(1) the diverse array of cultural contributions made by Chinese artists based in China, the United States, and around the world benefit the entire international community;

(2) the Kennedy Center, along with the Chinese Ministry of Culture, should be com-

mended for promoting Chinese achievement in the arts at the Festival of China;

(3) the significant undertaking and efforts necessary to organize the Festival of China provides a unique opportunity for bilateral cooperation;

(4) building upon the Festival of China, additional efforts that promote cultural understanding between the United States and China should be encouraged;

(5) the United States and China should work to promote cultural, as well as scientific and educational, cooperation between the two countries;

(6) the United States and China should continue to promote exchange programs, such as the Festival of China, as a vital tool for advancing mutual understanding and cooperation between the people of the United States and the people of China; and

(7) the hundreds of performers and individuals who have contributed their time and effort to make this landmark celebration of Chinese culture and the arts a success are to be congratulated.

ORDERS FOR WEDNESDAY,
NOVEMBER 2, 2005

Mr. GREGG. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that when the Senate completes its business today, it adjourn until 8:30 a.m. on Wednesday, November 2. I further ask that following the prayer and the pledge, the morning hour be deemed expired, the Journal of proceedings be approved to date, the time for the two leaders be reserved, and the Senate resume consideration of S. 1932, as under the previous order.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

PROGRAM

Mr. GREGG. Tomorrow, the Senate will continue its work on the deficit reduction bill, and under the time agreement, all time will expire at 6 p.m. tomorrow evening. I remind my colleagues to work with the bill managers if they plan to offer amendments. We will complete this bill this week. We will work through Thursday and Friday, if necessary, to finish this important measure. I encourage Senators to be judicious in offering amendments so that we can avoid a multiday vote-arama that will spill into Friday's session.

I remind Senators that we will need to dispose of the Agriculture appropriations conference report this week as well, and we will be slotting in debate time for that probably tomorrow evening.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. GREGG. I ask unanimous consent that there be a period for morning business with Senators permitted to speak up to 10 minutes each, with Senator WYDEN permitted to speak up to 20 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. WYDEN. Reserving the right to object—I do not intend to object—I ask to modify the unanimous consent re-

quest to speak for up to 20 minutes, and I would also like to ask, with the leave of the Chair and the ranking minority Member, that Senator NELSON be allowed up to 2 minutes. I think he had one additional comment that he wanted to make about his proposal.

Mr. GREGG. I believe my unanimous consent request was for 20 minutes for the Senator from Oregon, and I will add to that that the Senator from Florida be given 2 minutes.

Mr. WYDEN. I thank the distinguished chairman of the committee. I withdraw my reservation.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

ORDER FOR ADJOURNMENT

Mr. GREGG. If there is no further business to come before the Senate, I ask that the Senate stand in adjournment under the previous order, following the remarks of the Senator from Florida and the Senator from Oregon.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Florida.

MEDICARE PART B

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I rise to respond to the Senator from New Hampshire, to point out that the offset to the amendment that would freeze the Medicare Part B premium for senior citizens is not as the Senator from New Hampshire had been led to believe in Medicare Part D, which is the prescription drug benefit. No, the offset is in the new proposed changes to Medicaid that would make Medicaid be distributed through the States through managed care.

Under the current law, the prescription drugs that are available through Medicaid have to be discounted and provided to Medicaid recipients. The new waivers to the States allowing Medicaid to be dispensed through HMOs is going to allow those discounts to go away, and it will be a negotiated item. There is a savings of up to \$2 billion if one does not allow that law to be changed so that the discount goes away by law.

Therefore, Medicaid recipients very possibly pay more. It is that savings, by keeping that discount of up to \$2 billion, which is the offset that we pay for, keeping senior citizens whole by not raising their Medicare Part B premiums.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

AMERICA CAN DO BETTER

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, America can do better than making a policeman walking the beat pay a higher Federal tax rate than someone who makes their money on capital gains and dividends. Unfortunately, the Advisory Panel on Federal Tax Reform today