

Archbishop Dolan, Rep. Ryan exchange letters on House's budget for 2012

WASHINGTON - The president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and the chief author of the recently passed House budget for 2012 have exchanged letters discussing the moral implications of the federal budget debate.

Archbishop Timothy P. Dolan of New York, USCCB president, said in a May 18 letter to Rep. Paul Ryan, R-Wis., a Catholic who chairs the House Budget committee, that he was pleased to know that consideration was given to the foundational principles of Catholic social teaching in drafting the budget plan.

The archbishop's correspondence came in response to an April 29 letter from Ryan, who explained that the needs of the poor, the sick and the elderly were not being ignored and that it was a moral imperative to address the growing federal deficit in the budget as passed in the House. The Senate has yet to take up the budget.

Ryan's office released the letters May 19.

The House budget has been criticized by some Catholics who have said that it deviates from the basic tenets of Catholic social teaching. Specifically, they have raised concerns about how the plan would change Medicaid funding in the future, particularly harming children and women, how it would reshape Medicare and would likely reduce access to health care for the elderly, and how its plan to reduce the tax rate for high income individuals would fuel the federal deficit.

Archbishop Dolan reminded Ryan that any budget must keep the needs of the poor as a priority.

He reiterated the guidelines he offered in a Jan. 14 letter to all members of Congress as well as those offered by Bishop Stephen E. Blaire of Stockton, Calif., chairman of the bishops' Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, and Bishop Howard J. Hubbard of Albany, N.Y., chairman of the Committee on International

Justice and Peace, in an April 13 letter to the House as it debated the budget bill.

“In any transition that seeks to bring new proposals to current problems in order to build a better future, care must be taken that those currently in need not be left to suffer,” Archbishop Dolan wrote. “I appreciate your assurance that your budget would be attentive to such considerations and would protect those at risk in the processes and programs of such a transition.

“While appreciating these assurances, our duty as pastors will motivate our close attention to the manner in which they become a reality,” he said.

Archbishop Dolan took no stance on the House budget, however.

In his letter, Ryan explained to the USCCB president that he wanted to “provide facts about our budget to help advance an informed debate in light of social teachings about the well-being of the family, subsidiarity, the preferential option for the poor and the dignity of the human person.”

The budget “honors responsibility to family and self work, self-restraint, community and self-government both individually and collectively,” he wrote.

Ryan said the budget would reduce the country’s debt by \$4.4 trillion and prevent Medicare from becoming insolvent. He also said it proposes that tax rates be “flattened and broadened” while closing loopholes that benefit upper income earners.

In doing so, he said, the budget “is intended to restore the confidence of job creators in order to encourage expansion, growth and hiring today.”

Archbishop Dolan said he, Bishop Blaire and Bishop Hubbard welcomed further discussion on the budget.