

Pastors lobby for poor in heated deficit talks

News

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WASHINGTON (RNS) More than 4,000 pastors told Congress that churches would not be able to fill the gap facing social service providers if deep cuts are made to the federal budget to bring the deficit under control.

Christian leaders from across the country, led by Sojourners founder Jim Wallis, sent an open letter to lawmakers on Wednesday (July 13) pushing back on the assumption that churches and faith-based organizations will be able to pick up where government programs drop off.

The letter praised Medicare, Medicaid and the Women, Infants and Children program by name, insisting that they are "serving the people we serve."

"In every one of our congregations we have programs that help those in need with jobs, clothing, food, or counseling" the letter said.

"Still, we can't meet the crushing needs by ourselves. (Faith-based) nutrition programs only make up 6 percent of total feeding programs in the country while the government makes up 94 percent."

Wallis told reporters he's frustrated by the tone of budget conversations in Washington, and accused lawmakers of saying "nothing about people, real people, who are going to really suffer and pay the price of bad decisions in (Washington D.C.)."

Wallis also spoke about several issues he believes disproportionately affect America's poor and offered harsh words for America's tax system, saying, "The tax code in America is sinful."

The letter is part of a larger campaign organized by Sojourners, a Washington-based anti-poverty group, that includes a full-page ad in Wednesday's edition of Politico urging lawmakers to consider the moral implications of budget decisions.

On Thursday, an interfaith coalition is set to launch a similar 18-month campaign for the poor, which will include daily prayer vigils at the Capitol. The coalition chided lawmakers for cuts to the poor while "while shielding the wealthiest from any additional sacrifice."