

Poverty Forum hopes to shape White House goals: A bipartisan group of Christian leaders

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A bipartisan group of 18 Christian leaders has developed a host of policy recommendations on poverty reduction that they hope will shape the actions of the Obama administration and Congress.

The Poverty Forum, cochaired by evangelical activist Jim Wallis and Michael Gerson, who was a speechwriter for President George W. Bush, is led by what Gerson called an “orgy of strange bedfellows” who want to make sure that the poor are not overlooked in the economic downturn.

“This is middle-level policies, manageable policies that really are substantial but are doable that could be adopted by the administration, by Congress and . . . could make a real difference for poor people,” Wallis said. “This whole effort reflects the hope that overcoming poverty in this nation could, should, must become a bipartisan issue and a nonpartisan cause.”

The policy suggestions range from increased funding for low-income college students to helping needy pregnant women receive health care to an increase in the minimum wage.

Members of the forum have arranged to meet with White House officials to discuss their proposals. The initial effort by the Poverty Forum was funded by a \$51,000 grant from the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Meanwhile, the Obama administration’s desire to listen to religious leaders was called “refreshing and exceeding hopeful” on February 24 by Episcopal Church presiding bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori. She said the Episcopal Church’s Office of Government Relations participated in a number of policy meetings before the president’s inauguration, “and we only expect that to grow.”

Maureen Shea, OGR director, told Episcopal News Service that church members attended meetings discussing eco-justice, domestic needs, torture, reauthorization of foreign aid, immigration and the Middle East. Those conversations have continued into the new administration, Shea said. *-Religion News Service*