

# Catholic nuns' bus tour concludes in nation's capital

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c. 2012 Religion News Service WASHINGTON (RNS) A group of Catholic nuns ended its nine-state bus tour here Monday (July 2), speaking out against a Republican federal budget proposal they say favors wealthy Americans at the expense of poor families.

Led by Sister Simone Campbell, the "Nuns on the Bus" rejected the budget proposal of Rep. Paul Ryan, R-Wis., which it called "immoral" and "unpatriotic."

Ryan's budget "rejects church teaching about solidarity, inequality, the choice for the poor, and the common good. That's wrong," said Campbell, executive director of Network, a Catholic social justice lobby.

Nuns on the Bus claims that the Ryan budget would raise taxes on low-income families while cutting taxes for millionaires and corporations, push families into poverty, and kick 8 million people off of food stamps.

Ryan previously defended his budget cuts by saying they were informed by his Catholic faith.

"Many politicians offer deeply flawed theological justifications for the federal budget. They ought to get some theological help," Campbell said.

She rejected the argument that aid programs create dependence. "Food stamps create not complacency, but opportunity," she said.

The two-week, 2,700-mile tour concluded with a prayer service and press conference on Capitol Hill.

The nuns have been compared by some to rock stars, greeted by screaming fans holding signs and wearing commemorative T-shirts. That was also the scene outside

the United Methodist Building on Monday as scores of attendees cheered the arriving bus.

"Nuns on the Bus speak for not just Catholics, not for Christians only, not for Jews. They speak for all of us," said Sayyid Sayeed, national interfaith director of the Islamic Society of North America.

With the Capitol building in view, speakers at the event argued that they have a plan that offers a moral alternative to partisan gridlock.

Sister Mary Ellen Lacy, a lobbyist for Network, said a proposal crafted by an interfaith group, the "Faithful Budget," is a moral alternative informed by religious ideas.

"Religion is your core, and we worked with our core ideas for the common good," Lacy said. "It was hard, but we worked it out. All we're saying is that's what we want Congress to do."

Network and the Leadership Conference of Women Religious were subject to recent disciplinary action by the Vatican over doctrinal issues, including support of President Obama's health care reform.

However, speakers emphasized their "faithful budget" coincides with the goal of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The tour coincided with the "Fortnight for Freedom" campaign, a two-week effort by the U.S. bishops to modify or overturn a health care mandate that could require some religious organizations to provide insurance coverage for birth control. The Fortnight for Freedom ends on Wednesday, July Fourth.