

Church groups cheer food stamp funding: Senate panel votes against cuts

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Religious groups are claiming victory in the fight to preserve funding for food stamps after a key Senate panel voted to keep \$574 million for the program.

The Senate Agriculture Committee in mid-October rejected proposed cuts that Bread for the World, an ecumenical antihunger group, said would have removed 300,000 people from the program.

The victory may only be partial, however, because a similar \$1 billion measure to cut funding is pending before the House. Church groups hope the Senate action will push House leaders to maintain the funding in their proposals.

“With hunger on the rise and the forces of nature exposing poverty anew, we will continue to challenge our political leaders to drop any further plans to cut this vital and proven program,” said David Beckmann, Bread for the World’s president.

Congress is looking to cut between \$35 and \$50 billion from next year’s budget. Other programs under scrutiny include Medicaid (health care for poor Americans) and student loans.

Religious groups, particularly mainline Protestant churches, which have made the 2006 budget their top domestic priority, have lobbied hard to maintain the food stamp funding. Those groups thanked Senator Saxby Chambliss, the Georgia Republican who chairs the Agriculture Committee, for keeping it in place.

“This is a victory, the first of many in which we hope that Congress will reorder our national priorities and protect our most vulnerable citizens,” said Jim Wallis, founder of the antipoverty Call to Renewal campaign.

The measure was to head to the Senate Budget Committee, then to the Senate floor. The high cost of recovery from Hurricane Katrina has put pressure on Congress to

reign in government spending. -*Religion News Service*