

Catholic bishops say Ryan budget fails moral test

by [David Gibson](#)

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c. 2012 Religion News Service WASHINGTON (RNS) A week after House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan claimed his Catholic faith inspired the Republicans' cost-cutting budget plan, the nation's Catholic bishops reiterated their demand that the federal budget protect the poor, and said the GOP measure "fails to meet these moral criteria."

That and other strongly-worded judgments on the GOP budget proposal flew in a flurry of letters from leading bishops to the chairmen of key congressional committee.

The letters to Capitol Hill were highlighted in a Tuesday (April 17) statement from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops that came after Ryan, a Wisconsin Republican and rising conservative hero, told an interviewer last week (April 10) that his fiscal views were informed by Catholic social teaching.

The hierarchy's pushback comes after liberal Catholics in Congress and progressive activists challenged the bishops to resist the GOP budget proposals with the same vigor that they have challenged the Obama administration's contraception mandate and its perceived violations of religious freedom.

Even though the Republican-passed House budget has almost no chance of passing the Democratic-controlled Senate or the White House, it is nonetheless serving as a proxy economic platform for Republicans in the presidential campaign, and as a counterpoint for Democrats.

Last Thursday, (April 12), the bishops' Ad Hoc Committee on Religious Liberty called for American Catholics to engage in a "Fortnight for Freedom" campaign -- starting in late June and ending on July 4 -- to actively resist the contraception mandate and other measures that the bishop say impinge on religious liberty.

The next day, Rep. Rosa DeLauro of Connecticut, the ranking Democrat on the House Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations, wrote to the bishops' president, New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan, saying that as a Catholic she felt the bishops should highlight the injustices she and others saw in the Republican plans.

"What I am asking for is a campaign for the poor, the hungry, the middle class, the people who are going to be eviscerated by the Ryan budget," DeLauro told Catholic News Service.

That same day, some 60 Catholic social justice leaders, theologians and clergy also released a statement saying that "this budget is morally indefensible and betrays Catholic principles of solidarity, just taxation and a commitment to the common good."

Tuesday's statement from the bishops came the same day as Bishop Stephen E. Blaire of Stockton, Calif., called a proposed cut in benefits for children of immigrants "unjust and wrong." Blaire, chairman of the bishops' Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, also decried any cuts in food stamps while preserving federal subsidies for industrial farming enterprises.

"Congress faces a difficult task to balance needs and resources and allocate burdens and sacrifices," Blaire wrote to the House Agriculture Committee. "Just solutions, however, must require shared sacrifice by all, including raising adequate revenues, eliminating unnecessary military and other spending, and fairly addressing the long-term costs of health insurance and retirement programs."

"The House-passed budget resolution fails to meet these moral criteria."