

# Churches press Obama to protect poor in budget talks

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WASHINGTON (RNS) President Obama agrees with religious officials' concerns about protecting the poor as Washington debates the nation's debt ceiling crisis, according to leaders who met with him this week.

A delegation representing Catholic and Protestant organizations met with Obama and high-level White House staffers for 40 minutes on Wednesday (July 20).

"The president basically endorsed our concern for protecting the poor as we work on balancing the budget," Galen Carey, vice president of the National Association of Evangelicals, said after the meeting.

The Rev. David Beckmann, president of the anti-hunger organization Bread for the World, supported the administration's efforts to negotiate a budget that calls for spending cuts and revenue increases.

"We applaud the president for acknowledging that any budget deal must protect programs vital for hungry and poor people," he said in a statement.

Bishop Ricardo Ramirez of Las Cruces, N.M., representing the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, said religious leaders are not focusing on the partisan politics of the debt fight but rather on those who will be affected by its outcome: Americans who are out of work, in need of health care or struggling to feed their children.

Other organizations represented at the meeting included the National Council of Churches, the Salvation Army, Sojourners, the National African American Clergy Network, the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

These leaders of the "Circle of Protection" movement, which hopes to prevent cuts to poverty-fighting programs, also have met with Democratic and Republican members of Congress.