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More than 2,400 Faith Leaders Call on Senators to Oppose Senate Tax Bill

"As people of faith, we view decisions about tax policy and the federal budget as moral decisions. Simply put, this proposed legislation is fundamentally unjust."

WASHINGTON, D.C. – More than 2,400 faith leaders representing Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and other faith traditions delivered a letter to the U.S. Senate today to oppose the Senate Tax bill, potentially being voted on as early as tomorrow. Their message:

"We call on Congress to oppose the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act due to our strong belief that this bill is fiscally irresponsible, endangers our country's economic health, and disproportionately benefits the wealthy at the expense of vulnerable people and low-income families. Moreover, we have grave concerns over the manner in which such a large and complex bill, affecting the entire economy and millions of Americans, is being recklessly rushed through Congress."

The letter continues:

"It would grow the deficit by at least \$1.5 trillion over the next decade. This not only endangers America's economic health, but it will also create enormous pressure to cut the safety net and critical human needs services to reduce this growing deficit and debt. Congress is struggling to fund disaster assistance and prevent cuts to vital anti-poverty programs. These programs cannot afford more cuts and to balloon the deficit with this bill violates principles of fiscal and moral stewardship. "

Finally, the letter says:

"The individual mandate is critical to keeping individual market coverage affordable and keeping the individual market stable. By repealing the individual mandate, legislation will cause catastrophic losses in health coverage. The CBO estimates that the number of uninsured individuals would increase by 13 million by 2025, which violates our faith teaching."

The effort was organized by the Interreligious Working Group on Domestic Human Needs and the Interfaith Healthcare Coalition, a network of organizations working together to end poverty and ensure access to healthcare, on Wednesday November 29.

Read the full text of the letter, and see all 90 pages of signatures from faith leaders from all 50 states online at <http://www.networklobby.org/SenateTaxLetter>

Following this release are quotes from national faith leaders in opposition to the Senate Tax Bill.

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Below are quotes from faith leaders opposing the Senate Tax Bill:

Sr. Simone Campbell, SSS, Executive Director, NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice

"While no one has seen the Senate's final tax bill, we know from the skeleton that it is bad policy for our nation. It is based on the faulty theory of "trickledown economics." We have tried this policy for the last 35 years and the only people who have benefited are the wealthiest in our nation. This has created the income and wealth disparity that is hurting our society. We call on Senators to reject this failed theory and disastrous bill."

Diane Randall, Executive Secretary, Friends Committee on National Legislation

"The massive tax cuts to the wealthy and large corporations in the current tax reform bill before Congress would increase the deficit by a whopping \$1.5 trillion. This giveaway will imperil the long-term fiscal health of our country and undermine future funding for critical programs. This tax reform proposal is being rushed through Congress without full scrutiny by congressional offices or the people of our country whose welfare is directly affected. The people of the United States— low and middle-income households—are looking for opportunity. Sadly, this bill will do more to hurt those families than to help them. When fully implemented, the Senate bill raises taxes on households making less than \$75,000, increasing the tax burden for those with incomes between \$20,000 and \$30,000 by a staggering 25 percent. This bill does not serve those who government should help first. Making the rich get richer at the expense of families struggling just to get by weakens our society and harms people who want government to work for everyone."

Abby J. Leibman, President & CEO – MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger

"If the past is prelude to future, then we have a very real fear that Congress will propose paying for these \$1.5 trillion in tax cuts by slashing vital programs that prevent poverty and hunger, like SNAP. It violates our shared values and ideals to suggest that the tens of millions of Americans who struggle to put food on the table can afford to shoulder any of this burden."

Rev. David Beckmann, President, Bread for the World

"Funding tax cuts by increasing deficit spending will almost certainly lead to cuts in low-income programs, such as SNAP and Medicaid. In fact, the budget resolution that proposed \$1.5 trillion in deficit spending for tax cuts also outlined more than \$2 trillion in cuts to low-income programs. Tax reform could benefit many families who struggle with hunger – by strengthening tax credits for low-income families, for example. But the current version of the House bill doesn't include any provisions that would directly benefit low-income people."

Colin Christopher, Director, Office for Interfaith & Community Alliances, Islamic Society of North America

"Our tax system needs a real rethink, not a renewal of special interest giveaways and decreased tax revenue. The current tax legislation being considered in the Senate would continue corporate avoidance of contributing fairly, cement advantages for wealthy families, and likely lead to devastating cuts precipitated by decreased revenue. Like other faith traditions, Islam encourages a competitive market system where wealth is distributed equitably and no one goes hungry. Unfortunately, our country's global economic power has yet to translate into stability and dignity for far too many of us. Our nation deserves a tax code that serves the interests of the majority, increases revenue for prudent programs, and redistributes our wealth justly."

Patrick Carolan, Franciscan Action Network

"In a recent Sunday Gospel, we hear the parable of the talents, which is often misinterpreted to be taken literally: Jesus is telling us to not misuse our God given gifts. Instead, the lesson in the parable is one of economic fairness. The third servant who buried his master's gold is doing so knowing that his master "harvest(s) where (he) did not

plant and gather(s) where (he) did not scatter." (Matthew 25:24) We must apply the lesson of this parable to the Tax Bill as it 'harvests where it does not plant and gathers where it does not scatter' for the 1% of Americans who have the most wealth. Their tax breaks must not be made on the backs of the 99% of Americans who will see their taxes rise by 2027. We must bury this tax plan in the ground where it belongs and together come up with a bipartisan plan that ensures all Americans are treated fairly and do not see their taxes rise to benefit the wealthy few."

Iman Jandali, American Muslim Health Professionals

"As Muslims, we are commanded by our faith to serve the needy and help the poor. The Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him said "God will aid a servant so long as the servant aids his brother." The tax bill gives no consideration to the poor and needy and is morally bankrupt given its devastating implications.

Rev. Marti Keller, Minister, Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation

"Challenging and preventing extreme inequality is a moral imperative for Unitarian Universalists as we affirm justice, equity and compassion in human relations. We are committed to working to change economic systems that perpetuate and worsen income and wealth inequality with a goal of life, dignity and wellbeing experienced by all. This bill does not alleviate, only exacerbate, the disparities. We cannot ignore the harm caused by a lopsided system-- which this bill would only further-cause by a tax code that gives control of our country's financial resources to a very small percentage of people. Women continue to be especially vulnerable to economic inequity, with wage and wealth gaps that preferential provisions for high income corporations and individuals, and unfair Earned Income Tax and Child Tax credits will not repair."

The Rev. Dr. Susan Henry-Crowe, general secretary of the General Board of Church and Society of The United Methodist Church

"The United Methodist Church will continue to call for increased access to affordable, quality health care, no matter what vehicle is used to threaten it. To add measures that would dismantle health insurance for millions of people to pay for tax cuts that disproportionately benefit the wealthy is immoral."

Ralph Middlecamp, National Council President, Society of St. Vincent de Paul

"Nonprofit organizations that serve the poor, such as the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, already find it difficult to meet today's pressing needs throughout our country. Many elements of legislation pending in Congress to reform our national tax structure will immediately, or in the foreseeable future, significantly multiply the needs of people suffering from the effects of living in poverty. At the same time when many nonprofit organizations will be asked to do more in their communities the legislation takes away many of the incentives donors have to financially support our charitable efforts. We ask those who represent the citizens of our country to thoughtfully consider all their constituents when voting on pending tax legislation. Many of them may not have the influence to advocate for their own welfare but true leaders will protect the vulnerable."

Lawrence Couch, Director, National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd

"The original GOP tax plan failed to protect the lower and middle classes. Amazingly, it is now worse with the addition of language eliminating elements of the Affordable Care Act. Government is not doing its job if it is not protecting its people. The budget, taxes and health care all have a moral dimension and we must hold those in government accountable for their failures or inactions."

Rev. Matt Steinhauer, Faith Lutheran Church (ELCA), Lebanon, Tennessee

"On the Sunday after Thanksgiving, a day that will probably stand right in the middle of the procedures leading up to a Senate vote on the proposed Tax Reform legislation, I will preach from Matthew 25, where Jesus tells his followers: "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." It must be a source of great sorrow for Jesus to witness the many women and men who run for election boldly claiming their Christian title, who then get elected only to turn a blind eye to the very ones Jesus is turned toward - "the least of these." Tax Reform that gives permanent and substantial financial benefit to the richest in our nation, and minimal and temporary benefit to the middle class, while cutting benefits for the poor through Medicaid and Medicare cuts does not represent a Christ follower "walking the walk." Passage of the Tax Reform bill will be bad for our nation."

Rev. Matthew Kelley, Chair, Board of Church and Society, Tennessee Conference United Methodist Church

"While the tax plan currently being considered by Congress sides with those who are already wealthy and privileged, Jesus Christ stands with the poor, the immigrant, and others who are pushed to the margins of our society. We choose to stand with Jesus."

Rev. Jason Carson Wilson, United Church of Christ

"Putting access to healthcare for all at risk for the sake of tax relief for the rich is immoral. No one should face sickness without healthcare access, so someone can get a yacht tax deduction."