

Issue Briefings: 2011-2012 Legislative Agenda

The Legislative Outlook of the 112th Congress

Each year the United Church of Christ and the Disciples of Christ justice advocates raise their voices to make a difference in the public policy arena on a broad range of issues. After a divisive midterm election campaign characterized by heated rhetoric and partisan attacks, the 112th Congress convened in January 2011 with new leadership in the House of Representatives and a Senate even more closely divided along partisan lines.

Unlike the 111th Congress, one of the most legislatively active sessions in recent decades, the 112th Congress is more likely to be marked by impasse and deadlock. Many newly elected members of Congress who campaigned on an agenda of cutting federal spending have dominated early debate about the federal budget, a trend likely to extend through much of the 112th session. Protecting key social safety net programs for the most economically vulnerable in the midst of a still shaky economy will be an important charge for faith-based justice advocates in the next two years.

Although legislative action is needed in major policy issue areas such as immigration and public education, there appears little prospect of forward movement with a divided Congress. More likely, justice advocates will be called upon to defend attacks on recent legislative gains made in the area of health care, civil rights and environmental justice.

In the meantime, significant international issues – including the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, global debt and poverty, democratic movements in Northern Africa and the Middle East – will challenge political leaders and justice advocates.

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Federal Budget Calendar

The President and Congress work on the budget for nearly the entire year.

January

President signals budget and program priorities in State of the Union or inaugural address.

By First Monday in February

President submits budget to Congress following the procedure required by the Congressional Budget Act of 1974. The President's proposed budget is a starting point for congressional deliberations. It estimates spending, revenue and borrowing levels based on input received from federal agencies. The President's proposed budget plays three important roles: 1) it outlines what the President believes overall fiscal policy should be; 2) it reflects the President's priorities for federal programs – how much should be spent on defense, education, health....; 3) it indicates the spending and tax policy changes the President recommends.

February – September

The President's proposed budget helps inform Congressional deliberations on the annual Budget Resolution, which establishes a level of total spending and revenues (taxes and fees) within which Congress will then control the process of appropriations as the year moves forward. To craft the Budget Resolution, Congress interacts with federal agency representatives who explain and advocate the President's proposed budget and then develops its Budget Resolution through the work of the House and Senate Budget Committees. Usually in the spring, House and Senate Budget Committees hold hearings on the Budget Resolution. Based on committee testimony and deliberations, each committee "marks up" its version of the Budget Resolution. Once the committees have completed their work, the Budget Resolution goes to the House and Senate floors for debate and vote.

Once House and Senate have each passed their version of the Budget Resolution, members are named to a Conference Committee which resolves differences between the House and Senate proposed budget resolutions. Much of the exchange and compromise between conferees happens outside formal deliberations. The Budget Resolution is supposed to be passed by April 15, but it frequently takes longer. In some years, Congress does not pass a Budget Resolution, and therefore the previous year's resolution remains in effect.

****Advocacy Opportunities** – Help shape the debate by meeting with members of Congress and using media advocacy to lift up your key issues and positions. Provide forums to educate members of your congregation and community on the impact of the federal budget proposal on the most vulnerable. Highlight stories from your own community.*

Once a Budget Resolution has been adopted, Congressional committees then prepare 13 Appropriations Bills, which specify how the money that has been allocated to each functional category will be distributed across the many programs within the category.

There is another important stream of funding outside the budget itself: mandatory spending, which pays for entitlement programs that continue from year to year. An entitlement program is one where funding is available for all people who are eligible for the program. Examples of entitlement programs include Social Security, veterans' pensions, food stamps, Medicare, Medicaid, and the federal employees' retirement program. Congress does not have to appropriate mandatory spending each year as part of the budget. Instead changes to spending in the mandatory category are made in Authorization Bills that may be written at any time during the year.

****Advocacy Opportunities** - Contact and meet with members of the House and Senate Budget Committees. When members of the Conference Committee are named, contact and meet with those members.*

Continue to provide educational forums and mobilize your advocacy networks.

Work with your local media to cover the impact of federal budget decisions on your community

October 1

The new Fiscal Year begins. This means that the Budget is intended to be passed by the end of September. In many years, however, Congress fails to complete its deliberations by that date. If a Budget has not passed by September 30, Congress must pass Continuing Resolutions for each of the 13 Appropriations categories. Eventually a new Budget must be approved, but this may again involve the appointment of a Conference Committee to resolve differences in the Senate and House versions.

**Advocacy Opportunities – You will still need to meet with members of your Congressional delegation and communicate with House and Senate Budget Committees until the Budget process has been completed.*

Bullying and Harassment: Pass the Safe Schools Improvement Act (SSIA)



Bullying happens in all kinds of communities—at school and even at church. At school, bullying creates significant adverse academic and other consequences for students. No federal law or policy exists that requires schools to address the problem, and existing state laws and school district policies vary greatly in their breadth and effectiveness.

What is bullying? According to the US Department of Education, “Bullying among children is commonly defined as intentional, repeated hurtful acts, words, or other behavior, such as name-calling, threatening and/or shunning committed by one or more children against another. These negative acts are not intentionally provoked by the victims, and for such acts to be defined as bullying, an imbalance in real or perceived power must exist between the bully and the victim. Bullying may be physical, verbal, emotional or sexual in nature¹.”

Two studies published by the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) reported that two-thirds of middle and high school students (65%) and nearly 9 out of 10 LGBT students (86.4%) said they had been bullied in school in the past year. Suicide related to anti-LGBT bullying received a great deal of publicity in the fall of 2010 and has heightened awareness of this pervasive concern and its consequences.

In addition, the U.S. Center for Disease Control (CDC) reports: “Negative attitudes toward gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender people put LGBT youth at increased risk for verbal or physical harassment at school compared to other students². For example, a 2009 online survey³ of more than 7,000 LGBT middle and high school students found that:

- Eight in ten had been verbally or physically harassed at school in the past year because of their sexual orientation;
- Six in ten felt unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation; and
- One in five had been the victim of a physical assault.

The Twenty-seventh General Synod of the United Church of Christ (2009) declared its support for organizations, especially public school districts, to develop programs that promote anti-bullying and safe schools. It also called for participation in broad-based ecumenical and interfaith coalitions to advocate for anti-bullying, safe schools, and diversity/multi-cultural education in our public schools.

Faithful advocates should ask Congress to pass the Safe Schools Improvement Act (SSIA). It will strengthen the Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act to ensure that:

- Schools and districts have comprehensive and effective student conduct policies to prohibit bullying and harassment;
- Schools and districts focus on effective prevention strategies and professional development

- designed to help school personnel meaningfully address bullying and harassment;
- States and districts maintain and report data regarding incidents of bullying and harassment to inform the development of effective federal, state, and local policies.

The SSIA ended the 111th Congress with 131 bipartisan cosponsors in the House and 17 bipartisan cosponsors in the Senate. SSIA is expected to be introduced early in the 112th Congress and may be attached to reforms of the No Child Left Behind Act.

For more information, contact Rev. Michael Schuenemeyer, (216-736-3217) schuenem@ucc.org, or see our website: <http://www.ucc.org/justice/children-and-youth/what-can-we-do-to-stop.html> and the resource, [Bridging the Gap in Federal Law: Promoting Safe Schools and Improved Student Achievement by Preventing Bullying and Harassment in Our Schools](#) [http://www.glsen.org/binary-data/GLSEN_ATTACHMENTS/file/000/000/916-1.pdf]

¹ *Preventing Bullying: A Manual for Schools and Communities*, US Department of Education: p. 1. Link: http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/search/detailmini.jsp?_nfpb=true&_ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_o=ED453592&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_o=no&accno=ED453592

² From: <http://www.cdc.gov/lgbthealth/youth.htm?source=govdelivery> as of 2/6/2011.

³ Kosciw JG, Greytak EA, Diaz EM, Bartkiewicz MJ. *The 2009 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth in our nation's schools*. New York: Gay, Lesbian Straight Education Network. 2010. Link: http://www.glsen.org/binary-data/GLSEN_ATTACHMENTS/file/000/001/1675-5.PDF

Campaign Finance Reform: Uphold the Democratic Process



Campaign finance reform sits at the intersection of our faith values and our democratic ideals. It is not simply a political or public relations dilemma but a moral matter. The temptation to use money to buy unjust favors is an ancient one. Scripture speaks continually about the call to seek justice, particularly for those on the margins of society, those with little voice or power in the public sphere. The prophet Amos thundered against those merchants in Israel who "...sell the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes... and push the afflicted out of the way..." (Amos 2:6-7)

Psalm 15 defines a righteous person as one "who keeps his oath even when it hurts... and does not accept a bribe against the innocent."

As people of faith, we recognize the responsibility of government to seek justice for all people to build the common good. Justice cannot be achieved unless the rules governing the democratic process are just and fair to all. Central to that process is a citizen's free vote, not limited by the powers of money, social class and unequal access to the public media.

Rules governing the financing of campaigns have long been a focus of Congressional debate; yet meaningful campaign finance reform that would make the electoral process more responsive to and accessible to average voters has long been elusive.

Unfortunately, the January 2010 ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court in its *Citizens United v. FEC* decision has rendered even more elusive the prospect of meaningful campaign finance law that would protect the voices of individual voters. Although the case originally dealt with the narrow question of whether the electioneering communications provisions of the McCain-Feingold Act apply to “pay-per-view” movies produced by nonprofit entities, the Court stretched to ask a question that had not been posed to them. Then they answered it, announcing that private businesses, including for-profit corporations, have a right to spend an unlimited – yes, unlimited – amount of money to support or defeat candidates. The decision reversed numerous Supreme Court precedents and toppled dozens of long-standing campaign finance laws at the federal and state level.

To get a sense of the staggering implications of *Citizens United*, consider the example of Exxon-Mobil, whose political action committee (PAC) raised just under \$1 million in the 2008 election cycle from executives and members of its board. In that same year, Exxon-Mobil amassed profits of \$85 billion. If the *Citizens United* decision had already been law in 2008, and the company spent a modest 10 percent of its profits, they could have spent \$8.5 billion to elect candidates friendly to their interests and defeat candidates perceived as opposing their interests. This would have been more than was spent by the Obama campaign, the McCain campaign, every U.S. House and Senate candidate and every state legislative candidate in the country combined.

According to *Public Citizen*, businesses are likely to give considerable sums to front groups who will run attack ads against candidates who challenge corporate interests. Elected officials and anyone running for office will be under enormous pressure to support corporate interests, and it will be harder to advance a public interest agenda.

While Congress can pass some laws to limit the effects of the *Citizens United* decision, because the case is based on the protections of the First Amendment it can only be overturned by a constitutional amendment.

For more information, contact Sandy Sorensen, (202-543-1517) sorenses@ucc.org, or to learn more about advocacy for more just campaign finance laws in the wake of the *Citizens United* Supreme Court decision, visit <http://www.freespeechforpeople.org>.

Environment: Defend the Right of the EPA to Enforce the Clean Air Act



In April 2007, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has the right to regulate greenhouse gas (GHGs) emissions under the existing Clean Air Act; it did not need to seek additional Congressional authority. This decision was hailed as a landmark case by many in the faith and environmental communities because it would reduce GHGs that contribute to climate change.

Under the new Obama administration in December 2009, the EPA announced that scientific evidence proves that GHGs threaten the public health and welfare of the American people and are the primary drivers of climate change. This declaration led the EPA to announce the development of new rules beginning in 2011 to limit GHGs and smog-producing pollution from power plants, car and truck exhausts, and industrial boilers.

However, opposition to the new rules has been strong. To block EPA enforcement of the new rules the U.S. Chamber of Commerce filed a petition in August 2010, and eleven states filed a lawsuit in September 2010. The new House elected in November 2010 chose Rep. Fred Upton to head the Energy and Commerce Committee. Upton has vowed to have a "very aggressive, proactive schedule" to overturn the new EPA rules. Perhaps submitting to pressure, the EPA announced in December of 2010 that it will delay until later in 2011 the implementation of rules limiting smog and industrial boiler pollution.

Why are these new EPA rules important for people of faith?

- Air pollution has an immediate and long-term impact on the health of our communities. The EPA estimates that stricter EPA standards would help prevent up to 12,000 premature deaths annually and save up to \$100 billion in health care costs.
- Dirty air has a disproportionate effect on children and non-white poorer communities. Children – who have no choice where they live - are much more prone to asthma than adults, and in the landmark 1987 study commissioned by the UCC, *Toxic Wastes and Race*, communities of color or poverty often bear an onerous and unjust environmental burden compared to white and more affluent communities.
- Delaying or diminishing the new rules will add to climate change and its perilous outcomes for future generations. Taking steps now to combat global warming is absolutely essential for the health of the entire planet.

What can you do?

- Call, write, or visit your Senators and U.S. Representative. Tell them that we need the EPA to enforce the Clean Air Act that was passed 40 years ago by a bi-partisan Congressional effort, signed by a Republican President, and declared necessary by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2007.

- Make your own community or congregation a model of energy efficiency and mobilization for clean air, and then invite your elected officials to come and see how ordinary citizens are taking action.

Visit <http://www.ucc.org/environmental-ministries/just-green-congregations.html> and become a *Green Justice Congregation*.

For more information, contact Rev. Jim Deming (216-736-3722) demingj@ucc.org, or see our website: <http://www.ucc.org/environmental-ministries/water-air.html>.

Health Care: Do Not Repeal the Affordable Care Act

On March 23, 2010, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (called the Affordable Care Act [ACA]) was enacted into law by the 111th Congress and signed by President Barack Obama. In addition, a Reconciliation Amendment, the Health Care and Education Act, was signed into law on March 30, 2010. This combined legislation expands access to quality, affordable health insurance to an additional 32 million currently uninsured Americans. For the first time the U.S. has a health care policy that addresses escalating costs, uneven quality, discriminatory practices by health insurance providers; provides mandatory funding for prevention and wellness programs and activities; and strengthens the Medicare program.



The United Church of Christ's 1991 Synod resolution proclaiming *Health Care for All* affirms our belief in the moral and justice imperative of equal access for all people in the United States. The passage of the Affordable Care Act is consistent with our church's understanding that "we are our brother's and sister's keepers" and our commitment to Jesus' priority to minister to those who are sick.

H. R. 2: Repealing the Job-Killing Health Care Law Act was introduced in the 112th Congress, in the House of Representatives in January 2011. Its sponsors seek fully to repeal the health care law passed in 2010. Repeal is unlikely, however, for several reasons. A repeal vote is not expected to pass the Senate. Even if it were to pass all of Congress, the President would likely veto the bill, and there would likely be insufficient votes in the Senate to override the veto.

However, H.R. 2 is the first step in the legislative process to repeal the 2010 law and health care-related provisions in the Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act of 2010, which contains primary public health and prevention services needed to maintain a healthy nation. Largely a symbolic gesture by a block of members of the House of Representatives, the repeal process alone is not a serious threat. The introduction of H.R. 2, however, means a large scale assault to de-fund and dismantle components of the 2010 law can be expected. It is also predicted that some members of the House will use the appropriations process to slow the full implementation of health care reform.

Repealing the 2010 law would return us to a health system that was unfriendly to many. Further repeal would negatively impact the public health while adding dollars to the deficit. Without the ACA, for example, young adults would lose their insurance coverage through their parents; people would once again be vulnerable to lifetime limits; and there would be reversal of cost sharing benefits for preventative services and reversal of the “donut hole” coverage gap.

Please urge your Representative to oppose H.R. 2 and any future attempts to defund and dismantle the Affordable Care Act.

For more information, contact Barbara Baylor (216-736-3708) baylorb@ucc.org, or see our website: www.ucc.org/justice/health.

HIV-AIDS: Fund AIDS Drug Assistance Programs



The U.S. has a growing HIV epidemic. 38% of those who test positive for HIV are diagnosed with AIDS within one year. The need for anti-viral HIV therapy is greater today than it ever has been. However, large numbers of the uninsured or underinsured do not have access to the life-saving treatment and care services they need.

Universal access to health care, which includes access to anti-retroviral treatment, is a fundamental human right. Access to treatment and care has been proven to be an important component of effective HIV prevention. Inconsistency in taking HIV anti-retroviral medications also often leads to drug resistant strains of HIV, which not only has immediate consequences for an individual’s health, but also has alarming implications for public health.

Housing Work reports that in the past two years an ever-growing number of people have attempted to enroll in their state’s AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP), but states have less money to give to their ADAPs because the recession has significantly reduced state revenues across the United States. A number of states have blocked ADAP enrollment and instituted wait lists. As of January 2011, 5,779 people were on ADAP waiting lists in 10 states.¹ Other states have modified their ADAP eligibility requirements, cutting untold numbers from their programs and leaving many without a way to pay for medication. Yet other states have restricted the drugs they cover. The majority of the people served by ADAPs are black and Hispanic.

In July of 2010, when the number of people on ADAP waiting lists was about 2,100, advocacy groups and state officials urged the Obama Administration to provide \$126 million in emergency assistance for ADAPs to cover the needs to the end of the fiscal year. The Administration allocated \$25 million.² With wait lists now approaching 6,000 and growing, much more is needed to provide the treatment people need.

From the beginning of the epidemic, the UCC’s General Synod has consistently called on the US Congress and the President to appropriate the resources required to meet the needs of the epidemic, particularly in terms of providing treatment and alleviating suffering.³ In 1987 the 16th General Synod

called “for fair and equitable treatment for all population groups with respect to AIDS screening, treatment and provision of services.”⁴ And in 2009, the 27th General Synod Calls on local, state and federal governments to work together to develop and implement a national HIV and AIDS strategy that includes increased funding for best practice comprehensive HIV prevention programs. The National AIDS Strategy was launched by President Obama in July 2010 with treatment as one of its main goals. Backed by an abundance of research, the general consensus of the global AIDS community is that universal access to treatment is not only an essential human right but also vitally to effective HIV prevention.

Faithful advocates need to insist this health disparity be addressed with adequate funding in 2011 and in future federal and state budgets.

For more information, contact Rev. Michael Schuenemeyer, (216-736-3217) schuenem@ucc.org, or see The Federal Budget Process and HIV Funding (PDF), http://img.thebody.com/aac/pdfs/budget_process.pdf; Federal Funding for HIV by Category, <http://facts.kff.org/chart.aspx?ch=433>; National Alliance of State & Territorial AIDS Directors – Appropriations, <http://www.nastad.org/Programs/publicpolicy/ResourceDocument.aspx?Id=2&CatText=Appropriations>; General Synod Social Policy on HIV and AIDS, <http://www.ucc.org/health/hivaids/uccpolicy.html>.

¹Turkewitz, Julie, *ADAP Watch: AIDS Drug Wait List Grows to 5,779*, www.HousingWorks.org, Posted January 30, 2011 at 8:03pm, Link: <http://www.housingworks.org/blogs/detail/adap-watch-aids-drug-wait-list-grows-to-5779/>

²Pear, Robert, *U.S. to Provide \$25 Million to Help Buy AIDS Drugs*, New York Times, July 8, 2010, Link: http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/09/health/research/ogaids.html?_r=1.

³*Resolution on Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS)*, 14th General Synod of the United Church of Christ, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, June 24-28-1983.

⁴*A Pronouncement: Health and Wholeness in the Midst of a Pandemic*, 16th General Synod of the United Church of Christ, Cleveland, Ohio, June 25-30, 1987.

Human Rights: End Warrantless Searches and Seizures under Patriot Act



A number of controversial provisions of the Bush Administration’s Patriot Act are set to expire this year. Three of the most controversial provisions regarding civil liberties are (1) court-appointed wiretapping of multiple phone lines of people who are suspected terrorists, and at its most extreme, of people who are not suspected of any criminal activity; (2) full FBI access to any court-approved item to be used in a terrorist investigation; and (3) court-approved surveillance of people who are not U.S. natives, even if they have no known terrorist links.

Although these provisions are set to expire, there has been significant movement to introduce new legislation to maintain them in law. On January 5, 2011, Rep. Mike Rogers (R-MI) introduced a bill (HR 67) to renew those provisions. This bill mirrored the extension of the Act approved last year, and because it was so similar to the extension, was expected to pass the House. The bill was placed on a fast track, but failed to pass as we go to press. The vote was 277 to 148 – which would have meant approval, except for the more stringent requirements of fast-tracked bills. Although this measure failed to pass the House in its current form, we expect further attempts to retain these provisions of the Patriot Act.

In the original Act of 2001, a number of authorities were assigned sunset provisions which allowed them to expire unless legislative action extended them. Many of these have to do with surveillance. They are set to expire February 28, 2011. However, new legislation is expected to continue them. Relevant provisions include authorities for roving wiretaps and tracking devices on social networks and websites on people not suspected of criminal activity. They also permit the government to obtain documents on citizens without individuals being informed of their seizure. These sections not only infringe upon personal liberties, but do so without informing citizens of the infringements.

Essentially, by passing repeated extensions of the Patriot Act (notably in 2005 and twice in 2009), Congress has failed to come to terms with serious social justice and liberty issues within the Act. In 2008, the Justice Department reported that under the provisions of the Patriot Act, the FBI regularly abused its authority to obtain citizens' personal records without a warrant. National Security Letters are used to spy on individuals who are not suspected of crimes. Recently, the Department of Justice ordered Twitter to produce information on more than 600,000 users who followed outlets on WikiLeaks. Twitter appealed the secrecy of this order and was permitted to reveal the Justice Department's request. Still, the FBI and the Department of Justice have argued consistently that to restrict their authority to conduct searches without a warrant would harm national security.

We urge you to contact your Representatives and Senators and the White House to let them know you oppose warrantless searches and seizures of the citizenry. If you want these sections to expire, let your lawmakers know.

For more information, contact Rev. Sala W.J. Nolan Gonzales (216-736-3716), nolans@ucc.org, or consult http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/629173/the_usa_patriot_act_of_2001.html?cat=75 for an overview of the Patriot Act and its impact on civil liberties.

Immigration: Resist Enforcement-Only Legislation



Last year began with immigrant rights advocates optimistic about the prospects for comprehensive immigration reform to promote family unity, bring people out of the shadows, and create a path to legalization for undocumented persons living in the U.S.

The impact on the immigrant community has been devastating as heightened enforcement by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and police has resulted in record deportations of residents who once hoped for a path to legalization.

"Secure Communities" and "287g" agreements between ICE and local law enforcement have been expanded. In some places, state and local police have become involved in immigration enforcement. The result is that a record 393,000 people were deported in 2010 with thousands of families broken apart. <http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/secure-communities-fact-sheet>

In the 112th Congress there will be more enforcement only type legislation. Proposals will focus on border security, increased oversight by the Department of Homeland Security, restrictions on due

process, efforts to criminalize undocumented immigrants, and an increased role for local law enforcement in immigration enforcement. The “birthright citizenship” of children born in the United States to undocumented parents will be challenged.

At the state level, proposals will include a wide range of punitive measures. Instead of Congress addressing comprehensive immigration reform, the states are considering enforcement-only legislation, which means that new laws will likely prescribe ways to punish violators but will not provide a path to legal residence in the United States. While aspects of S.B. 1070 have now been enjoined by the courts, “copy cat” legislation has been passed in the legislatures of 20 additional states.

Another very important immigration concern is the DREAM Act. While the U.S. House passed a version of the DREAM Act in December 2010, the legislation failed by 5 votes in the U.S. Senate. The DREAM Act would allow undocumented youths who entered the U.S. as children to enter a path to legal status through higher education or military service. Many DREAM students came out of the shadows to advocate vocally on behalf of an estimated 65,000 undocumented young people who graduate from high school each year without the right to a driver’s license, a job, participation in the military, or access to college scholarships. The DREAMERS seek the prayers and support of the faith community as they continue to live with the risks and indignities of being undocumented.
<http://www.ucc.org/justice/public-education/statement-in-support-of-the.html>

The biblical texts speak to God’s love and compassion for the stranger. It is written, “When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself. For you were aliens in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.” (Lev. 19:33-34).

In Matthew 25: 35 Jesus is at one with the stranger, “For I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” Do the current laws being proposed welcome the stranger and welcome Christ, or do these proposals turn them away and bring judgment upon us as a nation?

In 1981, the United Church of Christ General Synod in its *Pronouncement: Justice in Immigration* called upon the church and its members to “advocate for the rights of immigrants” and “aid undocumented immigrants in attaining legal status.” In 2007, General Synod 26 issued a “Call for a More Humane U.S. Immigration Policy.” This resolution shared a special concern for the migrants who risk death crossing the border through the Southwestern desert. Current estimates are that at least 5,000 have died crossing the border. <http://www.ucc.org/synod/resolutions/immigration-final.pdf>

As a nation we need to build upon the foundations of freedom and respect for human rights. We should advocate for an earned path to legalization for undocumented persons of goodwill living in the U.S.. These people are working hard and raising families. We also need to insist that Congress reform outdated immigration laws that have kept families apart for decades.

Questions we must ask regarding any proposed legislation are: Does the law respect the role of the federal government? Does it consider how U.S. economic policies impact other countries and potentially cause people to migrate? Does it provide an earned path to legalization? Do our efforts to secure the border work for families, employers and people fleeing persecution? We need to advocate for comprehensive immigration reform and against enforcement-only laws that are being proposed across the states.

You are also invited to observe *Immigrant Rights Sunday*, on **May 1**. <http://www.ucc.org/justice/immigration/ImmigrantRightsSunday.html>. Learn about immigrants' concerns, honor their contributions, hear their pain, pray for their well-being, and listen to discover where God is leading us regarding immigration policy. You may also join a new Network of UCC members concerned for just and compassionate immigration reform. For more information, contact Mary Kuenning Gross, maryk-gross@gmail.com, or see our website: <http://www.ucc.org/justice/immigration>.

Job Creation: Make This Our Highest Priority



News reports proclaim the economy is recovering. But for millions of people who have lost their jobs, health insurance, economic security, and even their homes, the economic crisis continues. Congress must make job creation its highest priority.

American families are in a quagmire of financial and emotional pain. In January, 2011, over three years since the start of the recession, the unemployment rate is 9.4%.

Some 14.5 million people are officially unemployed. But a

broader count that includes everyone who wants work plus people who want more than their current part-time jobs indicates nearly 30 million people are unemployed or underemployed.¹ This is roughly twice the official count and nearly one in five potential workers. For some demographic groups, including people of color, young adults, and teenagers, the rates are much higher. Congress must make job creation its highest priority.

Federal Government – the Engine of Economic Recovery

The economy is growing slowly but job growth is stalled. Consumers have cut back their spending. Many firms have plenty of money but are not hiring.² If consumers aren't buying, companies don't need to produce more and they will not hire additional employees. The economy needs a jump start. The federal government must be the engine of economic recovery, boosting purchases so that firms will hire workers and raise production. Deficit spending by the federal government has ended recessions in the past and it can make an important contribution to economic recovery efforts today.

Federal Jobs Program

But a boost in purchasing will not be enough. Our shortfall in jobs is too large. Just to keep pace with growth in the labor force requires 120,000 new jobs a month. In 2010, we averaged just 94,000 new jobs a month. This rate of job creation is inadequate to keep unemployment from creeping up; it does not begin to address the backlog of joblessness. Even if job creation happened at over twice today's rate, say 220,000 new jobs a month (a level higher than even the best years in the 2000s), it would take nearly 10 years to reduce unemployment to the pre-recession level of 5 percent.³ Hurting families cannot hang on that long. Just waiting for the market to solve this crisis, without intervention, is unacceptable.

Congress must establish a program of job creation. The program could include tax credits to encourage firms to hire, funds for state and local governments to prevent layoffs, and grants to send workers back to school. It could include direct hiring by the government. There is much work that needs to be done, from cleaning up brown fields in our cities to making repairs in our national parks. Let's put people to work doing the things that need to be done.

Maintain the Safety Net

At the same time, we must maintain a solid safety net of support for people in need. Millions depend on unemployment insurance. One in seven people receives food stamps.⁴ Some 48 million people are insured by Medicaid and the numbers are rising.⁵ People are hurting and need a strong safety net. Congress must not cut programs for those most in need. Moreover, safety net spending stimulates the economy and creates jobs.

Reduce the Deficit Only After the Economy is Sound

The deficit is large but most of it is caused by the economic downturn.⁶ Unemployed people earn little money and pay few taxes. Government revenues fall. At the same time, costs rise as millions of people are forced to rely on safety net programs. Once people are working again, much of the deficit will disappear at least for now. In the longer term, health costs are the main factor driving the deficit and will need to be addressed.

For now, maintaining the deficit is the sound and humane thing to do. This will mean raising the debt limit. But only by creating jobs that put people back to work and strengthening the economy will the nation (and American families) be able to pay their bills and thrive.

For more information, contact Edith Rasell, Ph.D., (216-736-3709) raselle@ucc.org, or see our website: <http://www.ucc.org/justice/financial-crisis/>.

¹There are 14.5 million officially counted as unemployed. An additional 1.3 million say they want jobs but, since they are no longer looking for work, are not included in the official count. Nearly nine million can find only part-time work and want more hours. Another 4.4 million so-called "missing" workers have dropped out of the counts entirely. See Shierholz, Heidi, "Labor force smaller than before recession started," Economic Policy Institute, January 7, 2011 http://www.epi.org/publications/entry/labor_force_smaller_than_before_recession_started1/

²"U.S. Companies Sit on \$1 Trillion Cash," *The Street*, October 28, 2010. <http://www.thestreet.com/story/10903371/us-companies-sit-on-1-trillion-cash.html> Mufson, Steven, "Some giants sitting on piles of cash," November 6, 2009, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/11/05/AR2009110505221.html>

³The U.S. economy has 7.3 million fewer jobs than in December 2007 at the start of the recession. Those need to be replaced, plus we need 120,000/month for the past 36 months to accommodate the growth in the labor force, or a total of 11.6 million jobs. At the rate of 220,000 new jobs a month (120,000 taken by new entrants to the labor force) there would be 100,000 jobs a month for the jobless. To return to the unemployment level of December 2007 (5%) would take just under 10 years (11.6 million jobs needed / 100,000 created per month / 12 months). During the peak of the economic growth cycle during the 2000s, the U.S. economy created an average of 183,000 a month; 220,000 is an optimistic figure.

⁴Smith, Aaron, "1 in 7 Americans rely on food stamps," CNN Money December 21, 2010 http://money.cnn.com/2010/12/21/news/economy/food_stamps/index.htm

⁵DeNavas-Walt, Carmen, Bernadette D. Proctor, and Jessica C. Smith, U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, P60-238, *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2009*, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 2010. <http://www.census.gov/prod/2010pubs/p60-238.pdf>

⁶Ruffing, Kathy A. and James R. Horney, "Critics Still Wrong on What's Driving Deficits in Coming Years," Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, June 28, 2010, <http://www.cbpp.org/files/12-16-09bud.pdf>

Juvenile Justice: Support the Youth PROMISE Act



The Youth PROMISE Act (HR 1064) – officially entitled Youth Prison Reduction through Opportunities, Mentoring, Intervention, Support, and Education – was introduced in February 2009 by Rep. Bobby Scott (D-VA), and co-sponsored by 235 Representatives. The PROMISE Act would establish an Advisory Committee to assist the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention in hiring and training law enforcement officers as youth-oriented police to work with community-based organizations and high-risk youth. It would establish a Center for Youth-Oriented Policing. PROMISE would authorize prevention programs developed by community Coordinating Councils, and support partnerships

among mental health authorities and public and private groups to alleviate the effects of youth violence. It would support ongoing research to identify what actually reduces youth violence and gang involvement, and promote evidence-based practices to reduce delinquency.

There has been opposition to the bill from those who seek more punitive measures to address youth violence. Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) introduced the Gang Abatement and Prevention Act (S132), which would seek stronger prosecution efforts for gang violence and enhance criminal penalties for violent crimes. In December 2010, a new bill merging the Promise Act with Feinstein's bill, S132, was introduced. The seemingly contradictory approaches were noted by some supporters of the Youth Promise Act, but the compromise bill was supported by some analysts who believe that the charges and punishments proposed in S132 are already available to prosecutors under federal racketeering and conspiracy laws. The compromise bill was placed on hold in the Senate, precluding its passage in 2010. However, HR 1064 continues to progress. On December 22, 2010, the original Youth Promise Act was placed on the Union Calendar and is proceeding. Its passage depends on support for new federal expenditures for prevention and research; passage may be compromised in the context of budget deficits and strong fiscal scrutiny for all newly proposed programs.

Please support this bill. It is inherently positive, not punitive. It will support our communities and our youth. Although issues of funding may stall this legislation in its pathway to law, in fact, preventive measures will save millions of dollars for needless incarceration of our young people -- enormous expenditures that are destroying lives and communities. Contact your U.S. Representative and Senators to let them know you support this legislation, and that you believe its full funding will make better use of public dollars than imprisoning our young people.

For more information, contact Rev. Sala Nolan Gonzalez (216-736-3716) nolans@ucc.org, or see our website: <http://www.ucc.org/justice/criminal-justice/juvenile-justice.html>

Public Education — Overhaul the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (No Child Left Behind)



The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) originally passed in 1965 as the cornerstone of the War on Poverty, faces reauthorization every five years. Renamed “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB) in 2002, the law was scheduled for reauthorization in 2007, but Congress continues to delay.

The original 1965 ESEA allocated Title I money, called “compensatory funding,” for schools serving concentrations of America’s poorest children. Congress framed the 2002 reauthorization instead as holding schools accountable—mandating that states set standards, test whether students have met the standards, and punish schools that cannot quickly raise scores.

In 2009 Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, introduced a dangerous new agenda as part of the federal economic stimulus program, and now Duncan seeks to include these same policies in the ESEA reauthorization. Duncan set aside nearly \$10 billion stimulus dollars—including a \$4.35 billion Race to the Top Fund and a \$3.5 billion Title I School Improvement Fund—to be distributed through competitive grants to states that would agree to revise laws and rules: to base teacher evaluation and pay more heavily on students’ test scores and reduce due process protection for teachers; intensify the test-and-punish mechanisms of No Child Left Behind; legislatively remove state laws that cap the authorization of new charter schools; and impose harsh “turnarounds” on struggling schools—closing the school and moving the students, firing the principal and a large percentage of the staff, or privatizing or charterizing the school. These policies have added to the injustices of NCLB and their inclusion in the upcoming reauthorization would make matters worse.

As Congress reauthorizes ESEA, faithful advocates should ask Congress to:

- **Address public school inequality** by allocating federal resources for equity and pressing states to close opportunity gaps.
- **Allocate Title I funds to support schools serving children in poverty through a fair formula, not a competition.** Poor children should not lose federal support because their state loses a funding competition.
- **Reduce reliance on standardized tests** and test only in ways that improve instruction, measure real performance, and encourage exploration, imagination, and critical thinking.
- **Support and improve, rather than punishing, the public schools in America’s poorest communities.**
- **Address issues outside school that affect school achievement** such as racial segregation, concentrated poverty, and the need for pre-school that helps children before they fall behind.
- **Reject market-based, technocratic policies and improve public education as the bedrock of our society and public schools as the anchors of communities.** As a people called to love our neighbors as ourselves, we must insist that Congress balances the needs of each particular child and family with the need to ensure a strong public system that secures the rights and addresses the needs of all children.

For more information, contact Jan Resseger, (216-736-3711) ressegerj@ucc.org, or see our website: <http://www.ucc.org/justice/public-education/>.

Sexuality Education: Fund Comprehensive Programs



For nearly 40 years, United Church of Christ General Synods have advocated for age-appropriate, comprehensive sexuality education. The United Church of Christ is among the pioneers in providing comprehensive, faith-based, human sexuality education in the form of the highly-regarded curriculum, *Our Whole Lives - Sexuality and Our Faith*. *Our Whole Lives* is a series of human sexuality education programs for four age groups: grades K-1, grades 4-6, grades 7-9, and grades 10-12. Based upon the values of self-worth, sexual health, responsibility, justice and inclusivity, the programs provide accurate information

for parents, teachers and pastors to help children and young people learn about human sexuality in the affirming and supportive settings of our churches. These programs help participants make informed and responsible decisions about their sexual health and behavior. Comprehensive sexuality education provides more than facts about anatomy and human development. It also helps participants to clarify values, improve interpersonal skills, and understand the spiritual, emotional, social and political aspects of sexuality, including the relationship between sexuality and faith.

In contrast, from 1996-2009, 1.5 billion federal tax payer dollars was spent to fund abstinence-only-until-marriage programs. Strong research and evaluation shows that abstinence-only-until-marriage programs are ineffective. The definition of “abstinence-only” education conflicts with the concepts underlying effective sexuality and health education programs. In contrast, effective programs, such as *Our Whole Lives*, include information about abstinence as well as contraception and sexually transmitted disease prevention.

More hopefully, in June, 2010, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services launched the Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP), to allow states to apply for \$55 million this year in first-of-its-kind federal funding for comprehensive sex education. H.H.S. also opened applications for states to apply for \$50 million in funding to support Title V abstinence-only-until-marriage programs — programs which extensive research has proven to be ineffective. Both PREP and Title V were authorized and funded as a part of the recent health care reform package. State-by-state information can be found here: <http://siecus.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Feature.showFeature&FeatureID=1934>

For the first time in a decade and a half there is a funding stream to support comprehensive sexuality education; however, it is important to note that there also remains a funding stream for abstinence-only-until-marriage programs.

Faithful advocates should become familiar with the differences between comprehensive sexuality education and abstinence-only education. Encourage your church leadership to advocate for the incorporation of *Our Whole Lives - Sexuality and our Faith* into church programming.

If a discussion concerning sexuality education takes place in your community, the Sexuality Education and Information Council of the United States (SIECUS) has posted an excellent advocacy resource at <http://www.communityactionkit.org/>.

For more information, contact Ann Hanson (216-736-3718) hanson@ucc.org, or see our website: <http://www.ucc.org/justice/sexuality-education/>.

Violence: Support Sensible Gun Laws



In the wake of the tragic January 8, 2011 shootings in Tucson, Arizona that left 13 people wounded (including Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords) and 6 dead, the issue of regulating access to firearms and ammunition gained the attention it merits but rarely receives. Merely discussing the need for gun violence prevention, however, is not enough. It is important to take decisive action to bring an end to shootings by enacting legislation that will decrease

access to firearms and ammunition. One significant piece of legislation Congress is considering in light of the Tucson tragedy is the Large Capacity Ammunition Feeding Device Act.

Rep. Carolyn McCarthy, whose husband was killed and son severely wounded in the 1993 Long Island Railroad Massacre, has introduced this bill (HR-308) in the U.S. House of Representatives to prohibit the transfer, importation, or possession of high capacity magazines. Large capacity ammunition magazines were used in notorious shooting sprees such as occurred at Columbine, Virginia Tech, Fort Hood and Tucson, allowing the perpetrators to fire numerous rounds of bullets into the victims' bodies without even having to take time to reload.

Previously, the Federal Assault Weapons Act banned magazines with more than ten rounds of ammunition. But when Congress declined to renew the law in 2004, the ban expired. Under the Large Capacity Ammunition Feeding Device Act, it would again be illegal for any person to possess magazines containing more than ten rounds of ammunition (unless lawfully possessed before the bill went into effect), or to transfer or sell such large capacity magazines.

The Large Capacity Ammunition Feeding Device Act is moderate legislation. It exempts active and retired law enforcement and certain federal and state departments and agencies. The legislation has a reasonable chance of passing this year for several reasons. The bill is limited scope. Many people realize that large capacity ammunition is neither necessary nor appropriate for any non-military/non-law-enforcement firearm use. There has been increased media attention to the issue of gun safety following the Tucson shootings. If this legislation is to pass, however, demonstrated grassroots support will be essential. It is vital that legislators on both sides of the aisle hear from people of faith who are strongly committed to seeing this bill become law.

With that victory won, we will need to work toward more comprehensive legislation such as closing the gun show loophole. Call your Congressperson and Senators to let them know you support this common sense legislation.

For more information, contact NaKeisha Sylver Blount (202-534-1517) or (202-544-2352) sylvern@ucc.org, or see our website: <http://www.ucc.org/justice/gun-violence/>.

Women’s Rights: Reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)



The Violence Against Women Act was first introduced in Congress in 1991 by then-Senator Joe Biden. The bill was made part of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act and signed into law in September 1994 by President Bill Clinton. It was reauthorized in 2000. Building upon this law which provided funding for domestic violence crisis hotlines and battered women’s shelters, for special training for judges who hear domestic violence cases, and for expanded rape shield laws among other provisions, the Violence Against Women Act of 2005 was signed into law by President George W. Bush in 2006. VAWA reauthorized existing programs to combat domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking, and created new programs to meet the emerging needs of

communities working to prevent gender-based violence against women. It included new initiatives for programs and services for victims with disabilities, for community-based prevention programs, and for broadening VAWA service provisions to include children and teenagers.

VAWA is due for reauthorization in 2011, including federal funding for its many programs. Bipartisan support for reauthorization exists. At a June 10, 2010, hearing on VAWA conducted by the Senate Judiciary Committee, the Ranking Member of that Committee, Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-AL) said, “There has been tremendous progress made in combating violence against women.” Since enactment of VAWA in 1994, rates of non-fatal and fatal domestic violence have declined and states have passed more than 600 laws to combat these crimes. “Every dollar of Violence Against Women Act funds need to be wisely and responsibly spent,” he continued. “Let’s make sure these programs are the most effective programs to help women and children.”

For more information, contact Rev. Lois Powell (216-736-3715) powell@ucc.org. A section-by-section summary of the 2005 VAWA reauthorization can be found at: <http://www.aila.org/content/default.aspx?bc=1019|8846|18678|18208>.