



breadfortheworld
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

Testimony of the Rev. David Beckmann,
President, Bread for the World, before the
National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform

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I am David Beckmann, president of Bread for the World. We're a collective Christian voice urging our nation's leaders to end hunger at home and abroad.

I want to make a basic point about God and people in need; then talk about macroeconomic management; and finally flag two opportunities to make our government spending more efficient.

The needs of people who are hungry or in other kinds of severe trouble are sacred. When Jesus talked about how God will judge the nations, he said that our Judge will focus on what we did or didn't do for hungry people, prisoners, and other people in need.

Whatever you believe about God, we all know that we can't be good people or a good nation if we don't respond to urgent human needs.

So as you are framing your recommendations, I ask you – in the name of God – to give high priority to people in need.

The Bible doesn't say anything about macroeconomic management. But we know that jobs are super-important to poor people. The persistence of high unemployment argues for continued stimulus spending. A full-employment economy will also generate more tax revenues and, thus, reduce the deficit.

In order to increase tax revenues, our country is also going to have to increase tax rates for upper income people. Despite loud complaints about taxes, the total tax burden on Americans has gone down steadily since the 1950s.

On the spending side, we spend one-fifth of the government's budget in each of three areas – defense, Social Security, and health (mainly Medicare). Any serious program to reduce the deficit needs to reduce spending on defense and on Social Security and Medicare for upper-income people.

According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, all programs of assistance for people facing hardship amount to only 14 percent of government spending. We should insist on efficiency and results from these programs, but they can and should be protected from cuts.

Bread for the World does a lot of work on foreign aid and on food and farm policies, and we see clear opportunities to improve the efficiency of spending in both of these areas.

A broad coalition of groups that care about international development and poverty reduction are campaigning to reform foreign aid – to make it more efficient and to get more of our aid to people who really need help. I am pleased to report that the administration and both houses of Congress are now all moving toward the long overdue rewrite of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961.

U.S. farm policies are badly distorted by special interests. According to the Environmental Working Group, the federal government paid \$1 trillion in farm subsidies between 1995 and 2009, with three-quarters of the subsidies going to the top 10 percent of farms. Yet according to the Department of Agriculture, one in four U.S. children now lives in a household that runs out of food.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.