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OPINION

It's Worth Asking: What would Jesus cut?

A budget that takes aim at the poor

BY JIM WALLIS

What would Jesus cut? Several years ago, Sojourners asked that question, leading a campaign to remind our leaders in Washington that a budget is a moral document. Our faith tells us that the moral test of a society is how it treats the poor. As a country, we face difficult choices, but whether or not we defend vulnerable people should not be one of them.

As we look at the priorities outlined in the Trump Administration's 2018 budget, we know what Donald Trump would cut. His budget calls for more than \$800 billion in cuts to Medicaid, which takes away health care from about 10 million people. His budget would slash the Children's Health Insurance Program, the Social Security Disability Insurance program, Meals on Wheels, and federal funding for Habitat



for Humanity. It would worsen hunger in America by cutting SNAP (formerly food stamps) by more than 25 percent and eliminating federal funding for subsidized school lunches.

Before he began his public ministry, Jesus fasted for 40 days. When he returned to Galilee, he proclaimed in his first sermon that "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor." The word in the original language for "good news" is "evangel" from which we get the word "evangelical." So as an evangelical, I know that good news to the poor is at the core of Jesus' message.

The budget released by the Trump administration is anything but "good news" for the poor. It would be terrible news for those whom Jesus called "the least of these," the central focus in his final sermon that also calls upon "the nations" to protect the most vulnerable.

Leaders in the faith community must stand up to these deeply flawed priori-

ties, to say that the choice to protect the rich instead of the poor in the name of deficit reduction is an immoral one. Demoralizing the poor and slashing programs that benefit low-income people — while refusing to scrutinize the much larger subsidies we provide to the wealthy — is hypocritical and cruel.

Many of us, across our Christian families, believe that global health programs that save children's lives and food aid to nations about to experience famines are more important to Jesus than tax cuts for the rich.

President Trump calls for a \$43 billion increase in military funding next year, reversing the biblical instruction to beat our swords into plowshares. Instead, the proposed budget cuts would beat plowshares into more swords.

Some argue that the biblical mandate to protect the poor is meant to apply only to individuals, or to the church — not to governments. The Scriptures say otherwise. In the Old Testament, the biblical prophets consistently condemn injustice to the poor and frequently follow their

statements by requiring the king (the government) to act justly.

We as Christian individuals — and we as a nation — will be judged by our actions. We should all commit to improving the effectiveness of government programs, including those serving the poor.

But the Trump budget is not an attempt at reform; it's a heartless knife-slash to those who are struggling just to feed themselves and their families. The priorities of this budget are not consistent with Christian, Jewish, or Muslim values. They are not only bad economics, they are also bad religion; as we say in the evangelical community they are unbiblical.

It is now up to Congress to set their own priorities and to present their own budgets. It is therefore time once again to ask our elected officials — especially those who call themselves people of faith: What would Jesus cut?

Jim Wallis is president of Sojourners and author of America's Original Sin: Racism, White Privilege, and the Bridge to a New America.

Students Get the Last Word on Commencement

Give graduates a voice in choosing speaker

BY KENNETH WORLES

"Don't let complexity stop you," Bill Gates once told graduating Harvard seniors. "Be activists. Take on the big inequities. It will be one of the great experiences of your lives."

These days, college students have no trouble transforming into activists to address big inequities — including from their own commencement speakers.

Recently, over 100 Notre Dame graduates walked out of their graduation ceremony in protest of their commencement speaker, Vice President Mike Pence. The students explained that they were walking out to express solidarity with the vulnerable communities targeted by Pence's harmful policies as Indiana governor.

Two weeks before, students at Bethune-Cookman University booed and turned their backs on Education Secretary Betsy DeVos as she gave their commencement speech, in protest of her policies on public education.

Some people complained that the students simply didn't want to hear "challenging" views from

speakers they disagreed with — or even somehow violated the free speech of the powerful people speaking to them, simply by speaking back.

But commencement isn't the classroom, where graduating students have spent years being challenged by all kinds of views. Giv-



Celebrating academic achievement means putting the achievers — and their values — first.

ing a commencement speech is a privilege. It lends speakers the prestige of the colleges they speak at. For that reason, students at institutions of higher learning should have a much greater voice in choosing their own commencement speaker.

The way it is now, after four or more years of hard work, thousands of dollars invested, and countless hours spent studying and building a vibrant campus culture, these students get no input in deciding who speaks on what many call the biggest day of their lives.

So now, many are demanding that right.

During the same week of the DeVos speech, Texas Southern University removed Republican Sen. James Cornyn as its commencement speaker after a petition circulated on Change.org with almost a thousand signatures from students demanding someone else.

Perhaps looking to prevent a similar scene from the one at Bethune-Cookman, the school said it had asked Cornyn to visit "another time," in part "to ensure

email survey of suggested speakers — a list jointly developed by the Student Government Association and administrators.


In New Orleans, graduating students at Dillard University are able to submit a list of 10 personalities to speak at their graduation.

More than ever, we should push

for all institutions of higher learning to implement processes like these. If their voices aren't heard before commencement, students will continue to make sure they're heard on graduation day itself.

Kenneth Worles is the Newman Fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies.

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