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NETWORK Encouraged by President's Budget, Disheartened by Congressional Response
Working collaboratively should be at the heart of "regular order"

Washington, D.C. – When Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and House Speaker Paul Ryan started this year with a promise of operating in “regular order,” NETWORK – social justice advocates inspired by Catholic sisters – was encouraged by their commitment to work across the aisle to pass meaningful legislation in 2016. Specifically related to budget and appropriations, they said they would put out budget proposals on time, begin hearings and floor action on appropriations early, and bring each appropriations bill to a vote. This is a lofty goal that is desperately needed, and it has not happened in some twenty years.

We at NETWORK find this promise of regular order to be short-lived. Sister Marge Clark, BVM, NETWORK Budget Lobbyist explained, “This year, when regular order hit the ground, it was crushed! The crush was an unprecedented breach of protocol in which leaders of both House and Senate Budget Committees announced that they would not permit a presentation on the President’s budget by the Administration staff that produced it. The reason? Senator Enzi (R-WY), Senate Budget Chair, stated that he knew the President would not agree with Republican priorities, and for partisan reasons neither House nor Senate would hold hearings.” This partisan divide and disregard of regular order occurred even before the President presented his budget, and it discards a tradition of cooperation between the branches of government that has been in practice since 1921.

Sister Marge continued, “How can there be any regular order if there is no spirit of working collaboratively? This is unacceptable. So much for the promise of regular order!”

The President’s budget is a substantive document based on research, economic calculations, and discussions with agencies, legislators, and experts in relevant fields to determine what is needed in service of the American people. It is discouraging that the House and the Senate leaders have dismissed the President’s budget before even seeing it, much less examining it.

NETWORK finds much to support in President Obama’s proposed budget. The Administration focuses on funding priorities for the American people – and does it without exceeding the bipartisan Balanced Budget Agreement caps agreed to last year. The Administration is proposing responsible ways to increase revenue to fund these much needed programs. Many of these proposals, if implemented, would help to mend the income and access gaps in our nation.

NETWORK commends President Obama for the following proposals, and encourages Speaker Ryan and Senator McConnell to address these proposals right away:

1. Tax policies that bring about a more just funding of the federal government:
 - Expanding the Earned Income Tax Credit for workers without children (the only group taxed into poverty), and creating a Second Earner Tax Credit for families in which both partners work.
 - Taxing the petroleum industry by levying a \$10 tax on each barrel of crude oil in order to discourage oil consumption and investing the revenue from this tax in alternative clean energy.

- Curbing or eliminating tax protections that favor already tax-advantaged investors. Lifting these protections would raise nearly \$1 trillion over 10 years.
2. Employment policies that allow a greater sense of security in the event of an economic downturn and life changes:
 - Modernizing the Unemployment Insurance (UI) System so families facing loss of a job can be assured of re-training and wage insurance to assist during transition to a new job.
 - Ensuring that State UI programs are able to protect workers in a recession.
 - Increasing access to retirement plans and portability of retirement savings and benefits.
 3. Enhanced initiatives that help workplaces to become more family-friendly:
 - Expanding access to quality child care and increasing the duration of Head Start.
 - Raising the tax credit for families paying for child care.
 - Funding universal preschool and full-day kindergarten.
 - Expanding paid family and sick leave.
 4. Provisions that support and provide for a healthier nation:
 - Investing in the National Cancer Moonshot to eliminate cancer as we know it through further investment in ongoing research, as well as targeted investments and private sector efforts from industry and philanthropy.
 - Expanding the reach of the Affordable Care Act.
 - Reducing child hunger through a permanent Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer for Children (Summer EBT) program to ensure all families with children eligible for free and reduced price school meals receive food benefits in the summer months
 - Addressing nutrition needs through an initiative of competitive research grants, cross-department initiatives and renovation of vital infrastructure.
 - Expanding access to mental health treatment and addressing the prescription drug and heroin overdose epidemic.
 5. Housing initiatives that focus on decreasing homelessness among women and families, utilizing the model created to reduce veteran homelessness that resulted in a 36% reduction since 2010.

While there is much to celebrate, NETWORK is concerned that President Obama's budget proposal continues to focus on military build up to solve global problems where the actual solutions are diplomatic. This is particularly true for the increased funding of U.S. military presence in Europe to counter Russia's interest in regional control.

NETWORK is disheartened that legislators are unwilling to even consider the President's budget, which places the needs of families and communities at the center of policy. Partisan divisions are undermining Republican promises. The result is that the nation suffers. We at NETWORK challenge congressional leadership to place the future of the nation and all people at the core of their funding initiatives. This is what it means to govern, and we urge Congress to take their responsibility seriously, even in an election year.

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NETWORK, a national Catholic Social Justice lobby, which educates, organizes, and lobbies for economic and social transformation, has a more than 40-year track record of lobbying for critical federal programs that support those at the margins and prioritize the common good.