

Federal Policies Caused the Gaps: Looking Back Helps Us Move Forward



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NETWORK BOARD SEEKING NOMINATIONS THIS SUMMER

NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice is seeking two new Board members to join the Board in 2017. Specifically, we are looking for individuals who would bring finance and/or development/fundraising experience to the Board. Watch your mail in August to learn how you can help raise names of people to serve on the Board. We rely on our membership to build a Board that reflects our Spirit-filled network and we hope you will consider joining in our name-raising process.

ON THE COVER

Residents of Kansas City, Missouri show their support for new proposed regulations on Payday Lending from the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB). Photo courtesy of Alice Kitchen.

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Achieving a Vision of Our Society that Radically Cares for All

Inspired by the Possibilities of Mending the Gaps, NETWORK Imagines the Future

BY SISTER SIMONE CAMPBELL

I have met so many people who are struggling with the consequences of income and wealth disparity as well as gaps in access. The anguish of their situations brings tears to my eyes. In Missouri, Cathy's unemployed brother died because he did not have healthcare coverage and the state has not expanded Medicaid to include childless adults. I have met workers at Walmart who work at federal minimum wage and use "food stamps" and other safety net benefits to survive.

Yet Speaker Paul Ryan persists in his analysis that the "safety net" is used only by those who are lazy and unemployed. I have met Allane who lives in a homeless shelter sometimes (and outside when the shelter is full) because her Supplemental Security Income check is insufficient to allow her to pay rent in the pricey Seattle area. These are but a few who suffer in the economic gaps in our society.

Yet, among this heartbreak, there is good news. The good news is that these divides have been created by our policies and with enough resolve we can create new policies that will mend the gaps. This reality is at the heart of NETWORK's 2020 Vision. We the People can mend the gaping holes in our society. It won't be easy, but it is possible.

This requires a spiritual practice of working together for a vision of our society that is based in the community of the 100%. This spiritual practice includes holding Speaker Ryan—yes, even Speaker Ryan—in our care and acknowledging that he at least noticed that these gaps exist. It also means holding in our care Cathy and her brother, as well as Allane and all the others who suffer from our failed policies. This "both/and" spiritual practice is necessary if we are to create policies that bring us together and do not tear more holes in the fabric of our society.

But holding the 100% in our care is only one half of the spiritual practice. The second part is articulating and working for a vision of our society where all have a place. Fighting for this vision requires a fixed determination and tenacity to do this work over the long haul. It took about 35 years to arrive at our current broken reality in the United States; it will take at least that long to mend our society. But we need to start now to create policies that bring us back to who we are called to be as a nation and world.

In the last issue of *Connection* we examined why we have to have two lenses for our 44-year-old eyes. We concluded that the impact of policies on women and the complexities of race have to be the key to our understanding. We must, therefore, understand the history of how we got here in order to begin to

undo the financial inequality and lack of access that exists in the United States today.

In this issue we examine this history in order to change for the future. Some want to say it is the globalization of the market that has caused wages to be flat. But this is not true. If that was the case, and there really was not enough money, then CEOs would not have seen such a dramatic increase in salaries and benefits. The fact is that we made choices that preferred large salaries for top management while workers struggled. Globalization has an impact, but it alone cannot be blamed for this. There are enough resources to go around... if we share.

Join us in examining the roots of our current toxic system. Let this stir our hearts for the challenging spiritual work of radically caring for all and fighting for a vision of our society where all can be included. Perhaps this will be the fire of Pentecost in our time. ☀️



Notable Quotables

What justice-seekers have been saying this quarter

"Find a new way forward to reweave the fabric of our society. This is not a time for business as usual."

Sister Simone Campbell addressing the DNC Platform Drafting Committee about their task of creating a national party platform

"@SpeakerRyan's poverty plan blames unwillingness to work and laziness as reasons for poverty."

@NETWORKLobby Tweet after Speaker Paul Ryan unveiled his "Better Way to Fight Poverty" plan

"We pray for workers to get protections that let live in dignity! \$15 & a union!" #Jan16

@GoodJobsNation Tweet during a Just Advocacy Week lunchtime action with workers in the Senate Cafeteria

"It really is a part of the Church's teaching to support families. And I thought we should have policies that mirrored what we believe."

Chicago Archbishop Blase Cupich in an interview with NPR about the diocese's new Paid Family Leave policy

"I am experiencing a personal political freedom that I haven't felt in years. At age 71, I am a 'Pope Francis voter'."

Joe Severa, writing to NETWORK after reading Sister Simone's Op-Ed in the Philadelphia Enquirer

"For too long, we have underestimated the role that housing plays as a foundation for upward mobility."

Rick Lazio, former Republican member of Congress, in an Op-Ed published in The Hill

"#Protip: When nuns say your legislation hurts hungry kids... it's probably a bad call."

@AngRSchafer (Angela R Schafer) Tweet in reaction to the Child Nutrition Reauthorization bill

"America is not America without Muslims."

Letter of support to the Muslim community written by Auburn Senior Fellows, including Sister Simone Campbell

"I accept. It seems useful to me to have a commission that would clarify this well."

Pope Francis agreeing to study the possibility of allowing women to serve as deacons in the Catholic Church

"This is what a feminist looks like."

President Obama referring to himself during his speech at the United State of Women Summit

"The stories were painful to listen to as they told of loss of income to pay the rent, purchase medications, pay for transportation, feed their family and maintain their housing."

Alice Kitchen, NETWORK Board Member, in a guest blog about Payday Lending

"We honor Dr. King's legacy by standing in solidarity with low-wage federal contract workers who struggle to feed, clothe and shelter themselves."

Rev. Dr. J. Herbert Nelson, director of the Office of Public Witness for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) calling for support for living wages

Federal Policies Caused the Gaps: Looking Back Helps Us Move Forward

NETWORK lobbyists, Catholic sisters, justice-seekers, and those living on the margins have experienced the same reality over the past 40 years: federal policies are leaving people out or pushing them to the side. The economic and social divides in our nation have grown so wide that it is difficult to know who our neighbors are and many no longer believe in the inclusive meaning of “We the People.” Both data and policy analysis back up our assertion that there were federal policies passed (or left unpassed) during the past few decades that caused irreparable damage to communities and to our nation as a whole. The good news is that if policies got us into this mess, we believe policies can help get us out of it. Below, we explore some of those policy areas where unsuccessful policies contributed to the various gaps we are now experiencing.

The Federal Tax Code

This article and corresponding graphs are excerpts from “How Federal Tax Policy Changes Have Affected and Will Affect Income Inequality,” created by the Center for American Progress (www.americanprogress.org).

Since the late 1970s there have been many changes to the federal tax code. Some of those changes have been progressive, asking those at the top of the income pyramid to pay more or those in the middle and bottom to pay less. And some have been regressive changes, mostly in the form of large tax cuts that disproportionately benefit the rich. Not surprisingly, fluctuations in the effect of the federal tax system on income inequality track very closely to major policy changes in the federal tax code.

1979 to 1986

In 1979, before federal taxes the richest 1 percent claimed 9.3 percent of all pre-tax income. That year federal taxation reduced the Gini index [a measure of economic inequality] by 11 percent to 0.367 and reduced the share of income flowing to the richest percentile by nearly a quarter to 7.5 percent. 1979 is both the first year of reliable data and the high-water mark for

income-inequality reduction through the federal tax code.

In the early 1980s President Ronald Reagan spearheaded major tax cuts that primarily benefited those with higher incomes. The total federal effective tax rate for a household in the richest 1 percent declined from 37 percent in 1979 to less than 26 percent by 1986. Tax rates for everyone else barely moved at all. For those in the middle 20 percent of income, the effective federal tax rate in 1979 was 18.6 percent. Seven years later it was 18 percent. And taxes actually went up for households in the bottom 40 percent of income earners. The result was a tax code that asked far less from the rich—even as it asked the same or more from everyone else.

Consequently, the effect of the federal tax system on income inequality dropped sharply. Whereas in 1979 the after-tax income distribution was 11 percent more equitable than the pre-tax income distribution, in 1986 after-tax income was just 5 percent more equitable than pre-tax income. And whereas in 1979 the after-tax share of income claimed by the richest percentile was 24 percent below its pre-tax share, in 1986 the richest percentile's share of post-tax income was just 6 percent low-

Minimum Wage

The declining value of work during the past half century is the result of conscious public policy choices. With public support, the federal minimum wage has been adjusted 22 times since it was first instituted in 1938 (U.S. Dept. of Labor). During the 1980s, 1990s, and the Great Recession, federal legislation failed to raise the minimum wage to an amount that neared the purchasing power of earlier decades. The most damaging period was between 1981 and 1990 when the federal minimum wage was not adjusted once and quickly declined in inflation-adjusted value.

Today, a full-time worker making the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour earns a pre-tax salary of \$15,080. The federal poverty threshold in 2015 for a single person was \$11,770 per year, and for a family of four it was \$24,250. Instead of valuing work and providing for families, the decline in value of the minimum wage has contributed to widening inequality in our nation over the past three decades.

Family-Friendly Workplace Policies

Federal policies have not kept up with the reality of today's families, which are now much less likely to have a full-time, stay-at-home caregiver. The United States is the only high-income country without a paid maternity leave policy, the only highly competitive country that does not guarantee paid medical leave for serious illness, and the only one that does not mandate paid sick leave. Moreover, the less money you make, the more likely you are not to have paid sick days or paid family and medical leave.

According to Heather Boushey, Executive Director of the Washington Center for Equitable Growth, in 1963, the President's Commission on the Status of Women recommended federal "paid maternity leave or comparable insurance benefits" and in 1971 Congress passed a bill that would have created a national network of federally-funded child care centers. Neither one ever became law, however, and our policies have continuously failed to adequately respond to the changing workforce ever since then.

er than its share of pre-tax income. If 1979 was the high-water mark for the tax code's effect on income inequality, 1986 was the low point. (see Figure 4)

1986 Tax Reform

In 1986 Congress passed and President Reagan signed a comprehensive tax reform package that temporarily boosted the power of the federal tax system to reduce income inequality. The 1986 reforms lowered the top marginal tax rate but also removed or reformed a host of provisions that allowed rich households to reduce their tax bills, and raised the tax rate on investment income. The combined effect was an increase in the effective tax rate for the richest 1 percent from 25.5 percent in 1986 to 31.2 percent in 1987, and small tax cuts for the bottom 60 percent of households.

With the rich paying more and the middle and poor paying less, the after-tax distribution of income was substantially more equitable than it had been before the tax reform. In 1986, before the reform was implemented, federal taxes reduced the Gini index by 5 percent. In 1987, after reform, federal taxes reduced the Gini score by 7 percent. The following years saw

a slow erosion of the tax code's impact on inequality and by 1990 the tax code was bringing down the Gini index by about 6 percent—lower than the 7 percent reduction in 1987 but still higher than the 5 percent reduction in 1986.

Tax Hikes of the Early 1990s

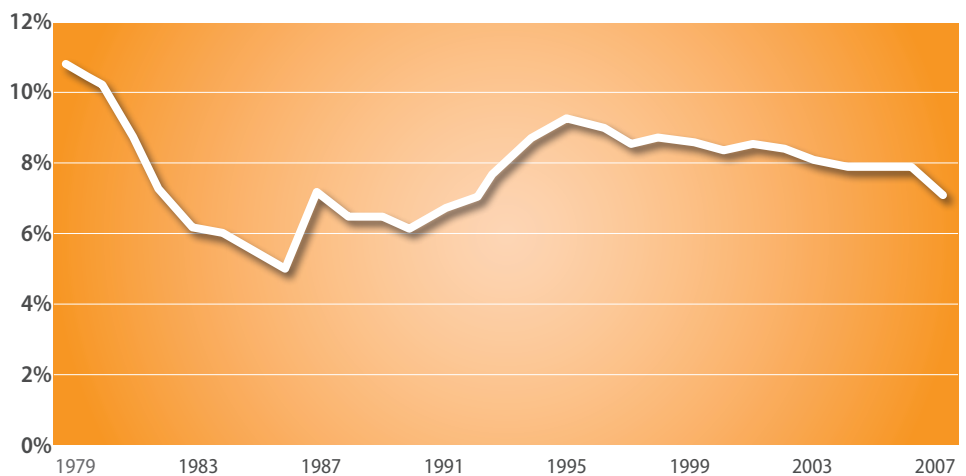
In the first years of the 1990s, President George H.W. Bush and then President Bill Clinton signed major federal deficit-reduction packages into law. Both packages included tax increases, and one important component of each was an increase in the top marginal income tax rate. The Clinton tax increase also included additional Medicare taxes for higher-income individuals. Both packages served to boost the impact of the tax code on inequality. From 1990 to 1995 the reduction in inequality, as measured by the Gini index, grew from 6 percent to 8.5 percent.

The other measures of income inequality actually show an even more marked change, especially after the 1993 tax increases. In 1992 the average before-tax income for someone in the top 1 percent was nearly 15.5 times greater than the average before-tax income for some-

FIGURE 4 | The tax code is doing less to reduce inequality than it once did.

Percent reduction in income inequality from federal taxation, as measured by the Gini index

Source: Author's calculations based on Congressional Budget Office data



one in the middle 20 percent, but was 13 times greater after federal taxation. In other words, using this measure, the 1992 tax code reduced inequality relative to the pre-tax distribution by about 19 percent. Two years later the tax code reduced inequality, using the same measure, by almost 29 percent. In fact if we measure inequality based on average income of the top 1 percent versus the middle, then federal taxes in 1995 and 1996 actually reduced income inequality just as much as the taxes of 1979. (see Figure 5)

Tax Cuts Return

In 1997 President Clinton signed another budget package, but this one included a tax cut, not a tax hike. The major component of this tax cut was a reduction in rates for capital gains, or the income earned from investments as opposed to salaries. Though it also included some tax cuts for people in the middle and at the bottom of the income spectrum, the overall tax cut was regressive, meaning richer households benefited more than those poorer than them. Four years later, President George W. Bush enacted a much

larger package of regressive tax cuts, and then did so again in 2003.

The combined effect of all these tax cuts was a steady reduction in taxes paid by the richest households. In 1996 the richest 1 percent of households paid an average effective federal tax rate of 36 percent. By 2001 that rate was down to 32.8 percent, and by 2007 it was down to 29.5 percent.

Predictably, as the tax rate for the rich dwindled, so too did the impact of the federal tax system on after-tax income inequality. Whereas in 1996, federal taxes reduced the Gini index by 9 percent, by 2007 that reduction was down to just more than 7 percent. The other measures of income inequality show a similar decline in effectiveness.

The Critical Importance of the Effective Tax Rate for Rich Households

Examining three decades' worth of tax law changes and the attendant consequences for the tax system's relationship to income inequality reveals something striking: The one thing that matters most in determining how effective the tax code



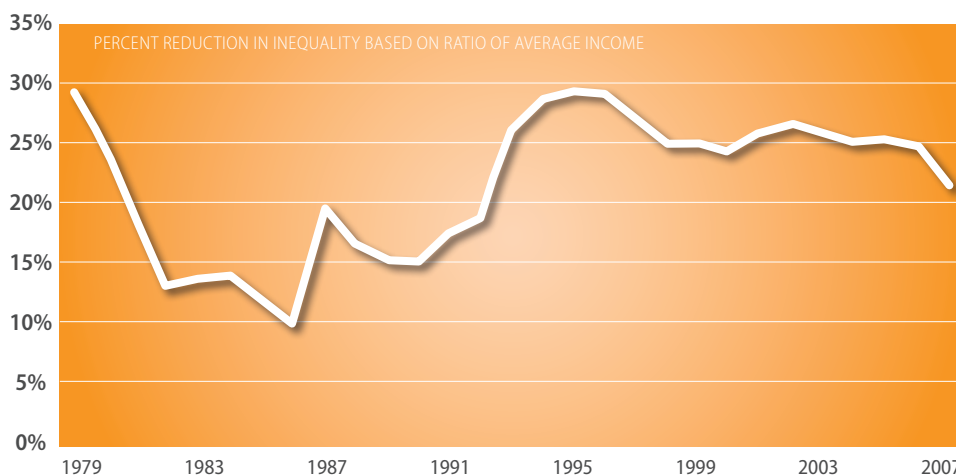
College students visited their members of Congress in Washington, D.C. during Just Advocacy Week in June. Their message?

“Current minimum wage earnings do not allow workers to provide for themselves and their families, enjoy the fruits of their labor, or engage in the social and political life of their community. The economy must exist in service to the people; people should not be trapped in service to the economy.”

FIGURE 5 | 1993 tax increases reduced income inequality

Percent reduction in income inequality from federal taxation, as measured by the ratio of average incomes for the top 1 percent to the middle 20 percent

Source: Author's calculations based on Congressional Budget Office data



Federal “Safety Net” Assistance

The federal government began granting states more flexibility in how they provided cash assistance to low-income families in the 1980s and 1990s through the increased use of state waivers. In 1996, “Welfare Reform” legislation made independent state control of these funds into law with the creation of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

According to Peter Germanis, a conservative policy advisor who worked on welfare issues for the Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute, and both President Reagan and President George H.W. Bush, “There are more families with children in poverty today [in 2015] than when TANF was created. (The same is true of other related measures – the number of families with children in deep poverty and the number of families eligible for TANF cash assistance.) Yet, since 1994, the caseload has steadily declined – in good times and bad.” Both the state waivers and TANF’s block grant structure created incentives for states to deny benefits to families through various limits and regulations, and save the unused funds instead for their state budgetary needs instead of mending the gaps in our society.

will be at reducing income inequality is the effective tax rate for the richest 1 percent of households.

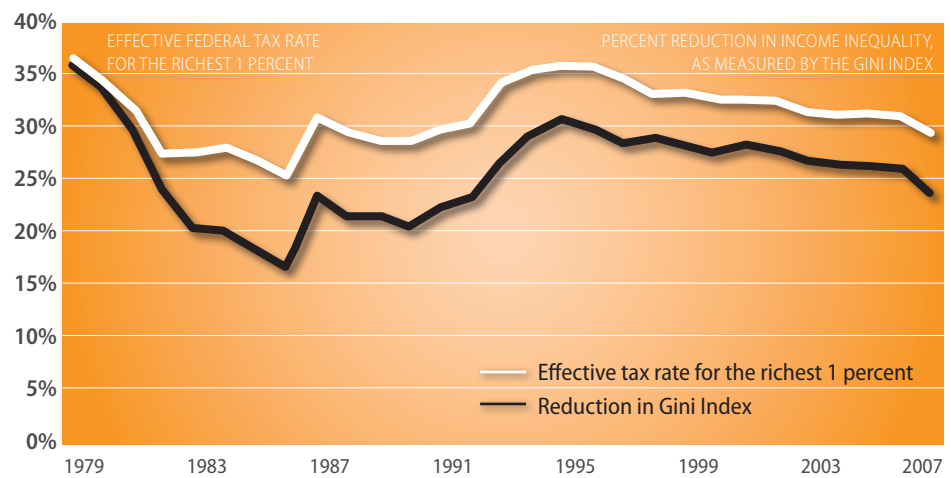
Figure 6 compares the effective tax rate for the richest 1 percent of households since 1979 and the tax system’s impact on inequality, as measured by the reduction in Gini scores, over the same time period. Mathematically, the two lines have a 92 percent correlation. In other words, when the effective tax rate for the rich goes up, so does the impact the tax code has on inequality, and vice versa. Looking at Figure 6, this relationship is immediately obvious.

By contrast, another supposed metric of “progressivity,” the share of taxes paid by

the rich, has no relationship whatsoever to the tax code’s impact on income inequality. Over the past three decades, the share of federal taxes paid by the richest 1 percent has consistently risen, while the impact of the federal tax code on inequality has fluctuated up and down. Some have suggested that this rise in the share of taxes paid by the rich proves the tax code has become more progressive. But of course the rise in share of taxes paid by the rich precisely mirrors the rise share of income going to the rich. Far from being a measure of progressivity, the share of taxes paid by the rich is actually an indirect measure of income inequality.

FIGURE 6 | As the effective rate for the rich goes up, so does the tax code's impact on inequality
Federal effective tax rate for the richest 1 percent; percent reduction in income inequality from federal taxation, as measured by the Gini Index

Source: Author's calculations based on Congressional Budget Office data



Learn More

NETWORK's policy proposals to mend the gaps are available to read online at

www.networklobby.org/issues





Appalachia Demonstrates a Path of Dialogue and Hope

The verses on the right come from *The Telling Takes Us Home: Taking Our Place in the Stories that Shape Us*, the People's Pastoral written by the Catholic Committee of Appalachia (CCA). The CCA has gone through a remarkable journey since its founding in 1970 to the publication of this, its third pastoral last year. Much has shifted and evolved over the past 46 years from institutional Church support to new social and environmental concerns, but the core of the CCA has remained consistent: being in dialogue with the people of Appalachia. In the three pastorals the CCA has written and in their advocacy, the members of CCA utilize a pastoral process that starts with listening.

During the last Nuns on the Bus trip while in West Virginia, NETWORK met and learned from members of the Catholic Committee of Appalachia and other community members living in the region. The sisters visited gardens and greenhouses that had previously been parking lots, and heard about ways residents were coming together to solve problems in their communities. In these encounters and many, many more across the country we seek to listen first, then analyze and reflect before responding. This is the process that informed the creation of our 2020 Vision, with its two lenses of race and impact on women.

In writing the People's Pastoral, the CCA heard stories from residents of mountain communities, working people, people who are homeless, women, youth, people of color, native people, women religious, LGBTQ people, activists, people who have left the church, and more. While the People's Pastoral is a prophetic call toward greater justice, peace, and wholeness for Appalachia, it is also a model for our country to listen and learn from one another and envision our future together.

More information and the pastoral itself can be found on Catholic Committee of Appalachia's website: www.ccappal.org/peoplespastoral.

The word "activism" is often met with suspicion in the church and in Appalachia. For many Christians, activism seems unrelated to, and even contrary to, the spiritual life. For many Appalachians, activists are seen as outsiders and "do-gooders" who have little relationship with the people or their communities.

But for others, activism, faith, and Appalachia are all a part of what it means to follow the Spirit in this place. We believe that Jesus showed us that life in the Spirit must be incarnate in our bodies and in our world. We believe that we are called to be the Body of Christ in the world and participants in God's action in history.

— *The Telling Takes Us Home*, 2015, p. 50



Michigan Advocates Take Action on Child Nutrition Reauthorization

BY ED WELCH

The East Lansing (E.L.) Catholics Network formed as a NETWORK Grassroots Advocates Team in the fall of 2014. We have grown and learned how to be effective advocates over the last couple of years, including hosting a visit from Sister Simone to East Lansing last fall. Recently, NETWORK suggested focusing our advocacy on Child Nutrition Reauthorization (CNR), as legislation on school lunches, WIC

and other child nutrition programs is due for renewal by Congress. Food for hungry children, of course, fit very appropriately within the principles of Catholic Social Justice that we had been reading and praying about.

Meg Olson, NETWORK Grassroots Organizer, and other members of the NETWORK staff offered their support to us. Most of our team members are represented by Congressman Mike Bishop

(MI-08), so we concentrated our attention on him. Rep. Bishop is a member of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, the committee responsible for Child Nutrition Reauthorization, so it was important to have constituents lobbying him on this issue since he is in a position to shape the legislation.

We had already established a relationship with a member of Rep. Bishop's local staff and had one face-to-face meet-

Act with the Michigan Advocates Team!

To contact your members of Congress about Child Nutrition Reauthorization and other current issues, visit the NETWORK Action Center at www.networklobby.org/actnow



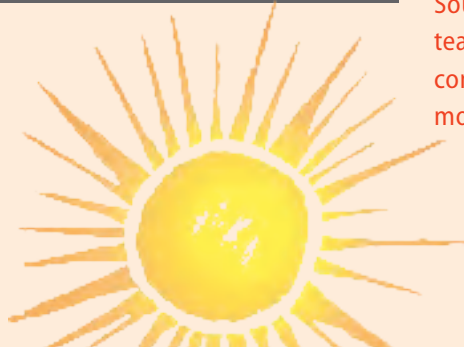
The South Carolina Grassroots Advocates team meeting with Rep. Mick Mulvaney (SC-05).

What is a Grassroots Advocates Team?

NETWORK Grassroots Advocates Teams are communities of spirit-filled justice seekers who come together to advocate for NETWORK's policy priorities, exercise their leadership skills, and strengthen relationships with people across their region who share their values. The teams participate in community-building activities together and lobby their elected officials, while receiving training and other resources from NETWORK staff.

Interested in learning more?

NETWORK currently has Grassroots Advocates Teams in South Carolina, Michigan, and Indiana. To connect with a team or learn how to start one in your own state, please contact Meg Olson, NETWORK's Grassroots Organizer at molson@networklobby.org.





ing with the Congressman. We requested another meeting with Rep. Bishop. We were told that this would be very difficult, but we persisted and eventually he agreed to a meeting.

We organized a group of four Team members and prepared carefully for our meeting. During the meeting, we were able to demonstrate our knowledge of the issue, talk about how our faith motivated us on this topic, and share personal stories about how essential these programs are to the health of children in our area. Rep. Bishop listened politely and expressed his concerns for the needs of children, but he did not make any commitments.

While doing our research on this issue, we learned that a substantial number of children in Lansing Diocese Catho-

lic schools receive free or reduced price lunches through federal programs included in the Child Nutrition Reauthorization. We asked Catholic school principals to write letters describing how these programs met their students' needs and sent them to the staff members who work on nutrition programs for Rep. Bishop and Rep. Tim Walberg (MI-09).

Unfortunately, when it came time to vote on a CNR bill in committee, both of our representatives—Rep. Bishop and Rep. Walberg—voted for a bill that, rather than expanding and extending these programs, actually restricts them. Our team members sent emails to their representatives expressing their disappointment in this vote. After that, our next step was writing a piece directly calling on Rep. Bishop to change his vote on the

bill for our local paper, the *Lansing State Journal*. The Op-Ed (see below) was published on June 17.

We may not have gotten our members of Congress to vote in a specific way on this issue yet, but it is clear that we have their attention and they know they have a significant number of constituents who are following their votes closely. We will continue to work on Child Nutrition Reauthorization and similar issues and pray that we can make a difference in the long run.

Ed Welch is a member of the E. L. Catholics Network. Contact him at welche@msu.edu



Op-Ed: School Lunch Program at Risk and Congressman Mike Bishop Can Help

BY CHERIE MOLLISON, MEMBER OF THE E.L. CATHOLICS NETWORK

For nearly half a century, the only fights about school lunch took place in cafeterias across the country with kids wielding fish sticks and chocolate pudding as weapons. Otherwise, in the fifty years since the Child Nutrition Act was signed into law, there was bipartisan consensus that as a nation, we should make every effort to ensure children from food insecure households and communities had enough to eat.

Today, that consensus is unravelling. Recently, the U.S. House of Representatives committee responsible for school breakfast and lunch and other nutrition programs voted to make it substantially harder to feed children in our communities. Sadly, our Congressman Mike Bishop, joined them, and the bill appears likely to pass.

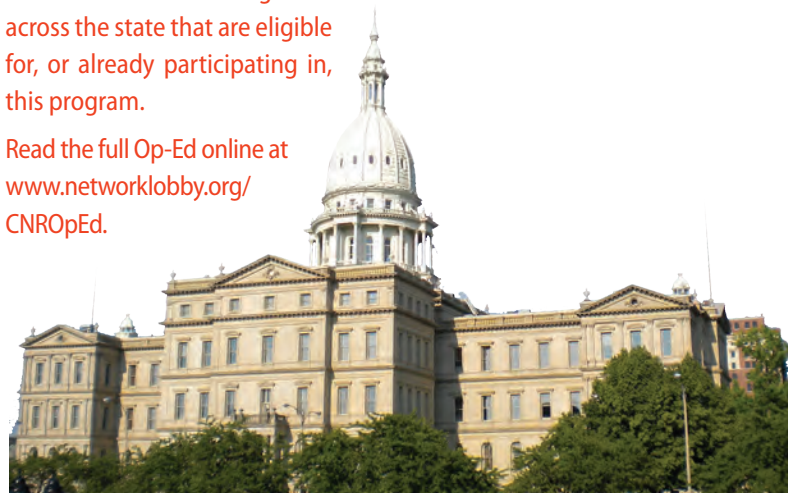
Congressman Bishop voted yes on the so-called Improving Child Nutrition and Education Act of 2016 (H.R. 5003); a dangerous piece of legislation both because of the immediate cuts it makes to the critical programs that help to feed children, and for the clear message it sends about Congress' future plans to undo our social safety net.

Of immediate concern is a provision that reduces the number of schools allowed to provide meals at absolutely no charge to students. Currently, schools can provide free meals to all students if 40

percent of the student body is automatically eligible. The new bill would raise that threshold to 60 percent.

This means that 7,000 schools nationwide, which have been providing free meals to 3.4 million children, will no longer be eligible to serve all students. Michigan has more than 500 schools in counties across the state that are eligible for, or already participating in, this program.

Read the full Op-Ed online at www.networklobby.org/CNROpEd.



Michigan State Capitol Building in Lansing, MI. Photo by Bryan Robb.

Sister Sharon and the Interfaith Welcome Coalition

A Model of Hospitality

Sister Sharon Altendorf, a sister of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary (PBVM), has been dedicated to accompanying and advocating for immigrant families for decades. She currently serves as the Justice Coordinator for her province, and works with the Interfaith Welcome Coalition (IWC) in San Antonio, Texas. Sister Sharon had recently returned from accompanying two women and their children who had just been released from a family detention center to the airport when she spoke with *Connection* about the coalition's work and the collaboration that makes it possible.

The Interfaith Welcome Coalition, she said, was started in 2014 by the Presbyterian Disaster Relief organization. The list of organizations she named that are now involved with the group's activities is extensive, and includes: RAICES, Texas Impact, NOWCastSA, COPS/Metro Alliance, Catholic Charities, Mennonite, Presbyterian, and Methodist faith communities and more. She and other members of the coalition coordinate visits to some of the largest family detention centers in the country in Karnes City, Dilley, and Pearsall, Texas.

The coalition also houses and assists with transportation for individuals and families after they are released from these detention centers. If not for the IWC members, newly released immigrants would be dropped off at the San Antonio bus station without any assistance or comfort as they travel on to new cities. She noted the difference it makes for someone to have a good night of sleep and a change of clothes before boarding a bus or plane to a new city and how stressful it is for women and families to be traveling by themselves in a country where they may not know the language.

During her 11 months of accompanying two women in the Karnes City detention center, Sister Sharon witnessed many of the hardships that women and children who were detained there experience. When the Karnes City and Dilley family detention centers were applying for childcare licenses from the state of Texas, Sister Sharon spoke out. She cited the military culture inside the detention center and the damaging psychological effects of detention on children and mothers.

She has seen children refuse to eat for months, forget how to play with toys, and even require suicide watch while inside the detention centers. The lack of medical at-



Sister Sharon accompanies a family at the bus station.
Photo by Molly Hennessy-Fiske / Los Angeles Times

tention, unsafe food, and prison-like conditions were a direct denial of the women and children's human dignity. Sister Sharon ended her testimony with a strong message, "We're better than this. Don't lessen the rights of these children. They deserve the rights of any child, even if they're not citizens."

Before her time in San Antonio, Sister Sharon served the International Presentation Association at the United Nations as an NGO representative. When asked to compare the experience of advocating for refugees and immigrants worldwide with her ministry at the U.S.-Mexico border, she said, "It's not much different, when I think about the people talking about refugees around the world. My sisters are in those places across the world, so we're all connected to say that we've got to be open to these people. We've got to welcome them. They are our brothers and sisters. There is no difference. Where is our hospitality?"

As the conversation neared its end, Sister Sharon stated that she stays in contact with her congressman, Representative Lloyd Doggett (TX-35), on immigration issues. She's lucky, she said, that her representative votes with NETWORK on most issues, but many elected officials in Texas do not. From her lifetime of working with immigrants internationally and domestically she knows, "We need comprehensive immigration reform. We do not need the detention of women and children." Like the work of the Interfaith Welcome Coalition, this is a much larger problem than any one person can solve. "The mantle is over all of us. We've got to march on together."



10 Things Speaker Ryan Could Do to Address Poverty Right Now

We welcome anyone, any time, to the conversation about how to make sure no one in the United States lives in poverty. But we strongly dispute the claim that this is a deeply complicated problem requiring a brand new agenda, such as the one that was recently presented by Speaker Paul Ryan. The fact is Congress knows, and has always known, how to end poverty. It is simply not that difficult, in the richest country the world has ever known, to create an inclusive economy where everyone has the resources to live with dignity. In fact, we could do much of it as early as tomorrow.

Toward that end, we offer Speaker Ryan, the driving force behind the Republican “anti-poverty” agenda, 10 things he could bring to the House Floor tomorrow that would actually work. This is not everything that has to be done to mend the gaps in the fabric of our society, but it’s a darn good start.

- 1. Raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour**—Even as the economic recovery has brought lower unemployment, too many people working full-time jobs (or even two or three of them) don’t make enough to get by. A study by the National Employment Law Project found that \$15/hour was the lowest wage that would still allow a single worker to meet the basic cost of living just about everywhere in the United States. Speaker Ryan could help lift thousands of workers out of poverty by passing **H.R. 3164, the Pay Workers a Living Wage Act** introduced in Congress last year.
- 2. Guarantee paid sick leave**—49% of workers in America still lack paid sick leave and are forced to choose between losing the salary they desperately need and jeopardizing their health and the health of those around them. After passing a comprehensive paid sick leave policy New York City found not only that it improved the health and financial security of workers, but also that unemployment dropped and businesses grew. The **Healthy Families Act (H.R. 932)** was introduced in Congress more than a year ago. There’s no excuse not to pass this legislation today.
- 3. Guarantee paid family leave**—In addition to ensuring that everyone has the ability to take a sick day to care for themselves or their family, we must also guarantee paid leave for

new parents and those who have to take extended time to care for a sick family member. Only 5% of workers in the lowest 25% wage category have access to paid family leave, compared to 22% of workers in the highest 10% wage category. The **FAMILY Act (H.R. 1439)**, introduced in Congress last year, builds on successful legislation passed by cities and states around the country to create an insurance program that provides workers with the family leave they need.

- 4. Expand and protect the Earned Income Tax Credit**—The **Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)** is one of our most effective anti-poverty programs. It provides tax relief to low-income workers to ensure that no one who labors to earn a basic wage is taxed back into poverty. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, the EITC helped lift 6.2 million people out of poverty in 2013. But the current law overlooks too many workers in need, including those low income workers without children and workers under 25 or over 65. Speaker Ryan himself discussed his support for addressing these gaps when he was Chairman of the House Budget Committee, now he has the means and the opportunity to make those changes today.
- 5. Expand childcare subsidies**—The high cost of quality childcare takes a dramatic toll on low-income families across the country. A report from the Economic Policy Institute found

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that in every state, quality childcare cost more than 30% of a minimum-wage worker's earnings. Access to high quality childcare allows parents to support their families and better prepares children to learn and grow into healthy adults. We shouldn't ask people to choose between their kids and their paychecks—**H.R. 4524, the Child CARE Act**, is one way that Speaker Ryan could solve that problem.

6. Ban the box—It's no secret that admitting to having a criminal record is the kiss of death for job applicants. Conviction records are likely to reduce the prospect of a job offer or interview by almost 50%. There are currently 70 million people in America with arrest or conviction records, we are only just beginning to realize the massive economic implications of discriminating against the people who are reentering society and the workforce. Passing the **Fair Chance Act (H.R. 3470)** would allow people seeking to reenter the workforce the opportunity to apply based on merit, without facing discrimination.

7. Pass immigration reform with a path to citizenship—For the millions of people who live in the U.S. without documentation or with only temporary permission to work, finding stable employment can be nearly impossible. Many more immigrants are barred from accessing the social programs they need because of decades of anti-immigrant legislation. By allowing immigrants to come out of the shadows and fully participate in society, immigration reform would benefit individual families and our community; the CBO estimated that immigration reform would reduce our federal budget deficit by \$200 billion over ten years. **H.R. 13, the Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act**, had the votes to become law in 2014 and is a viable solution to fixing our broken immigration system. Speaker Ryan should work with his fellow members of Congress to pass real immigration reform now.

8. Expand eligibility and opportunity for low-income housing units—There is a significant shortage of affordable housing units across the country. Bipartisan legislation in the Senate rumored to be introduced in the House of Representatives (the **Affordable Housing Credit Improvement Act**) would incentivize the building and preservation of almost 1.3 million homes. Speaker Ryan can move forward with his commitment to end poverty by developing a housing plan that focuses on ensuring that everyone has a home.

9. Continue to make healthcare more affordable—The Affordable Care Act was a critical step toward making sure that all Americans can access the healthcare they need, but it stopped short of realizing the goal of universal healthcare. **H.R.3241, the State-Based Universal Health Care Act of 2015**, would allow states more flexibility and freedom to work toward universal healthcare. Speaker Ryan can move forward today to ensure that no one lives in the healthcare gap and take a powerful step toward alleviating the economic uncertainty and financial burden of families still left without health insurance.

10. Reauthorize and improve the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act—The landmark legislation that helps feed children in schools across the country has been under attack by congressional Republicans. Congress has sought to cut the number of schools eligible to feed all of their students and increase the amount of time and effort schools must put into qualifying for the program. Beyond these initial changes that will kick thousands of students out of the program, Republicans in Congress want to replace the entire program with 'block grants' that will seriously jeopardize our ability to feed children in need. Congress has an opportunity to improve child nutrition programs to feed more children who are hungry. If Speaker Ryan wants to lead on poverty, he can start by leading his party away from policies that take food from children.

As the Nuns on the Bus reminded Congressman Ryan in 2012, to implement programs that work to eliminate poverty, Congress must have the political will to raise reasonable revenue for these responsible programs. We can pay for these programs by closing tax loopholes and having the courage to fix our broken tax system. Right now, a loophole in tax law allows hedge fund managers to call a portion of their earnings a 'capital gain' instead of 'income' and that small difference costs the nation billions in tax revenue every year. The **Carried Interest Fairness Act (H.R. 2889)** is one such piece of legislation that promotes tax fairness in the United States.

Creative solutions to solving poverty are necessary, but we don't need to look far to find the answers. What if—instead of giving the billionaires another break—we took that money and used it to expand **Section 8**, the federal program that helps low-income families find affordable housing? NETWORK judges all legislation by how it would affect people experiencing poverty. If Speaker Ryan is serious about this issue, we encourage him to use the same criteria.

NETWORK—a Catholic leader in the global movement for justice and peace—educates, organizes, and lobbies for economic and social transformation.

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In early June, 16 college students from all over the country convened at the NETWORK office in Washington, D.C. for our third annual Just Advocacy Week (JAW), a week-long intensive leadership and experiential learning program centered on faith-based advocacy rooted in Catholic Social Justice principles and inspired by the example of Catholic sisters.

Through workshops and peer collaboration, JAW participants gained the skills to educate, organize, and lobby for social justice. Now, after JAW has concluded, these inspiring, committed justice seekers are bringing their experience back to their communities.



Thanks to the generous contributions of NETWORK's members like you, JAW participants are able to come to D.C. free of charge, a critical component of ensuring we can nourish activist leaders from all economic backgrounds. Your support and participation in this work is necessary for this development of our young leaders which is an integral part of NETWORK's ministry of justice. Please make a contribution today using the enclosed envelope, or at www.networklobby.org/member.



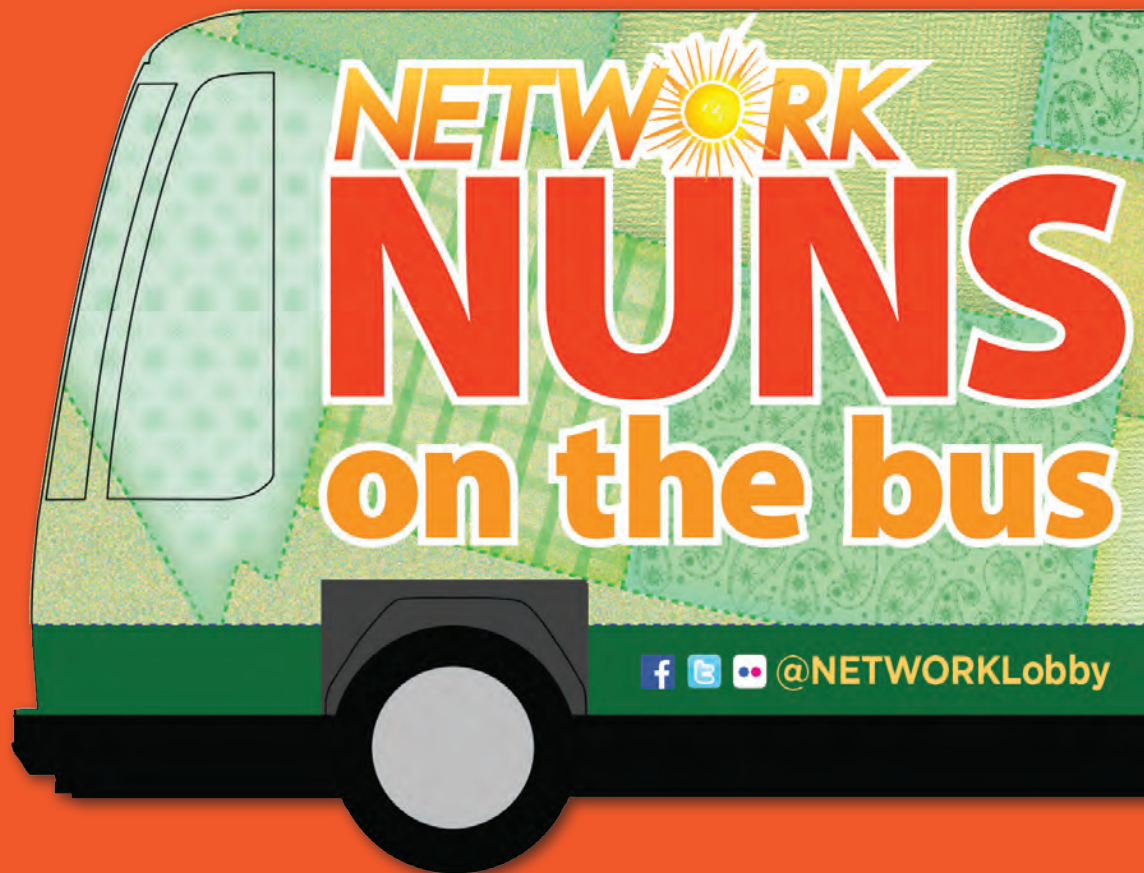
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