

Congresswoman Barbara Lee
Statement on CBC Budget Priorities
March 18, 2009
Committee on the Budget

Thank you Mr. Chairman. I'd like to thank you, Ranking Member Ryan, the staff, and the members of the Budget Committee, including Congressman Bobby Scott, for giving me the opportunity to testify today on the 2010 budget.

As the Chairwoman of the Congressional Black Caucus, I want to briefly lay out several priorities of our caucus in the areas of poverty, healthcare, justice programs, national defense, and international affairs which I believe the Committee should consider as it crafts the House budget resolution.

The fundamental point I wish to make to the committee today is that a budget is really a moral document. It should reflect our values as a nation, and what we as a community and a society hold sacred.

Particularly during these tough economic times, the budget should strive to protect and care for the least among us, even as it puts our nation on a path to economic recovery.

I'm pleased that this year, for the first time in a long time, we have a President and an administration that finally gets it, and I'm proud to support President Obama's budget.

However, we cannot underestimate the magnitude of the problem that our nation is facing.

As all of us know, the budget priorities and the policies of the last administration have quite literally left our nation in shambles.

Although the challenges that our nation faces are great, I believe that with the leadership of President Obama we can put our nation back on the right path.

Fundamentally that means addressing the issue of poverty, and funding programs that help put people back on their feet.

On Poverty

As job losses continue, we must support vital income security programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP/food stamps), and we must safeguard access to Unemployment Insurance, Medicaid, and the Recovery Act's COBRA subsidy.

The CBC also urges the Committee to consider including the necessary budget authority to account for the cost of increasing the federal minimum wage and indexing it to inflation.

In addition, the Committee should consider the cost of reforming current asset tests for economic assistance.

We ask that the committee also commit to making the expanded earned income tax credit and child tax credit in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act permanent.

Finally, the Committee should also consider the cost of redefining the Federal Poverty Level to create a "Decent Living Standard Threshold" to determine the amount of annual income that would allow families a safe and decent, but modest, standard of living.

Healthcare

The CBC supports the President's call for healthcare reform.

The CBC urges the Budget Committee to account for the cost of healthcare reform to ensure that the 45 million uninsured Americans (four million of which are children) have access to quality and affordable healthcare.

The CBC also urges that we equalize payments to Medicare Advantage and Medicare. This simple move will save \$55.9 billion over the next 5 years alone.

In addition, the CBC urges the Committee to address ongoing racial and ethnic health disparities, for example by including additional funding for initiatives to combat HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections among minority communities, including \$610 million for the Minority AIDS Initiative.

We also urge the committee to zero out funding for ineffective abstinence-only-until-marriage programs, and redirect those funds to teach comprehensive sex education, which includes abstinence. Ultimately making this shift in funding priorities will save taxpayers money.

Justice Programs

The CBC urges the Committee to account for funding efforts to combat and reduce juvenile crime and efforts to rehabilitate ex-offenders.

The CBC urges the full funding of the Second Chance Act, increased funding for the Justice Assistance Program, the Juvenile Justice Program, Civil Rights Enforcement, the COPS Program, the Byrne Justice Grant Program, and State and Local Law Enforcement Assistance.

On National Defense

The CBC supports robust funding for our troops and America's national defense.

But even as we maintain the capacity of our military and fully fund support for our returning veterans, we should eliminate the excesses of the previous Administration.

The CBC supports reducing funding for the failed Ballistic Missile Defense program and has consistently supported the work of the Government Accountability Office to weed out waste, fraud and abuse within the DOD.

The Defense Department has already saved an estimated \$89 billion between FY01 and FY07 by implementing 1,682 of the GAO's recommendations. And we urge the Committee to include direction to the Armed Services Committee supporting further action on the GAO recommendations.

International Affairs

The CBC commends the President for requesting a \$15 billion increase for the Department of State and other international programs in FY2010.

We urge the Committee to include this increase in the budget resolution to support a range of critical programs that help for example to combat global AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria, assist in peacekeeping efforts in Darfur, and fund cultural and educational exchange programs.

Closing

Let me thank the committee again for the opportunity to share the priorities of Congressional Black Caucus with you today and if

there are no objections I would like to submit a detailed list for the record.

As you can see the Congressional Black Caucus has a broad range of priorities but they share a common purpose, to safeguard our shared values and to invest in an America that will ensure opportunities and prosperity for generations to come.