



# New Congress

## POLICY BRIEF AND TALKING POINTS FOR MEETINGS WITH MEMBERS OF CONGRESS

### BACKGROUND ON GLOBAL HUNGER AND APPROPRIATIONS: SPRING 2019

#### Hunger

Unfortunately, 1 in 9 people in our world do not have enough to eat, which includes over 15.6 million households in the United States. America's economy is approaching record lows of unemployment, but the number of Americans who are food insecure continues to increase. Today, 42 million Americans suffer from food insecurity including 1 in 6 children. Those who are most vulnerable, children, disabled and elderly, continue to be the most susceptible to food insecurity.

Around the world, millions of our brothers and sisters are facing hunger due to conflict and drought. Countries like South Sudan, Nigeria, and Yemen have been mired in violence for the last several years, and there is great concern additional countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo could see violence spike, leading to more hunger. Drought continues to persist across the globe, including some parts of the Horn of Africa and Central America. According to USAID's Famine Early Warning System, which analyzes food insecurity in 46 countries, 83 million people are expected to need food assistance in 2019, up 7 million from the year before. This figure does not include the food security response needed to address more recent challenges such as helping Rohingya or Venezuelan refugees. Further, we could see severe drought affecting large portions of Latin America, Africa and Asia if an El Nino materializes later this year, as is predicted by weather experts.

Pope Francis shared these words about hunger in the world, "Let us be clear. Food shortage is not something natural, it is not a given, something obvious or self-evident. [...] The earth, abused and exploited, continues in many parts of the world to yield its fruits, offering us the best of itself. The faces of the starving remind us that we have foiled its purposes." Hunger should never be considered the norm, and international food security programs are essential elements to preventing and ending global hunger. Our Catholic faith calls us to honor the dignity of every human being. We must ensure that all people have regular access to sufficient nutritious food.

#### Appropriations

Each year, the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate negotiate how to spend U.S. taxpayer dollars through a process called appropriations. Every February, the Executive branch, which expends the money appropriated by the Legislative branch, sends a budget proposal to Congress. Of the \$4 trillion U.S. federal budget, only one-quarter, or a little over \$1 trillion is defined as *discretionary* spending, or money that Congress decides how to spend each year. The other three-quarters is *mandatory* spending, or expenditures that are permanently designated in law, such as Social Security.

After Congress receives the President's Budget Request, the House and Senate Appropriations Committees each develop their own plans for spending taxpayer dollars for the upcoming fiscal year. Each Chamber of Congress conducts hearings, accepts outside requests related to spending from constituents, drafts legislation, and debates the spending bills in Committee before voting on the legislation in the full Chamber. After each Chamber passes their own appropriations bills (there are twelve in total that fund the various agencies of the government), the House and Senate meet in conference to debate the differences between the bills. After they negotiate and come to a compromise, they pass the bills and send them to the President to sign into law. Congress is expected to complete this process before the beginning of the next fiscal year, which is at the end of September.

Historically, about 1% of total spending is appropriated to foreign assistance as part of two appropriations bills: the State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs bill, which funds the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development, and the Agriculture bill, which funds the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Half of that 1% (roughly \$25 billion) is directed toward poverty-reducing humanitarian and development aid. Through funding from the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Agency for International Development, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, organizations such as CRS partner with the U.S. government to implement programming. While foreign assistance has large bipartisan support, each of the last three years, the Administration has proposed to reduce foreign aid by 30%. Thanks to constituent voices like yours, Congress has rejected these cuts and largely maintained U.S. investments in poverty reduction programming.

## STATE OF PLAY

### What's the connection between global hunger and appropriations?

As the world's wealthiest nation and the largest provider of international humanitarian assistance, the United States plays a key role in protecting and promoting the global common good, addressing chronic causes of poverty, and responding to complex humanitarian emergencies. U.S. leadership inspires other nations and donors to give generously and sets policy agendas for alleviating poverty. CRS is a recipient of these public funds, which support key CRS programs that addresses global hunger. CRS also receives private funds, especially from Catholic Church partners and foundations, allowing us to innovate, be flexible, and scale up quickly during emergencies.

To respond to the needs of those who experience hunger and address the root causes of poverty, CRS depends on the U.S. government continuing to support robust funding for foreign assistance. Advocating with your member of Congress on appropriations is an important way to influence how the U.S. government prioritizes relief and assistance overseas. Many of the food security projects CRS implements, including Feed the Future in Ghana and Rwanda, Food for Peace in Guatemala and Ethiopia, and Emergency Food Security Programs in Nigeria and Somalia, and McGovern-Dole in Honduras and Sierra Leone come directly from U.S. government appropriations.

In 2018, Congress reauthorized key international food security programs through the Global Food Security Act and the Farm Bill. Given the current and potential international food security challenges in 2019, we ask Congress to ensure these accounts are robustly funded, as well as foreign assistance overall. Some explanations of these accounts that address hunger include:

- International Disaster Assistance, which funds cash-and voucher-based emergency food assistance programs;
- Development Assistance, which funds long-term agriculture and nutrition programs under the Feed the Future umbrella;
- Food for Peace, which funds U.S.-commodity based emergency and development programs targeting the poorest and most vulnerable populations; and
- McGovern-Dole, which funds school lunches and education improvement measures.

## TALKING POINTS

- Thank you for your time to discuss international development and humanitarian aid. *(The introduction is an opportunity to introduce CRS, particularly for new members, who you are, and that you are there to discuss global hunger and appropriations.)*
- Serving more than 130 million people in 110 countries in 2017, CRS can attest first-hand to the significant challenges communities encounter and to the impact of poverty-reducing foreign assistance. Our humanitarian work provides food, water, shelter and other life saving aid to people impacted by conflict and droughts. Our development programs work with poor and vulnerable communities to help farmers grow more food, treat and contain the spread of health challenges like malnutrition and malaria, and foster more peaceful and cooperative relations between groups. For more than 75 years, in partnership with the U.S. government and generous donors around the country, CRS has worked to bring hope, safety, and opportunity to communities.
- As committed Catholics, we believe the United States must continue to be a global leader in addressing the root causes of hunger and meeting the immediate needs of those suffering from hunger around the world. *(Share a personal story of why **you** support those experiencing hunger and Catholic Relief Services' international humanitarian and development work. Share information on CRS programs that address hunger that you may know about, but even more importantly, share about the work you do in your diocese or community to advocate on behalf of the poor and the marginalized overseas.)*
- We are pleased that Congress protected international assistance in Fiscal Year 2018 and Fiscal Year 2019 and rejected the Administration's draconian proposals to cut assistance by 30%. CRS is proud to partner with the U.S. government to provide assistance overseas.
- **As Congress develops and negotiates Fiscal Year 2020 spending, we urge you to ensure the highest funding levels possible for poverty-reducing international development and humanitarian assistance. [Share chart (to be provided by CRS) and explain that the range of poverty-reducing accounts support the poor and the vulnerable, alleviate suffering, and allow communities to thrive.]**

## QUESTIONS/COMMENTS TO RAISE

- If the Senator/Representative travels abroad, please let us know if he/she would like to visit CRS programming. As you know, we are in 110 countries around the world and would welcome an opportunity to show the Senator/Representative the impact U.S. dollars have on the ground.
- Encourage the Senator/Representative to see CRS and your group as a resource in Washington, DC and in the state/district.
- Invite the Senator/Representative or their staff to your next event on campus.
- Express an interest in continuing to dialogue with the Senator/Representative, or his/her staff, on these issues.