

Bishop Thomas's Intervention at 2017 Spring USCCB:

The moment we find ourselves in is marked by a deep sense of urgency and gravity.

Within two weeks, we may see a federal budgetary action with potentially catastrophic effects on the lives of our people, most especially children, the elderly, the seriously ill, the immigrant, and our nation's working poor.

The proposed federal budget is slated to eliminate \$880 Billion dollars from Medicaid over the next decade, and an additional \$192 billion dollars from nutritional assistance programs that directly benefit the poor and hungry of our nation. If left unchallenged or unmodified, this budget will destabilize our own Catholic healthcare apostolates, take food from the mouths of school-aged children and the homebound, and deny already scarce medical resources to the nation's neediest in every state across the land.

These are our people, our communities, our parishioners, and members of our own beloved families.

As a conference of bishops, we have the responsibility to "read the signs of the times," and to shine the light of the Gospel and the principles of Catholic social doctrine on this proposed budget.

The poor need individual bishops, our respective state Catholic Conferences, along with the unified voices of this Conference to speak with and for them. We can do this by:

- Expressing our solidarity with the poor in their hour of need;
- Raising up a new degree of public consciousness while appealing for public compassion and conscience protections;
- Asking lawmakers to choose dialog over diatribe, and avoid partisanship and polarizing rhetoric;
- Ensuring transparency and new opportunities for public engagement and debate;
- Asking lawmakers to weigh both the intended and unintended consequences that accompany this budget proposal; and
- Most especially by forming a budget that gives a preferential option to the poor.

Our silence or our indifference would be tantamount to complicity with a bad budget if we turn our faces away from our people in their time of greatest need.

Conversely, our unity and our advocacy could serve as much-needed catalysts to produce beneficial change and security that the poor of our Church and nation both desire and deserve.

Robert Frost described two roads that diverged in the yellow wood. I pray that we choose the road less traveled for the sake of the people we have been ordained to serve.