



March 19, 2015

## REJECT REPRESENTATIVE PRICE'S FY 2016 BUDGET RESOLUTION

Dear Member of the House Budget Committee:

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition charged by its diverse membership of more than 200 national organizations to promote and protect the rights of all persons in the United States, we write to express our strong opposition to the Fiscal Year 2016 budget proposal offered by Rep. Tom Price (R-GA). We urge you and your colleagues to reject it and instead pass a resolution that strikes a fair and reasonable balance between revenue increases and spending cuts, rather than one that attempts to balance the budget on the backs of the most vulnerable Americans and hides the true costs of proposed cuts.

The Leadership Conference believes that our diverse communities, many of them low income, would suffer greatly from the cuts in the Price budget. The budget purports to balance the budget in nine years and proposes \$5 trillion in cuts that are extreme, inequitable, and lacking in transparency. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities estimates that *two-thirds or more* of the proposed budget savings appear to originate in cuts to programs for low- and moderate- income Americans.<sup>1</sup> The budget would slash or eliminate services that are critical to communities represented by our member organizations, including vulnerable groups like young children, the elderly, low-income families, individuals with disabilities, students, the unemployed, and the uninsured. As the economy begins to recover and many hardworking families work to regain their footing, instead of providing a blueprint for shared economic growth and responsibility, the Price budget would unfortunately knock many Americans back down again by gutting Medicare, Medicaid, and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), with dramatic, unspecified cuts in education, veterans' pensions, and other necessities to come as well.

At the same time as it proposes significant spending cuts that would harm low-income and middle class Americans, the Price budget simultaneously would give large tax cuts to high-income individuals and families and corporations. It would also effectively cancel the defense half of the sequester cuts by redirecting funds through the Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) fund, what some have referred to as a "slush fund" for military spending. This is despite the fact that the Price budget proposes dramatic cuts to non-defense discretionary spending below the draconian cuts already required by sequestration. The Price budget may speak of fiscal responsibility and deficit reduction, but the few details that the proposal provides instead reveals a vision of America that bears little resemblance to those ideals.

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<sup>1</sup> Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, *Statement by Robert Greenstein, President, On House Budget Chairman's Plan*, (March 18, 2015)(available at: <http://www.cbpp.org/files/3-17-15bud.pdf>).

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We are particularly troubled by the following aspects of the Price budget proposal:

- **Health Care:** The Price budget would repeal the coverage expansions in the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and also cut (through “block grants”) Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program by more than \$900 billion. These two steps would cut almost \$3 trillion and drastically increase the number of uninsured Americans. Under this budget resolution, tens of millions of Americans would lose coverage or be underinsured.
- **Medicare:** This newest budget would end Medicare as we know it. Beginning in 2024, it would replace Medicare’s guaranteed coverage with a voucher program. This system would lead to increased costs for seniors and force millions out of traditional Medicare. CBO predicts that under a voucher system healthier, lower-cost Medicare recipients are likely to choose private plans. Over time, this would significantly raise out-of-pocket health costs for those who need to stay with Medicare, such as sicker, more expensive Medicare beneficiaries.
- **SNAP:** The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly known as the Food Stamp Program) would be cut by approximately \$140 billion over the next 10 years under the Price budget. In 2021, SNAP would be converted into a block grant system. It is unconscionable that many of the more than 46 million Americans who depend on the SNAP program would face being thrown off the rolls under the Price plan.
- **Education:** The bill would eliminate mandatory funding for Pell Grants, and as in other House budgets proposed in recent years, the Price budget again proposes to freeze the maximum Pell Grant for 10 years, preventing the program from keeping up with inflation. As a result, Pell Grants would lose substantial purchasing power, potentially denying access to college for millions of students who need financial aid. These are short-sighted cuts that would reverse our nation’s progress on improving student achievement and fail to invest in our nation’s youth and our economic future.
- **Other Vital Services and Programs:** The Price budget proposes \$1.1 trillion in unspecified cuts to mandatory programs. While vague on specific programs or numbers that would be targeted, the plan would certainly lead to massive and disproportionate cuts to countless services and programs that are vital to the communities that we represent. Among the safety net programs that would be severely jeopardized are the Supplemental Security Income program (SSI), school lunches and other child nutrition programs, the Earned Income Tax Credit, the Child Tax Credit, Head Start, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.
- **Tax Cuts for Millionaires, Billionaires, and Corporations:** One of the few transparent pieces of the Price budget is a proposal for hundreds of billions of dollars on high-income and business tax cuts. In addition, the plan includes unspecified rate reductions for high-income earners and corporations. Meanwhile, the budget does not address a tax increase on 26 million working families and students. The Price budget forcefully calls for deficit reduction and draconian spending cuts, but then provides handouts to higher income Americans and corporations, while low- and moderate- income Americans face tax increases.



For these reasons, we strongly urge you to oppose the Price FY2016 budget proposal. Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions, please contact Emily Chatterjee, Senior Counsel at The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, at (202) 466-3648.

Sincerely,



Wade Henderson  
President & CEO



Nancy Zirkin  
Executive Vice President