



UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

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Bishop Wenski Calls For Priority For The Poor In Senate Climate Change Debate

WASHINGTON – The chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on International Justice and Peace declared "a central moral measure of climate change legislation is how it touches the poor and vulnerable." Speaking at a press briefing that included the sponsors of Senate climate change legislation (S. 2191) and interreligious leaders, Bishop Thomas Wenski said, "The real 'inconvenient truth' is that those who contribute least to climate change will be affected the most and have the least capacity to cope or escape. The poor and vulnerable are most likely to pay the price of inaction or unwise actions. We know from our everyday experience their lives, homes, children, and work are most at risk."

"As Catholic bishops, we are not here to endorse the many details of this or any other legislation," said Bishop Wenski, "but we welcome and support... leadership in lifting up and seriously addressing how climate change will disproportionately affect the poor and vulnerable in our country and around the world."

Bishop Wenski's complete statement follows:

"Seven years ago, the U.S. Catholic bishops adopted a major statement on the moral dimensions of climate change, A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good. Pope Benedict XVI is making caring for creation and climate change central themes of his global leadership. The U.S. Catholic bishops insist that responding to climate change raises fundamental questions of morality and justice, fairness and shared sacrifice. As bishops, we lead a Church, not an interest group. We are not 'the environmental movement at prayer.' Rather we lead communities of faith that have been called to care for God's creation and the poor since Genesis.

"We have called for principled, constructive, realistic and civil discussion on climate change. This essential and long overdue national debate is moving forward. For this, we can especially thank Senators Boxer, Lieberman and Warner who have exercised strong leadership and introduced this groundbreaking legislation. As Catholic bishops, we are not here to endorse the many details of this or any other legislation, but we welcome and support their leadership in lifting up and seriously addressing how climate change will disproportionately affect the poor and vulnerable in our country and around the world. This represents a significant advance on previous proposals. We are grateful for the hard work and renewed commitment this represents.

"As our Bishops' Conference testified before Senator Boxer's Committee,

'The real "inconvenient truth" is that those who contribute least to climate change will be affected the most and have the least capacity to cope or escape. The poor and vulnerable are most likely to pay the price of inaction or unwise actions. We know from our everyday experience their lives, homes, children, and work are most at risk.'

"We have been working with our religious partners and with these Senate leaders to make clear that a central moral measure of climate change legislation is how it touches the poor and vulnerable. We particularly welcome the essential provisions which offer substantial resources and other much needed assistance to poor persons and poor countries for adaptation and mitigation of climate change. We will continue to work with these Senate leaders and others to build on and strengthen these essential commitments and to assure that those with the greatest needs receive the most help through effective, targeted and workable allocations and programs.

"As religious leaders we make a plea for strong, bi-partisan action on climate change which reflects the old-fashioned virtue of prudence and a genuine commitment to the common good. Protecting God's creation and "the least of these" requires urgent, wise and bold action. We join our religious partners in working to advance this essential moral, national and global priority."