

The Way It Looks to Me...

Ripples of Hope

Decisions about federal funding for individual housing and other domestic programs will be made over the next several months by the appropriations committees in the House and Senate. We are being

asked to support increased funding for individual housing programs, and that will intensify in the weeks and months ahead.

I recently suggested to advocates that we should support increased funding for every program unless we honestly don't think it merits support, even if the combined increases exceed the budget resolutions. Some Members of Congress may say that the budget resolutions put them in a box, that overall funding is going to be cut, and that we should tell them which programs we think they should cut, preserve or

increase. Some may say that advocating for increased funding for programs, if it adds up to more than the budget resolution allows, is naive and unhelpful.

I contend that we have to deliver the message, as consistently and effectively as possible, that total funding for housing and other domestic programs is inadequate compared to the needs and compared to what a compassionate society, with the resources we have, can do. Some people will argue that this is impractical. But this is a time to be impractical in the interest of doing what's right. This is a time, like never before, for us to work together and support one another.

I have been hearing loud and clear from advocates across Wisconsin in response to my message. Their words say it so well.

Greg Rosenberg, Executive Director of the Madison Area Community Land Trust: "I think you are right on the money. It is not our job to make it easier for Congress to decide which programs to cut, because in doing so, we signal our willingness to condone the process. We need to make these decisions as difficult as possible. The danger is that issue areas where advocacy is not as well organized will receive disproportionate cuts in funding...or that less popular areas, such as fair housing, will get sliced. The solution, as you pointed out, is to support each other in our advocacy efforts, so all of our voices are heard as loudly and as clearly as possible."

Bethany Sanchez, Director of Community and Economic Development for the Metropolitan Milwaukee Fair Housing Council: "It's easy to get consumed by our normal workloads, which seem to increasingly involve spending more time on fundraising. But if we make our views known, and provide easy ways for our staffs, boards and clients to do so as well, the impact WILL be felt!"

Brian Peters, Housing Program Coordinator of IndependenceFirst in Milwaukee: "What we don't want to do is get into a squabble of 'cut Section 8 funds' to

'increase funds for Section 811' or 'cut money from every program to save CDBG.' We need to be advocating for a bigger pie (overall housing budget) rather than arguing about the size of the slices (program budgets)."

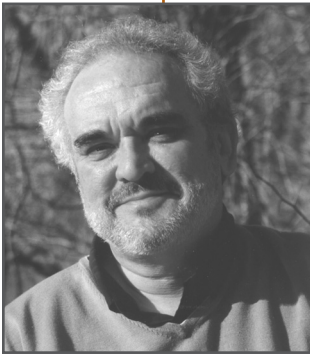
Sheila Crowley, President of the National Low Income Housing Coalition, writes in their latest newsletter: "This is the first time in three years that the Senate and House have been able to reach agreement on a budget resolution. Low income people would have fared better if there had been no resolution again this year. The budget resolution imposes discipline on the Congress that gives it cover when constituents demand that program funding be maintained or even increased. The opportunities for advocates to argue for their particular interests without doing harm to other essential federal programs have been severely diminished. We will be asked to make choices. 'If you want full funding for your program, tell me what other program you want me to cut' will be the refrain that advocates will hear over and over again in the coming months.

"Here's the answer. This is a predicament that Congress has created for itself by cutting taxes over and over and over again—and again in this budget. There would be no necessity to impose these spending cuts if the budget resolution did not also provide for another \$106 billion in more tax cuts in the next five years. And once again, the benefits of the tax cuts will accrue to the most well-off."

My good friend Dawn Stockmo, Senior Director of Regional Initiatives for the Fannie Mae Foundation, recently sent me a quote from Bobby Kennedy. She can't lobby on the federal budget, but she knows how much he helped shape my life, and that I think about him when it seems like the odds are against us. He could be speaking to all of us right now.

"Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope...and, crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current that can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance."

We can all be one of those people.
That's the way it looks to me.



William C. Perkins
Executive Director