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"A Vital Christian Presence in Social Work"

FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS AND SOCIAL POLICIES: BUDGETING CHALLENGES AHEAD

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Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) face increasing social policy budgetary challenges ahead. Increasing demands on U.S. social welfare, from within (largest aged population in history, and increasing growing health care costs, etc.) and without (war on terror, etc.) pose growing challenges for funding of the voluntary sector and FBOs in coming years.*

This paper divides into two sections: Increasing Military Expenditures and the War on Terror, and Entitlement Programs and Expanding Social Welfare

needs, and the challenges posed for faith based organizations (FBOs). This paper does not portend to thoroughly discuss or cover all aspects of this subject (that, indeed, could be the subject of a book).

Faith based organizations were touted by President George W. Bush as a new and innovative social policy initiative that would make a difference in addressing America's many social ills. Government would fund FBOs to perform or carry out needed human services. Influenced by authors like Myron Magnet and Marvin Olasky, President Bush stated that FBOs were much more likely than government services to treat the poor and the needy well, to treat them with compassion, to treat them as human beings. Indeed, "compassionate conservatism" was a much trumpeted base or anchor for FBO initiatives. The private, voluntary sector, long an important part of American social welfare, was seen as a human service response to social problems that should be encouraged in

every way possible by government initiatives and funding. Government would gingerly step through a possible legal briar patch vis a vis the separation of church and state, and forge onward here, being careful to fund human service programs inspired and carved out by churches, and not funding the churches themselves.

Increasing Military Expenditures and the War on Terror

After the “9/11” attacks on U.S. soil on September 11, 2001, the “war on terror” became a central tenet of American concern, and public policy. The U.S. became involved in two wars, in Iraq and Afghanistan, and increased its military and defense expenditures in general. Winslow T. Wheeler, Director of the Straus Military Reform Project of the Center for Defense Information in Washington, and a respected, long-time analyst on military and defense issues, notes (2007) that the 2008 U.S. defense budget is enormous. President Bush has requested a Pentagon budget for fiscal year 2008 that is \$481 billion. This, Wheeler states

firmly, are not the real defense costs, but only the beginning. A more realistic defense figure, he avers, is \$878 billion for 2008, a massive amount, which probably still understates the total figure.

Doug Bandow has published widely, and echoes many of the concerns as Wheeler. Bandow avers that, so far, Iraq and Afghanistan have cost an estimated \$661 billion. He estimates that by the time the U.S. finishes its involvement in both countries, the estimated costs could be about \$1 trillion. This massive figure could still be an underestimate of total costs.

Aside from direct military expenditures on warfare (or anticipated warfare), the total societal commitment to a large scale “war on terror” is a huge societal undertaking (which Israel, to name an important example, has been engaged in for years). Kendal (2001:373) observes that: “As collective violence, terrorism shares certain commonalities with war... Terrorism and war also extract a massive toll on individuals and societies....” American public and social policy now and in the

future is a large scale contest between “guns and butter.” Indeed, the task of supporting military expenditures and social welfare expenditures at the same time is a challenging task, indeed (Watts & Bohanon, 2006:82).

Entitlement Programs and Expanding Social Welfare Needs

In fiscal year 2006, Samuelson (2007) notes, entitlement programs to individuals are almost 60 percent – and rising. The federal government spent \$544 billion on Social Security, \$374 billion on Medicare, and \$181 billion on Medicaid, out of a total expenditure of almost \$2.7 trillion. Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid consume so much of the federal budget (with projections of even higher expenditures in the years ahead) that there is little room left for other social welfare needs or programs.

All of this has come alongside a rapidly expanding aged population. There were 31.2 million people in the U.S. over aged 65 in 1990, and that figure increased to 35.0 million in 2000. The fastest growing segment of the aged population is

among the oldest groups, those 85 and older (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001:1-2).

Not surprisingly, these populations have the most needs, and health expenditures reflect this. For 3 of 5 disabilities measured by the Census in 2000, the “disability rate of the population 65 and over was at least 3 times the rate of the total population” (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2004:11).

Entitlement programs like Social Security and Medicare have proven very difficult to change or maneuver. Almost no one dares slash any of these programs, due to the political implications of attempting to do so. They have sizeable constituencies with power and clout. Thus, as Samuelson (2007) has noted, the social welfare situation in the U.S. seems to be grafted in place, with a welfare state that is “immovable” and a budget situation that is “intractable.”

All of this poses considerable problems for the funding of faith-based initiatives. David Kuo, in his volatile, critical book on the political aspects and dimensions of faith-based initiatives (2006), states that adequate funding for

comprehensive FBO efforts is sorely lacking. Competing budgetary demands can easily suffocate voluntary sector funding that addresses social welfare needs. The constituents of FBOs are hardly very powerful or influential, at least alongside the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), and other groups.

It is one thing for FBOs to compete with “guns” (in the guns vs. budgetary equation). It is something else to compete with other “butter,” with other social welfare needs, demands, programs, some involving huge entitlements, some not. In the long run, we must find some way of curbing massive entitlement programs, while at the same time conducting a realistic foreign policy that acknowledges the limits of American budgetary capacities. Not even mentioned here are the sizeable environmental challenges ahead, and a number of other challenges too numerous to mention, all entailing needed societal attention, and, as well, needed expenditures.

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