

WITNESS FOR JUSTICE

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Witness for Justice #539

August 1, 2011

Road Kill and the Debt Ceiling

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I was driving home the other day on a stretch of highway 271 in Ohio that cuts through the Cuyahoga National Forest, a lovely expanse of rolling hills, woods and open meadows. The usual summer construction projects were underway – orange barrels on the narrowed shoulder and concrete barriers between the lanes. I passed a dead deer lying on that slight right shoulder. If she had been trying to cross the road, she would not have been able to because of the concrete barriers which would have increased her chances of being hit by a passing car.

Road kill. A reminder of how we as humans have intruded into the homelands of many other species and the uneasy and often fatal truce that we have established with them. Road kill always makes me sad.

As I write this, there is no agreement yet on raising the debt ceiling. The posturing and politicking continue with both sides insisting on non-negotiables and with no one really looking at the potential intrusion into the lives of honest-to-goodness human beings who are not members of Congress considering their re-election bids. Which would be the vast majority of us.

The underlying issues which have gotten us into an economic recession, into high unemployment, into foreclosures and questionable lending practices, into an IRS tax code thousands of

pages long and a multitude of other related concerns cannot be fixed with one fell swoop of a piece of legislation. We should agree to raise the debt ceiling and commit ourselves to responsibly look at all the other issues—revenues, spending reductions, corruption and waste in entitlement programs, the cost of ongoing wars, etc.—in the near future.

If we don't, and the so-called compromise reached to avoid defaulting on our loans tries to reform long term problems without careful consideration, we risk tossing aside the health and wellbeing of many of our citizens who rely on program like Medicaid and Medicare. Tossing them aside like road kill.

The Interfaith Disability Advocacy Coalition, a coalition of more than 25 national faith-based organizations, sent a letter to members of Congress. It calls upon Congress to protect Medicaid from drastic cuts or other changes that could jeopardize persons with disabilities who rely on Medicaid. "Medicaid is a lifeline for millions of Americans with disabilities and a vital public health program for seniors, children, and low-income Medicare's beneficiaries who rely on Medicaid to fill Medicare's gaps," their letter states. "Medicaid spending cuts and block grant proposals would have a particularly devastating effect on the provision of long-term care services, as Medicaid is the primary funding stream for these services."

I know the federal budget is a terribly complex matter. And I also know this – that wealthy people will not be dying if they have to pay more taxes, but many seniors, persons with disabilities, children and low-income Americans may die if funding for vital health care services are cut.

I don't think God would tolerate this kind of road kill. Nor should we.

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