

WITNESS FOR JUSTICE

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The 99 Percent Must Tell Congress What We Want

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It's not just the people occupying Wall Street who know there is something deeply wrong in this country. Even those of us still sleeping in our own beds at night are profoundly disturbed by the huge and growing divide between the rich and the other 99 percent, the nearly one in five potential workers who is jobless or working too few hours, the record high poverty level, wars, "free" trade agreements, millions of people without health insurance, the persistently broken housing market, unequally-resourced public schools, and unaffordable higher education.

Rather than dealing with any of these severe and immediate problems, Congress is fixated on reducing the deficit. But ever since the economic crisis began in late 2007, the deficit has been helping, not hurting, the economy. When households and corporations reduce their buying, firms cut back production and lay off workers. The economy stalls and it will stay in the doldrums until demand picks up for firms' products. Today, when purchases by households and corporations continued to be depressed, the only way to boost demand is through deficit spending.

No one should be surprised we have a deficit. Tax cuts and the economic downturn have driven tax revenue to its lowest level since

1950. Wealthy households and corporations are paying much less than in the past and people who earn less also pay less in taxes. At the same time, government spending is up. Military and homeland security expenditures have risen by 50% over the last decade while hard times have increased spending for unemployment insurance and other safety net programs. Ending the downturn through federal programs to create jobs will shrink the deficit. We also need to raise taxes on wealthy households and corporations, and cut spending on the military and homeland security.

What does Congress plan to do? In its concern about the deficit, Congress appointed a “Super Committee” to propose at least \$1.2 trillion in deficit reduction by November 23 then Congress must vote on their proposal by December 23. These critical decisions will establish the country’s direction for the next decade. Unfortunately for the 99 percent of us, many Committee members appear to prefer cutting social programs and even core government functions that serve the common good instead of creating jobs, raising taxes on corporations and wealthy households, and cutting military spending.

This is a critical time in our nation’s history. Will we begin to address our many problems and restore opportunities for widely shared prosperity, or will we continue down the path of great wealth for a very few and anguish for many? Some of us will join the Occupy Wall Street movement. But every one of us in the 99 percent needs to tell the Super Committee and Congress what we want (view the link and send a letter <http://tinyurl.com/super-committee-alert>). The future – ours, our children’s and the country’s – depends on it.

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