

## American Values

What do fairness, compassion, equality, and security for our families and our country bring to mind? These are the values that many people hold and they are the values of the Democratic Party. They are what are driving our fights in the state legislature and in the US Congress over the proposed budget cuts in Georgia and across the county.

Recently I sent a list of the proposed cuts in the budget by the Republicans in the US Congress to a neighbor. The list included such things as

- Cuts in vouchers for returning soldiers, thereby rendering 10,000 of them homeless
- Completely cutting fund for Planned Parenthood, an organization that has helped curtail the number of abortions annually because of their education and counseling programs
- Cut funds for cancer research at the National Institute for Health
- Fire 65,000 teachers thereby again increasing class size for our children
- Cut food and health care services for pregnant women.

What was this neighbor's response? His answer was we can't afford these things; we are broke! We can afford to send our soldiers to two unfunded wars to lose life and limb, but if they return and can't find a job we can't afford to help them with housing vouchers. **But wait**—we can afford to give tax cuts to the wealthiest Americans and to special interests and corporations! There is a terrible disconnect here that Americans need to stand up against.

By the way, we are not broke! Our governments on all levels are still running but facing fiscal problems because of the economic turndown. There are many ways to handle this turndown. As EJ Dionne of the Washington Post says "We will come up with wiser and more sustainable solutions if we approach fiscal problems calmly, realizing that we're still a very rich country, and that the wealthiest among us are doing exceptionally well." In fact there are many Americans who have not been affected at all by this recession. Governor Scott Walker of Wisconsin's assault on public unions did not come because Wisconsin was broke. He cut taxes for special interests first and **then** said he was broke. Politifact examined his statements and said that in fact the state is not broke. They have a variety of tools to make ends meet and shutting down unions wasn't one of them! And Bloomberg News looked at John Boehner's (Republican, Ohio), House Speaker's statement on February 28 that "We're broke—we're going bankrupt" and said, "It's wrong. The US today is able to borrow at historically low interest rates, paying 0.68 percent on a two-year note . . . Tax revenue as a percentage of the economy is at a 60-year low, meaning if the government needs to raise cash and can summon the political will, it could do so!" As Mr. Dionne says "A phony metaphor (We're broke) is being used to hijack

the nation's political conversation and skew public policies to benefit better-off Americans and hurt most others"

And what is going on with our state representatives. They continue to pass bills which cut benefits for the most vulnerable Georgians, especially our children with their drastic assault on education. Their recommendations for tax changes mean that the wealthy in Georgia will pay less tax while middle income and lower income will pay more tax. And they continue to give huge tax break to corporations. Last week they passed HB322 which gives Delta Air Lines a \$20 Million dollar tax break. The tax break was initiated in 2006 when Delta was having financial problems. Since then they have received \$120 Million in tax breaks. They are no longer having financial problems. Last year their profit was \$593 million. Maybe our Republican state legislators just don't want to give up the perks they get from Delta. They receive free upgrades and free Sky Club memberships to "encourage" them to continue to vote for this tax break!

As Alan Essig says of the Georgia Budget and Policy Institute, "With \$20 million the state could lessen the number of teachers furloughed, eliminate two-thirds of the waiting list for services for those with developmental disabilities, or replace the funding cuts to our technical colleges. It could provide more resources to our public safety agencies- like gas so that our state patrol would not have to limit the miles they drive."

What is most ironic is that last year the General Assembly took a \$20 million tax break away from the poorest Georgians under the guise that providing a \$26 refundable tax credit for individuals making less than \$20,000 was welfare. The world does seem upside down when we can afford corporate welfare, even for the most profitable companies, but we cannot afford to assist those Georgians most in need." In addition to these tax breaks for special interests they are proposing a permanent tax exemption on aircraft parts for Gulfstream and other companies, tax breaks for companies that start tourist attractions, tax breaks for companies that use diesel fuel for locomotives, and the return of the sales tax holiday. These are choices our legislature has to thoroughly consider. It is a choice between tax breaks for these special interests or keeping school nurses, having an adequate number of police and firefighters, providing materials and supplies for our schools, and a myriad of other things that will be cut again this year!

So what about fairness, compassion, equality, and security for our families and our country? These are still the values of the Democratic Party, but our Republican leadership seems to have something else in mind!