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## U.S. Faith Leaders Press Presidential Hopefuls on Poverty

**High-profile religious leaders urged U.S. presidential candidates John McCain and Barack Obama to make a major commitment to fighting poverty at their respective party's national convention.**

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High-profile religious leaders urged U.S. presidential candidates John McCain and Barack Obama to make a major commitment to fighting poverty at their respective party's national convention.

Republican Sen. McCain of Arizona and Democrat Sen. Obama of Illinois were asked by Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, and Muslim leaders to dedicate their primetime speech at the convention to propose a comprehensive plan to address poverty and opportunity in America.

"As people of faith, we believe that it is immoral to ignore our nation's most vulnerable populations," the leaders wrote in the letter released on Monday.

"As Americans, we believe enduring poverty undermines our country's economic strength and prosperity," they added, describing persistent poverty as a plague that causes millions of Americans to lack the basic necessities of life.

Only one month remains before the four-day Republican National Convention in St. Paul, Minn., and three weeks before the Democrats Convention in Denver. They will come at a time when food and fuel are more expensive, homes are less valuable, credit is harder to get, jobs and raises are increasingly difficult to get, and unemployment is continuing its long climb.

The Labor Department reported Friday that the unemployment rate in July was 5.7 percent – up from 5.5 percent in June and 4.7 percent a year earlier. The economy has lost jobs in every month of 2008.

"During these tough economic times too many Americans are only one job loss, health crisis, or foreclosure away from poverty," the religious leaders expressed in their open letter. They noted that more than 37 million Americans, including nearly 13 million children, live in poverty today.

"By making a commitment to help 'the least of us,' you can help create an economy that enables all Americans to move forward together," the leaders insisted.

While faith-based organizations serve people in need every day, their efforts need to be complemented with a "serious plan" from political leaders, the interfaith group maintained.

They said a primetime speech at the 2008 national convention on poverty would be "an important first step."

Religious leaders, pointing to their shared tradition of justice and compassion, vowed to mobilize their networks to combat poverty in the United States.

"We look forward to working with you to make sure our nation's most fundamental values – a commitment to shared prosperity and opportunity for all – are given the attention they so desperately need and deserve," they stated.

Signers of the letter are: the Rev. Richard Cizik, vice president for government affairs of the National Association of Evangelicals; the Rev. Dr. Michael Kinnamon, general secretary of the National Council of Churches; the Rev. David Beckmann, president of Bread for the World; the Rev. Jim Wallis, head of Sojourners; Rabbi David Saperstein, director and counsel of the Religion Action Center for Reform Judaism; Father Larry Snyder, president of Catholic Charities USA; Rabbi Steve Gutow, executive director of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs; Dr. Sayyid M. Syeed, secretary general of the Islamic Society of America; and Dr. Eboo Patel, executive director of Interfaith Youth Core.

*Christian Post reporter Eric Young in Los Angeles contributed to this article.*

Jennifer Riley  
Christian Post Reporter

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