

The poor must be spared in state's budget cuts

Archbishop George Niederauer
San Francisco Chronicle
Monday, August 9, 2010

Making budget priorities is essential in tough economic times. But we need to remember that although closing a park may be inconvenient, closing down programs like CalWORKS hurts children and destroys families.

This is the problem facing the governor and the Legislature as they confront the glaring \$19 billion [California](#) state deficit.

If they could craft a fair and responsible way to increase revenue, then that would be welcomed. The fact remains that the Legislature cannot possibly increase revenue enough to cover such a huge deficit. State government services will have to cut back.

But cuts should not be made blindly. They need to be made intelligently, with compassion, keeping in mind the long-term needs of Californians and our moral responsibility to the most vulnerable among us.

When Leonard arrived at the Supportive Housing Program run by [Catholic Charities](#) of [San Francisco](#), he was ready to change his life and the lives of his two children. With support from Catholic Charities and from the state's CalWORKS program, he was able to enroll in professional training and secure employment through job-assistance programs.

Job and training programs like CalWORKS, which help needy families and children, are some of the most valuable resources for Leonard and people like him. Through CalWORKS, Leonard is able to put together a structured schedule and financial plan. He is encouraged to be self-motivated because he is treated with dignity and respect. Leonard gets training for real world jobs that don't require college degrees or decades of experience.

For two years, Leonard and his children have been in the program. They have made great progress, but they're not yet independent. Success is still just out of arm's reach. To cut funding on these programs would mean that all the resources invested so far have been wasted. Without a structured program, Leonard's family could spin back to the poverty they worked so hard to escape. And picking up the pieces of broken families is far more expensive than training someone to get a good job.

A similarly misguided idea, to reduce [Supplemental Security Income](#) (SSI/SSP) for the elderly, blind and disabled, would save minuscule sums of money at great cost to the most vulnerable residents in California.

These programs aren't cut because Californians don't need them. They're cut because it's expedient. There are no powerful interest groups representing poor families, the elderly, the blind and disabled.

Now is the time for our legislators and the governor, many of whom are not facing re-election, to show real courage and imagination. Families are suffering because of a devastating - but curable - budget crisis. Lawmakers and the governor have the tools and the ability to solve these problems, but it requires leadership. They need to stop giving in to special interests and start looking after the future of California. They need to stop the partisanship and the bickering.

We are a better people than this.

George Niederauer is the archbishop of the Roman Catholic diocese in San Francisco.

This article appeared on page **A - 8** of the San Francisco Chronicle

Read more: <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2010/08/09/EDUM1EOGJ9.DTL#ixzz0w8pJl2QS>