



*An article from  
**Catholic Rural Life Magazine**  
Spring 2004 volume 46 number 2*

## **WASHINGTON UPDATE**

**Andrew Rivas**

**United States Conference of Catholic Bishops**

On March 12<sup>th</sup>, the U.S. Senate approved a \$2.36 trillion budget along mostly party lines with a vote of 51-45. In approving the budget package, the Senate followed along the President's vision of defense increases, restrained domestic spending and gradual deficit reduction. However, the budget resolution ignored the President's call for permanent tax cuts.

The only two senators who crossed party lines were Trent Lott (R-MS) and Zell Miller (D-GA). The four Senators who did not vote were John Edwards (D-NC), John Kerry (D-MA), Harry Reid (D-NV), and Tim Johnson (D-SD).

One amendment the Senate approved would temporarily stop the government from filling the nation's petroleum reserve, a practice some critics say helped to drive up gasoline prices. Although the amendment is non-binding, the passionate debate and the 52-43 vote illustrated that there is growing sentiment for Congress to take action.

With regards to agriculture, the Senate budget resolution did not include funding for the Conservation Security Program (CSP) after 2005. NCRLC members have expressed great support for this program, so this came somewhat as a surprise. The Senate budget does include funding for conservation technical assistance for farm bill programs, setting up the possibility later this year that there could be an amendment on appropriations to restore technical assistance to mandatory funding. This was the original intent of the 2002 Farm Bill, which seems to be the brunt of various attempts to reduce federal spending.

Also taking place in March, the House Budget Committee began their debate of the 2005 budget. Chairman Jim Nussle (R-IA) had hoped to complete passage of the bill in a single day, but advocates for the Defense Department and the Veterans Administration raised so many concerns that they forced the Committee to continue debate another day. Agriculture advocates then began to focus their efforts so that the House budget resolution would assume full funding for the Conservation Security Program in FY 05. The struggle

will continue in both the House and Senate to get funding for necessary conservation programs beyond 2005.

While committee work was going on, the House floor opened a debate on indecency. The House approved sharply higher fines for broadcasters and entertainers who break indecency rules; Congress is moving closer to cracking down on incidents that are deemed to be obscene. The Broadcast Decency Enforcement Act of 2004, which passed 391-22, would give the Federal Communications Commission the ability to impose fines of up to \$500,000 per violation, up from the current \$27,500. Because many shows are syndicated and played on numerous stations around the country, fines could run into the millions of dollars. Broadcasters also could have their licenses revoked after a third violation.

This being a presidential election year, everything becomes political. At the same time, it shortens the amount of time Congress is in session. They'll break for the two national party conventions and spend as much time as they can campaigning for re-election. It will be an interesting year for the nation.



National Catholic Rural Life Conference  
4625 Beaver Avenue  
Des Moines, Iowa 50310-2199  
(515) 270-2634  
email address: [ncrlc@mchsi.com](mailto:ncrlc@mchsi.com)  
website: [www.ncrlc.com](http://www.ncrlc.com)

This article was published in the spring 2004 issue of Catholic Rural Life<sup>®</sup>. No portion of this article may be reproduced without written permission from The National Catholic Rural Life Conference. To purchase the spring 2003 issue of Catholic Rural Life, please contact The National Catholic Rural Life Conference office at 4625 Beaver Avenue, Des Moines, Iowa 50310-2199, call (515) 270-2634, or e-mail [NCRLC@mchsi.com](mailto:NCRLC@mchsi.com). The cost is \$2<sup>50</sup> an issue plus postage and handling.

---