

# Christian Coalition Asks Obama to Protect the Poor During Meeting

Just before stepping into a meeting Wednesday afternoon with House and Senate Democratic leaders to discuss the budget and debt, President Barack Obama met with Christian leaders to seek their advice and ask them to pray for him.

The religious leaders, who are members of a new Christian coalition called the Circle of Protection, told Roll Call that they urged Obama not to cut programs for the poor as he looks to strike a deal with Republicans to raise the debt ceiling.



“He agrees with us that the ‘least of these’ and the most vulnerable citizens should not have to sacrifice for the well-being of our country,” Galen Carey of the National Association of Evangelicals said, referencing the biblical teaching to care for the poor. The Circle of Protection has been lobbying lawmakers not to cut programs that benefit the poor, including Medicaid; Women, Infants and Children; food stamps; and international development aid.

At the same time, officials have a “spiritual and moral” responsibility to reel in government spending, Carey said he told the president. “I talked about the importance of fiscal responsibility, which the president articulated very clearly, so we’re with him on that,” he added.

The White House confirmed Wednesday evening that Obama spoke with the coalition members.

Obama also asked the religious leaders to pray for him and to continue raising the plight of the poor with their congregations, according to Carey.

“He said Americans are people of good will, and when they see and understand the names and faces behind these [programs], they are very responsive,” he said.

Obama spent about 40 minutes in the room before excusing himself to meet with Congressional leaders, Carey said.

“The timing was really excellent because, as he was going into the meeting, he has the poor on his mind,” he added.

Tim King, a spokesman for the Christian advocacy group Sojourners, was also in the room and said the president appeared receptive to the advice from the religious leaders.

Several prominent Christian leaders were present at Wednesday’s meeting, including Jim Wallis of Sojourners, Catholic Bishop Ricardo Ramirez, David Beckmann of Bread for the World, former Rep. Tony Hall (D-Ohio), the Rev. Stephen Thurston of the National Baptist Convention of America and Mark Hanson of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

King said the leaders have also requested meetings with Republican leaders, including Speaker [John Boehner](#) (Ohio) and Senate Minority Leader [Mitch McConnell](#) (Ky.).

In addition to the White House meeting, the Circle of Protection has been applying pressure in other ways. More than 60 prominent Christian leaders have signed a statement urging politicians to remember that the poor and vulnerable “do not have powerful lobbies.”

Last week, the group also organized more than 4,000 pastors to sign a letter to Obama and Congress with a similar message.

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