
A budget plan that puts people first

By Mike Honda and Jeffrey D. Sachs, Special to CNN



Mike Honda

- The public is fed up with budget debates, say Mike Honda and

Jeffrey D. Sachs

- Budget deal must be publicly debated and reflect America's true values, they say
- A proposal of the Congressional Progressive Caucus achieves this, say Honda and Sachs
- The People's Budget takes on corporations and excess spending, they say

Editor's note: Rep. Mike Honda is a senior member of the House Budget and Appropriations Committee and a member of the Congressional Progressive Caucus. Jeffrey D. Sachs is director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University.

(CNN) -- Last week's collapse of the Senate's «Gang of Six» debt-reduction talks, and talk of a «Gang of Five,» will deepen the public's distaste for the process and substance of the budget debates in Washington. Voters across the country resent being left out of these increasingly elite deliberations.

As much as the politicians argue, they don't seem to hear the good sense of the American people. The many closed-door meetings in Washington to decide on America's future are filled, instead, with esoteric and magical formulas purporting to close the deficit.

One group wants budget «caps.» Another wants «trigger clauses.» A third wants simplistic rules. None of these will work. These are gimmicks, not governing. Governing is about making choices, setting priorities and following through.

Governing is also about ensuring that the interests and values of American people are at the negotiating table. If not, any new deal will benefit only the rich and powerful, or will simply postpone any real decisions until after 2012. Either way, America would lose.

Our message is therefore clear: a budget deal needs to be publicly debated, and needs to reflect the true values and views of the American people.

One group in Congress gets this. The [Congressional Progressive Caucus](#) (CPC) has heard the message of the American people, who want to cut the deficit without cutting into America's future and without destroying America's sense of fairness.

Ask the public what they want, and they will tell you: Let us defend our health programs for the elderly and the poor, Medicare and Medicaid. Let us hold to our intergenerational promise of Social Security.

Let us invest in education, research and development, and fix our crumbling infrastructure. Let us bring our men and women home from Iraq and Afghanistan, and save at least \$150 billion a year, not to mention the lives saved as well. Let us rebuild America.

Most important, let us stop the Republican Party plan to coddle every oil company and billionaire.

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Regular Americans are suffering, yet the rich keep racking up tax cuts one after the next.

Even the oil companies, bursting with profits, never seem to be satisfied with what they take from the American people. They are demanding every unjustified tax break they can gather through their lobbying activities.

If the American people are so clear -- preserve the social programs, cut the military waste, end the wars and tax the rich -- then why doesn't our democracy deliver the results? Why do so many decisions in Washington seem to go against the public will?

The answer is simple. In America today, there are the people's votes, and there are the dollar's votes. The dollar's votes are very powerful, since they pay for the campaign ads and television time that politicians crave.

The Congressional Progressive Caucus is a group of 80 Members of Congress who are intent on putting the people's voice and vote above the dollar's vote. The Caucus is listening to the people, and is also explaining the realities of the budget through public outreach.

The CPC's budget proposal, known as the People's Budget, is the only plan in Washington that truly reflects the will of the people.

The Republican Plan would protect the rich while slashing government for the middle class and the poor. The President's budget presented in February would leave a large budget deficit by the end of this decade, and would pile on too many debts into the future. Only the People's Budget closes the deficit by the end of this decade without sacrificing fairness.

How does the People's Budget accomplish this task? By taking on the billionaires, the corporations and excess spending. The People's Budget calls for rai-

sing tax rates on the rich and adding a «millionaires» tax bracket for the richest of the rich.

It would end corporate loopholes for companies that keep their profits abroad to avoid paying their fair share of taxes. It would end the wars and wasteful Pentagon spending.

A fair budget will not emerge from behind closed doors. We need an open budget process, one that keeps the interests of the broad majority of Americans front and center. The CPC wants to bring the People's Budget to the forefront of publicly held negotiations, as the only budget plan that would truly put the American dream back within reach for the majority of Americans.

The opinions expressed in this commentary are solely those of the writers.