Opinion
Guest Voices
Metropolitan Archbishop Borys Gudziak

Metropolitan Archbishop Borys Gudziak of the Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Philadelphia speaks March 6 at the University of Notre Dame's 2025 Ukrainian Studies Conference in Indiana. Gudziak is chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development. (OSV News/University of Notre Dame/Matt Cashore)

Borys Gudziak

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Our Catholic tradition says time and again that how a society treats its most vulnerable members is a test of its moral character.

Our faith compels us to care for the poor, the sick and the marginalized. And the central act of our faith, the Eucharist, is a sign of our incomparable dignity as human persons. Our equal dignity, regardless of our social or economic status or where we come from (James 2:1-9), causes us to recognize "what value each person, our brother or sister, has in God's eyes, if Christ offers Himself equally to each one," as St. John Paul II writes.

Most Americans want change. It is good to work for change! The One Big Beautiful Bill Act, currently pending before Congress, has many components and aspects, and my brother bishops and I have already commented on and commended several of them.

Here, I want to focus and insist on the reconsideration of some of the provisions that significantly harm the poor and the environment failing to recognize the dignity of the weakest and vulnerable among us, especially children. These provisions should be changed before the bill moves forward.

> We must respond to both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.
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Congress has the power to improve the lives of families and vulnerable individuals, but in many ways, this bill does the opposite. The bill raises taxes on the working poor, adds overly burdensome work requirements that will cause millions to lose access to health care, makes fundamental changes to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, that will result in families going hungry, and backs out of crucial investments in clean energy and jobs, air and water. This would be unacceptable and unconscionable.

In Catholic social teaching, economic decisions must be evaluated, first and foremost, by how they affect the poor. As we bishops have shared, "The way society responds to the needs of the poor through its public policies is the litmus test of its justice or injustice." Caring for the poor is a Gospel mandate. When legislation weakens access to basic, undeniable needs like food, health care and a livable environment, it violates our commitment to one another.

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This bill imposes burdensome and unnecessary work requirements that will not achieve the goal to promote employment and instead will strip health care and nutrition assistance from millions, many of whom are already working or are unable to work due to disability, caregiving responsibilities or economic forces beyond their control. It makes drastic programmatic changes that threaten the viability of food assistance through SNAP and will leave families and children without enough to eat.

Meanwhile, the wealthiest among us stand to gain tax breaks, while families struggling to meet their daily needs are asked to pay more.

We are also deeply concerned about the bill's lack of environmental commitments. As Pope Francis taught, care for creation is inseparable from care for the vulnerable. We must respond to both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. Pollution, climate change and environmental degradation fall most heavily on those with the fewest resources to respond.

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The social safety net is not charity; it is a matter of justice. It affirms the God-given dignity of every human being. As followers of Christ, we are called not only to serve the poor but to advocate for changing systems that create and perpetuate poverty. This bill, as it stands, falls significantly short in responding to the needs of our vulnerable sisters and brothers.

Congress must make important changes to this legislation. Protect SNAP. Preserve Medicaid. Uphold environmental investments. You can take action by calling your senators. Every day, more decisions are being made that will impact the well-being of our most vulnerable neighbors, and we must speak up.

Let us, as Pope Leo XIV urges, become "truer and richer in compassion," remembering that what we do for the least among us, we do for Christ.