

Briefing Document and Talking Points: New Members of Congress

SPRING 2023

OVERVIEW

The background information and talking points in this document serve as a guide for how to structure your meetings with new Congressional members.

Catholic Relief Services believes that our work together in the United States is the outward expression of missionary discipleship. Together, we are called to encounter Christ in the members of our human family most in need, and to share the Good News with others—becoming prophetic advocates for justice and the common good. CRS' campaigns on hunger and climate change allow you to do just that.

As an opportunity to stand with people experiencing poverty or vulnerability, your congressional meetings will focus on establishing a relationship with your new legislators while also inviting them to prioritize the important issues of climate change and hunger.

Your voice matters! Your members of Congress want to know *why* you and your community care about these issues. As you prepare to meet with your senator/representative, reflect on the stories of our sisters and brothers around the world that you can share to illustrate the importance of caring for our global family and how you and your community are taking action to support people in need.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

The 118th United States Congress convened January 2023. Of the 535 members of Congress, there are 81 new members—seven senators and 74 representatives. Freshmen members of Congress have been busy setting up their offices and establishing their legislative priorities. As they get settled, this is a great opportunity to build relationships, educate them on key humanitarian issues and raise your voice to address global poverty and its root causes.

Before reaching out to your senator/representative, do some research ahead of time to help prepare you for your conversations and support your relationship building efforts. Search for connections they may have to the issues of hunger and climate change and consider these questions:

1. Is the member Catholic or religious?
2. Has the member said anything in support of or in opposition to foreign aid?
3. Did the member serve in the military or any form of international service? What is their work history?
4. If the member served in previous office—local, state, national—are any of their past votes relevant to hunger or climate change?

5. Has your member championed or lead an initiative related to hunger or climate change? Or have they pledged support for any of these issues?
6. Has your member been assigned to any committees?

Once you have more information about your legislator(s), use the [Congressional Champion Scale](#) to assess where they stand on the issues of hunger and climate change. Consider how your actions can move them up the scale so that they can become champions for these important issues.

Remember that the overall objectives for meeting with your new members are to:

1. Establish a connection and begin the relationship building process.
2. Help them see you as a trusted resource.
3. Share how you are connected to a larger network of CRS Chapters and Clubs and advocates, as well as a greater movement of millions of Catholics and others of goodwill working to end global poverty.
4. Demonstrate how global hunger and climate change impact your state or district directly.

BACKGROUND: HUNGER AND CLIMATE CHANGE

According to the United Nations World Food Program, 349 million people are experiencing crisis or worse levels of acute food insecurity and malnutrition—a magnitude of hunger that our world has not seen before. Families are struggling to meet their food needs due to the compound effects of conflict, climate change, COVID-19 and rising food costs. Inflation of food prices has put people under tremendous strain, while supply chain interruptions have impeded humanitarian operations and disrupted local and regional markets around the world. The rising costs of food, fertilizer and fuel make it difficult for individuals to build sustainable livelihoods, secure a steady income or feed their family with nutritious food.

In many parts of the world, communities are also experiencing the compounding effects of climate change, such as in the Dry Corridor of Central America, Afghanistan and the Horn of Africa where communities are facing the worst drought ever recorded after five consecutive failed rainy seasons. Farmers who depend on the ability to grow and harvest crops for their livelihood are directly impacted. In many regions, families are forced to migrate to other areas in search of food, causing conflict over land and resources, which then results in disruptions to local food, livestock and crop production.

Climate change continues to be an urgent challenge for our world today and especially affects people who live in poor and vulnerable communities. Often these communities live in low-lying coastal zones, dry arid regions or flood-prone areas, making them more susceptible to the impacts of droughts and flooding—devastating homes and communities, disrupting livelihoods and causing economic instability and inequality.

The global food crisis and the impacts of a changing climate are disrupting the efforts of communities who have been working hard to lift themselves out of poverty. Instead of being able to thrive, they are fighting merely to survive. We must act together to serve people who are most vulnerable—to find sustainable solutions that help us better care for God’s creation and each other as one planet and one family.

TALKING POINTS FOR CONGRESSIONAL MEETINGS

Framing

Begin with gratitude

Thank you for your time to allow us to get to know each other and discuss the important issues of hunger and climate change.

Express gratitude for their service in Congress or check their website to thank them for something they have done in the recent past.

Introduction: Who you are and why you're there

As people of faith seeking justice and care for all in our world, we believe there is a moral obligation to provide assistance and address the root causes of poverty, hunger and climate change. Global food insecurity and the impacts of climate change are two of the most pressing issues of our time, which disproportionately affect people experiencing poverty and vulnerability.

Share about yourself/the group and your work in the state/district. Also share about your connection to CRS and why you support the work of CRS.

Catholic Relief Services is the official international Catholic relief and development agency of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. CRS works in over 100 countries around the world to address the root causes of poverty, promote the sacredness and dignity of human life and help build more just and peaceful societies.

Share a personal story to illustrate why you/your group support international humanitarian and development work, including your concern about our human family and why global issues like hunger and climate change matter to you.

Moving to the issues: Set the stage for the conversation

The United States government has the responsibility and capacity to address the needs of people around the world experiencing poverty and vulnerability, to prevent hunger and to provide necessary assistance in adapting to the world's changing climate. U.S. leadership is critical in our collective effort to address the root causes of poverty, hunger and climate change.

Share a story about how poverty-reducing international aid and development programs help people find sustainable livelihoods, develop resilience against future economic and climate shocks and build a better future for themselves and their families. Consider using one of these CRS resources:

- [Adapting to Climate Change in Bangladesh to Fight Hunger](#)
- [Building Resilience from the Ground Up](#)
- [Responding to the Hunger Crisis in Ethiopia](#)
- [2023 CRS Rice Bowl Stories of Hope](#)

Explain why it is critical for the U.S. to build on the successes of international aid and development programs by addressing the challenges of climate change around the world and ramping up efforts to alleviate the global food crisis.

The Ask

During this time of unprecedented and dire food insecurity in the world, we urge you to prioritize addressing global hunger and climate change—issues that disproportionately impact communities experiencing poverty and vulnerability the most—so that all people may live with dignity and thrive.

Discussion

Questions to Ask

- How does the senator/representative plan to approach the global issues of hunger and climate change?
- What can I do, as a constituent, to continue to advance these important issues with the senator/representative?

Comments to Raise

- If the senator/representative travels abroad, ask if he/she would like to visit CRS programming in the future. CRS is in more than 100 countries around the world and would welcome an opportunity to show the senator/representative the impact United States investments in food security and climate change adaptation have on the ground.
- Let your senator/representative know that you—along with CRS—can serve as a resource both in Washington, DC and back home in their state/district. Express an interest in continuing to dialogue with them, or their staff, on these and other issues of mutual interest.