Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

August 12, 2015

His Holiness, Pope Francis
Apostolic Palace
001200, Vatican City State, Europe

Your Holiness Pope Francis,

As Members of Congress, we write to express our gratitude and joy as well as aspirations about your upcoming visit to the United States. We are especially delighted that you will spend time at our nation's Capital and address the U.S. Congress.

We thank you for the many ways you have reminded us all of the centrality of the social teachings of the church and your clear emphasis on human dignity, solidarity and the rights of workers, and above all, the poor and vulnerable. That is why we are delighted that during your six day visit, you will not only address government officials, but will also visit with homeless people, immigrant families, and prison inmates. Your powerful example of solidarity with the poor and the marginalized will undoubtedly help inform our current debates around major US policy affecting all Americans. Your message of hope could not come at a more crucial time, in particular to those in our nation that are struggling on a minimum wage salary, or relying on public assistance to put food on the table.

The fact is we find ourselves struggling with a broad range of economic and social issues as a nation. These policy issues range from health care, the widening

gap between the rich and poor, climate change, immigration, and increased racial tensions, just to name a few. One key example that troubles us deeply is the failure to eliminate hunger. Currently nearly one in seven households are not sure if they can afford enough food to feed their families. Yet, recently, Congress enacted cuts to food support for those in need that totaled almost $9 billion over the next decade. We believe the continued existence of hunger in America is a disgrace and an indictment of our government. As President John Kennedy put it: "We have the ability, we have the means, and we have the capacity to eliminate hunger from the face of the earth. We need only the will."

Similarly, some in the US Congress have refused to prioritize an increase in the minimum wage, which has remained at $7.25 since 2009. This, while workers are not provided access to paid sick leave or family leave. As such, many American families must work two jobs to even afford a basic living and are one sickness away from financial disaster. While we have a rich tradition of valuing work and family, we also seem to have "irrational confidence" that wealth will "trickle down," contrary to past history. As you so eloquently stated in the *Joy of the Gospel*, "some people continue to defend trickle-down theories which assume that economic growth, encouraged by a free market, will inevitably succeed in bringing about greater justice and inclusiveness in the world."

Finally, we recognize and welcome your challenge in the recent encyclical *Laudato Si'* to forge a new dialogue on the intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet. Here too we struggle as a nation because the U.S. Congress continues to enact a national budget for 2015 that requires that national agencies promote coal fired plants abroad and directs "no funds may be available for the green climate fund" to help developing nations deal with the impact of climate change. Your words calling us elected officials to 'attest to our God-given dignity and leave behind a testimony of selfless responsibility' are needed now more than ever. We believe that just as *Rerum Novarum*, at the end of the 19th century, ushered in a new era of social teaching that we still rely on, your latest encyclical lays a path for all people to lead the way in shaping the future of the planet we call home.

Your Holiness, we look forward with great anticipation to your visit and to your words on all these issues. Thank you for considering this letter in the spirit of progress in which it was intended.

Respectfully,

Rosa L. DeLauro

Bill Pascrell, Jr.

Anna G. Eshoo

Tim Ryan

John Garamendi

Charles B. Rangel

Xavier Becerra

Joseph Crowley

Chris Van Hollen

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