

[Click Here to Print This Article](#)

February 26, 2009

# Will Rainford: Our leaders seem more concerned with projects than people

## READER'S VIEW ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

Christina, a college student with a 4.0 GPA, sat in my office the other day, weeping because she was going to have to drop out of school due to her financial crisis. A single mother of a young child who works full time as a waitress while taking a full load of courses, Christina is the face of the economic crisis we are all in together. She doesn't have child care, can't get medical insurance and is swamped by student loans. If she finishes college, she will very likely obtain a decent job that pays almost \$20,000 more than she makes as a waitress. Christina and her daughter would have full medical benefits. Christina would be able to save toward retirement and her daughter's future education.

Tragically, I had no easy answers for her. Christina cannot obtain scholarships and must continue to work full time to pay for basic housing, food and medicine for herself and her child. I urged her to push forward, but I knew that the reality of our economy would probably be the end of her college career. I provided her with the contact information for various local charitable organizations. Christina was on my mind this past week as I advocated for protection of programs and services that help economically fragile families. I couldn't help feeling frustrated with the U.S. Congress. These are tough times, and tough decisions must be made. I wouldn't want to sit in the seat of a congressman. But it is beyond ridiculous when legislators build into a "stimulus" package millions of dollars for comprehensive sexual education, re-sodding lawns in Washington, D.C., or assistance in purchasing digital converter boxes for televisions.

I was equally frustrated with legislators in Idaho. While corporations, many of which are out of state, received \$1.6 billion in state tax credits and deductions, and corporate tax absconders were allowed to pay pennies on the dollar for taxes in arrears, programs such as Medicaid and food stamps lost millions of state dollars.

Further, Christina's daughter will enter kindergarten in the fall in an era of increasing class sizes, reductions in educational materials, and retrenchments in school funds.

Legislators have told me repeatedly that they "have no choice." I watched as several of them anguished and wept openly at the tough choices they had to make. I prayed for them, for their sadness and their need for wisdom. And then I offered, in both personal conversations and through testimony in hearings, that they did indeed have a choice. They could reduce the amount of corporate tax benefits by \$200 million and prevent any cuts in services to fragile families or to our schools. I expected them to say no, and they did. Tough choice.

Catholic Charities of Idaho and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Boise will continue to stand up for economically fragile families who deserve the basic human rights of decent housing, affordable health care, nutritious food and economic opportunities through public education.

We urge Idahoans to join us in our efforts. Tell your congressmen to prioritize people over pet projects, and your legislators at the Statehouse to place families over corporations. If you want more information on how to help in our efforts, please call (208) 890-0448. Will Rainford is the legislative advocate for Roman Catholic Diocese of Boise.