Letters to the Editor should refer to an article in the paper you’re responding to. Think about how you can connect news stories or opinion pieces to any of these topics. The texts below are suggestions – you can draw on them but to the greatest extent possible use your own words.

**On Raising the Minimum Wage:**
*(Thanks to our friends at Half in Ten for providing content)*

[A good opening connects to a recent article. Was there a story about your Congressman speaking at a recess event? You can say you were disappointed (s)he didn’t say anything about the minimum wage, or were pleased that (s)he did. Stories about use of emergency food or other hardships of poverty could prompt a letter about raising the minimum wage. An editorial or column about priorities for action could be criticized for not mentioning the minimum wage. Stories about rising corporate profits could lead you to say, “It’s amazing that with record-breaking corporate profits, Congress is not acting to raise the minimum wage.”] Right now our economy isn’t working for everyone – too many Americans are working full-time hours at multiple jobs that don’t pay enough to lift their families out of poverty.

The federal minimum wage is stuck at $7.25 per hour. That’s $15,080 annually for a full-time worker, far below the poverty line for a family of three. In the late 1960s, the minimum wage was sufficient to lift a family of three out of poverty. Had it been indexed to inflation it would now stand at more than $10.70 per hour.

Fortunately, the Fair Minimum Wage Act would increase the minimum wage to $10.10 per hour and index it to inflation. It would boost the wages of 28 million workers—including 17 million women—by $35 billion. More than 21 million children have at least one parent whose pay would go up as a result of passing this legislation. In [your state], raising the wage will create [enter your state data] jobs and affect [enter your state data] workers. [Use Half in Ten’s Minimum Wage Toolkit for state information or Oxfam America’s interactive map for information by congressional district.]

It’s long past time that Congress listens to the vast majority of the American people who support increasing the minimum wage to at least $10.10 per hour. We need to grow our economy in a way that works for everyone, not just those at the very top. Restoring a strong minimum wage is one key step towards achieving that goal.

**Other points about raising the minimum wage you could use:**
This would enable a full-time worker to earn $19,777 annually, meaning that hard work would once again lift a small family out of poverty. Raising the minimum wage to $10.10 per hour would also help those earning just above the minimum wage.

Despite what opponents to raising the wage would have you believe, these workers aren’t “teenagers flipping burgers”: the average worker who would benefit from this wage increase is 35 years old.

Over the past several decades, worker productivity has risen dramatically, but American workers aren’t reaping the benefits. If the minimum wage had kept pace with increased worker productivity, it would be more $18 per hour today. Today’s workers are more educated and more productive than ever before, but the minimum wage of $7.25 per hour is 31 percent lower than its value in 1968. Workers earning the federal minimum wage haven’t gotten a raise in five years.

When low-wage workers make more money, they spend it on basic goods and services like housing, food, and gas. This boost in demand will help stimulate and grow the economy by $32.6 billion. That money is funneled back to businesses large and small as they hire more workers to keep pace with increased demand, reinforcing a virtuous circle that will help build an economy that works for everyone. Raising the wage to $10.10 will also save taxpayers $46 billion over ten years as they’ll no longer have to foot the bill for supplementing Americans’ low wages that corporations can afford to pay.

More than half of the states that raised the minimum wage during periods of high unemployment saw the unemployment rate decrease over the next 12 months. According to the Economic Policy Institute, raising the wage to $10.10 will create 85,000 new full-time jobs. It will also reduce employee turnover, increase employee productivity and loyalty, and increase profits.

On the Child Refugee Crisis:

[There has been a great deal of coverage of the children from Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador fleeing from violence. You should not have any trouble finding an article to respond to in your letter. But here too, if your member of Congress attends an event and does not raise the issue, you can say (s)he should have addressed it. You can even react to back to school stories by contrasting with the trauma of the refugee children, and the need to protect them.]

While Members of Congress are home enjoying their August recess, thousands of refugee children fleeing violence are waiting for them to act. Already this year, nearly 60,000 children migrants have come mostly from Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador, a great many because of violence, including sexual assault and trafficking. Existing funds to care for and house them, process their asylum requests,
address the root problems causing the children to flee, and secure the border are starting to dry up due to Congress’ failure to reach an agreement.

The U.S. must provide adequate funding to care for and protect the children and determine fairly whether they should be allowed to stay. The public supports this: 70 percent of respondents to a recent poll said the U.S. should offer shelter and support while beginning a process to determine whether the children should be allowed to stay in the U.S. And just as many said we should provide refuge and protection for all who come to the U.S. when they are facing serious danger in their home country.

Some in Congress are using this situation to exploit fears, eliminate protections for migrants, expedite deportations, and cut other programs to respond to the urgent needs of these children. When there is a humanitarian crisis, the United States must not turn its back on vulnerable children. These desperate children – and the American people – are waiting for Congress to act, and act responsibly.

Other points about the child refugee crisis you could use:
• This is a clear moral issue. We must provide no less than the $2.7 billion proposed by Senate appropriators, since funding is starting to run out for temporary shelter, processing their cases, transferring them to more appropriate family settings, providing for their basic needs, and seeking better international solutions.

• The funding bill passed by the House is not adequate to meet the needs. At least $2.7 billion in new funding is needed. This bill also requires other programs be cut to meet these needs, despite the fact that this is a true emergency.

• House Republicans used this situation as an excuse to end protections for migrant children and to end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, which allows young people who have been here since 2007 to work and/or attend school legally for a two-year period. These efforts will do nothing to improve the situation and will only make matters worse.

On Appropriations:

[You can link a letter about the need for responsible appropriations to any article about Congress being home for a long recess – they need to get back and get to work. If there are any back-to-school articles about class sizes rising or other shortages, you can point out that Congress needs to invest more in education and other needs, and should end sequester cuts.]

Congress has yet to send a single appropriations bill to President Obama, and with the current fiscal year expiring at the end of September, a stopgap spending bill will most likely be passed in September to avoid a government shutdown. This temporary spending bill will likely maintain current funding levels for most programs. This is not what we need. Programs like education, child care, housing, meals on wheels, job training, and so much more have been shrinking since 2010. The deficit is on track to be the
lowest in six years. Now is the time to invest in needed services and in rebuilding roads and schools. That will create jobs and put jobless people to work. More parents will have child care so they can take jobs, and people of all ages can get the education they need to qualify for jobs today and in the future.

If Congress keeps stalling on making good funding choices, it will be standing in the way of progress for families and communities. What’s worse, Congress may just slide along until 2016, when a new round of deep sequestration cuts will kick in again if it fails to take action to stop the damage.

In September, Congress should start to rebuild. Congressman [name] should be a leader in calling for the end of sequestration cuts and funding caps that make it impossible to invest in our future. [If your Member of Congress supports sequestration or other cuts, say something like: Instead, (s)he has called for cuts that are costing jobs and inflicting hardship on children, seniors, and the jobless. If (s)he opposes cuts, say: Congressman [name] is a leader in calling for the end of sequestration cuts and funding caps that make it impossible to invest in our future. (s)he should know constituents favor that responsible stance.]

Instead of rewarding corporations with tax breaks when they hide their income offshore, Congress should tax them fairly so we can responsibly invest in meeting needs and creating jobs.

Other points about appropriations you could use:

- The Coalition on Human Needs reports that from FY2010 through FY2014, out of a group of 131 programs of special importance to low-income and vulnerable people, 119 saw decreases after adjusting for inflation. Only 12 programs increased during that period. Ninety-nine programs were cut by over 10 percent.

- Just a few of the losers over the last several years include adult and youth job training programs (cut 18%), home heating and cooling assistance (cut 38%), and child welfare services (cut 12%). A few more of the 119 programs and their cuts are listed below.

- These cuts show a dangerous pattern of failing to help the most vulnerable in our society. Members of Congress need to know the impact of their decisions. Each of the cuts represents lives affected, and people who could’ve been helped but instead weren’t

On Rep. Ryan’s Poverty Plan:

[Rep. Ryan is embarking on a tour to promote his new book, “The Way Forward: Renewing the American Idea.” If he’s coming to your area, or if the book is reviewed, you can connect your letter to this news. Or, any mention of poverty in your community or the nation would allow you to respond to say that Rep. Ryan’s plan would not help.]
House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan (D-WI) recently unveiled his plan to fight poverty, which includes the creation of “opportunity grants” that would consolidate up to 11 different federal programs into one funding stream for states. His plan promises that total funding would not decrease for states opting to take the grant. However, several previous budgets proposed by him would drastically cut most of the programs he would pool in the block grant. The question needs to be asked of Rep. Ryan, therefore, how his promise could be kept without abandoning the budgets he’s championed for years. He can have one or the other, but clearly not both.

While Congressman Ryan claims that the opportunity grants are not block grants, they most certainly are. Block grants often result in funding cuts that reduce benefits or services and also end federal protections to ensure that needy people are not excluded from the programs.

Chairman Ryan proposes increasing the Earned Income Tax Credit for workers without children, which is good news. It is an important step in supporting the young adult workforce (and will help some older adults too). However, Congressman Ryan would pay for this expansion by eliminating the Social Services Block Grant and denying the Child Tax Credit to millions of low-income children in immigrant families.

In short, Chairman Ryan’s plan would be devastating for low-income people and would be likely to increase poverty for many of our most vulnerable neighbors.

Other points about the Ryan poverty plan you could use:

- Chairman Ryan said we need customized and personalized aid for each person in the form of case management and service provision. But if his plan is budget neutral, and he seems to call for an increased investment in case management, where is the money to pay for this going to come from?

- Block grants do not allow for the flexibility needed to respond to increased needs during times of recession where needs.

- Rep. Ryan insists on paying for this tax credit by cutting other programs. However, the House has passed billions in tax cuts for corporations without paying for them. The Social Services Block Grant, which Rep. Ryan proposes eliminating, provides numerous services in child welfare and to the elderly and disabled.

- Chairman Ryan has consistently offered budget proposals that slash programs meant to assist low-income and vulnerable populations, including eliminating health care coverage for 40 million people, refusing nutritional assistance to 10 million who would have been eligible, and squeezing funding for human needs programs even further below the already shrunken sequester levels.

For tips on writing and sending a Letter to the Editor, see this tip sheet from our friends at NETWORK. Please send copies of your letter to CHN’s Communications Associate Joanna Sandager at jsandager@chn.org.