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WASHINGTON (ABP) — Vice President Dick Cheney had to cut short an official trip to Pakistan and rush back Washington to cast a tiebreaking Senate vote for budget cuts Dec. 21.

The chamber was deadlocked 50-50 on the \$40 billion in cuts to growth in federal programs. Because most of the programs being squeezed — such as Medicaid and student-loan programs — serve the poor, many religious and anti-poverty leaders have spoken out against them.

Cheney, in his role as president of the Senate, cast the tiebreaker. The Senate's 44 Democrats were joined by five moderate Republicans and one left-leaning independent in opposing the cuts.

The budget-cutting measure trims nearly \$40 billion from those programs and others over the next five years. However, that represents less than one half of one percent of the estimated trillion-plus dollars in federal spending

over the same period.

The House passed a similar budget-cutting measure Dec. 19, but the Senate version differs sufficiently that it must return to the House for further approval.

In appealing for the vote, Sen. Judd Gregg (R-N.H.), chairman of the Senate Budget Committee, said it would be a step toward reducing the federal budget deficit. "This is the one vote you'll have this year to reduce the rate of growth of the federal government," he argued on the Senate floor.

But Democrats and other critics said the bill would harm the poor, and noted that the same Republican leaders who are pushing it are also pushing many billions more in tax cuts.

"While proponents will likely declare this a victory for fiscal responsibility, it must be noted that for every dollar in spending cuts, more than two dollars will be spent for additional tax cuts if a companion tax bill is accepted by both chambers," read a statement from the Center for American Progress. "And all of the cuts combined add up to little more than one fifth of the already enacted tax cuts for the top 1 percent of the population."

A group of 115 Christian leaders were arrested Dec. 15 for blocking the entrance to a House office building to protest the cuts.