

Campaign for debt relief brings unlikely allies together

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WASHINGTON (RNS)—An Alabama congressman is promoting another round of international debt relief because previous loan forgiveness has improved health care, education and security in developing countries.

[Rep. Spencer Bachus](#) is the lead Republican sponsor on the latest attempt to cancel more longstanding international debt, this time for up to 67 countries where even interest payments can be crushing. His motivation is a mix of religious conviction and concern for human rights and national security, and it dates to 2000 when the first of two debt relief measures was approved.

“Tens of millions of schoolchildren in Africa alone are attending class that weren’t seven years ago,” said Bachus, a Baptist. “The fact that their future prospects are so much greater and poverty will begin to fall with education, the benefits of that to our country and to the world are unimaginable.”

An expanded debt relief bill backed by religious groups, known in shorthand as the [Jubilee Act of 2007](#), is sponsored by Rep. Maxine Waters,

a liberal Democrat from California who acknowledged the unusual partnership she's had with the Alabama conservative. She called their friendship, developed over the debt relief bill, a "miracle."

"We worked together in a way that I never thought we would," Waters said. "We were up early in the morning at meetings, and it has been one of the most delightful experiences I've had in Congress."

The legislation cites some recent examples of what countries have done with the money that otherwise would have been spent paying back loans. Zambia, for instance, in 2006 used its savings of \$23.8 million for agricultural and health care projects. In Uganda that same year, almost \$60 million was spent addressing electricity shortages, primary education, malaria control, health care and water infrastructure.

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