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Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515-2105

July 18, 2011

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20502

Dear Mr. President,

As you know, addressing the debt ceiling is about one thing: paying the bills for policies that we as a nation already agreed to purchase on credit. As then-President Ronald Reagan stated in 1983, failure to address the debt ceiling would force us to default on our debts, calling it a “denigration of the full faith and credit of the United States,” and arguing that “the Nation can ill afford to allow such a result.”

The policies for which we now must pay include the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, a generous expansion of the Medicare prescription drug benefit in 2003, tax cuts, and emergency measures to save the economy from deeper recession. Members of both parties have supported each of these steps, and others. Now we must all share the responsibility of together finding a responsible path forward that prevents our nation from an unnecessary default and puts our budget on a road to fiscal reform.

I understand the fundamental responsibility to honor our debts which is why I am hopeful that a compromise is still possible. Furthermore, I share your view that for reasons of both fairness and pragmatism, any deal must include shared sacrifices. Both parties will have to make concessions if a deal is to be reached. As conservative columnist David Brooks has noted, a deal that demands sacrifice from one group but not another is not sustainable in our democracy over the long run. To return our deficits to the surpluses we ran in the late 1990s and pay down our long-term debt will require a sustained commitment from the entire nation, a commitment that will only come if a deal is seen as fair.

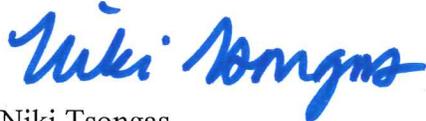
With those principles in mind, I believe that a plan that truly addresses the challenges we face should include some portion of revenue increases and should not fundamentally alter the Social Security and Medicare programs upon which seniors rely. I believe it is both responsible and fair to end tax breaks for oil companies that receive billions of dollars in federal subsidies especially as they are turning record-breaking profits, to end other egregious tax loopholes, and to ask the wealthiest Americans to return to the income tax rates that existed during the 1990s. Likewise, it is important that we make reforms to all components of federal spending, including

defense spending and entitlement programs. I support efforts to strengthen Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid for years to come, but will reject any attempts to privatize these programs, or to turn them into block grants or vouchers that transfer those costs onto those least able to afford it. After years of paying into these programs, our seniors and those about to retire deserve the peace of mind knowing that their retirement security is protected and that they won't have to deplete a lifetime of savings if they require longer hospital stays, assisted living, or a complicated surgery.

Furthermore, we must be careful that the final deal does not damage our still-fragile economy. A default would have serious consequences for our economy—much as defaulting on a personal debt will destroy an individual's credit—but so too would steep and immediate spending cuts that lead to lay-offs. Economists have warned that some of the spending cuts proposed by the House of Representatives—if enacted too quickly—could lead to up to 800,000 lost jobs.

A responsible plan that reduces the deficit in a balanced way while protecting American jobs is vital to our nation's economic strength and prosperity, and I appreciate that you have made these negotiations one of your highest priorities. Thank you for your leadership and for your consideration. I look forward to working with you to ensure that our nation pays its bills and protects our future.

Sincerely,



Niki Tsongas  
Member of Congress