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September 22, 2011

The Honorable Patty Murray
Co-Chair
Joint Select Committee
on Deficit Reduction
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jeb Hensarling
Co-Chair
Joint Select Committee
on Deficit Reduction
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen Murray and Hensarling,

Over the next two months, the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction has a tremendous responsibility and I understand how difficult this task will be. Devising a plan to bring our budget back into balance and help spur economic growth will require both bold and responsible compromises.

I write to share with you the perspective and priorities of the district I represent, priorities that are shared by communities throughout the country. These priorities include making a real down payment on our national debt, preventing deep cuts from undermining our fragile economic recovery and harming our national security, incorporating broadly shared sacrifices, and protecting the guarantees of Social Security, Medicare, and veterans' benefits.

The Budget Control Act (BCA) gave you a mandate to find \$1.5 trillion in savings, but you have the opportunity to do much more, creating a balanced plan that puts us on a long-term path toward fiscal responsibility while at the same time funding investments in our economic competitiveness. Failure to find consensus will mean triggering devastating cuts to education, transportation, food and product safety, air traffic control, and federal criminal prosecutions. It will mean longer wait times for the approval of life-saving pharmaceuticals and medical devices, fewer agents patrolling our borders, and canceled contracts with businesses employing millions of private sector workers, including many in my district. As a member of the Armed Services Committee, I know that the trigger also has the potential to undermine our nation's security. Admiral Edmund Giambastiani (Ret.), a former Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, recently testified that allowing the trigger to be pulled would be "akin to performing brain surgery with a chainsaw." I supported the deep cuts made in the BCA to both defense and non-defense spending because I recognize the need to phase in spending cuts over the next ten years but allowing the trigger to make far deeper cuts on top of those already enacted risks putting our economy and our people at great harm.

Avoiding the consequences of stalemate will require reaching a deal that includes shared sacrifices. Both parties will have to make concessions. This is both just and pragmatic. 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. It should also ensure we have the resources to adequately care for our veterans. 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 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.

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. 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

CC:

The Honorable Max Baucus
The Honorable John Kerry
The Honorable Jon Kyl
The Honorable Rob Portman
The Honorable Pat Toomey
The Honorable Dave Camp
The Honorable Fred Upton
The Honorable James E. Clyburn
The Honorable Xavier Becerra
The Honorable Chris Van Hollen