



COMMITTEE FOR A RESPONSIBLE FEDERAL BUDGET

CHAIRMEN

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November 6, 2019

The Honorable Mike Enzi
624 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Sheldon Whitehouse
530 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

PRESIDENT

MAYA MACGUINEAS

Dear Chairman Enzi and Senator Whitehouse,

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CHARLES BOWSHER
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JANET YELLEN

On behalf of the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, I would like to commend your leadership in advancing thoughtful reforms to the budget process. Your legislation, the Bipartisan Congressional Budget Reform Act of 2019, reflects an admirable commitment to identifying realistic bipartisan improvements to a budget process that is in many ways broken.

We are pleased that you and other members of the Senate have found many constructive areas of consensus. We offer our support for these efforts and others that may follow. We believe several areas are particularly promising:

Debt-to-GDP targets. The Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget strongly supports setting debt-to-GDP targets, which the Peterson-Pew Commission on Budget Reform proposed in a 2009 report [Red Ink Rising](#), a 2010 paper [Getting Back in the Black](#), and we have proposed many times subsequently. Setting a [fiscal goal](#) is an incredibly important first step toward achieving long-term sustainability. We also support efforts to integrate debt-to-GDP targets into the budget resolution, which will help give current members ownership of those objectives and hopefully strengthen their commitment to meeting fiscal targets.

Bipartisan budget pathway. We strongly support a new bipartisan path to a budget resolution. Serious bipartisan compromise will be needed to address our unsustainable fiscal outlook, and this approach attempts to facilitate consensus from the very beginning of the budget cycle. In addition to the debt limit increase prompted by the budget resolution (below), the reforms would add enforceable limits on discretionary spending and would ease the path to taking up appropriations legislation. Those are significant inducements to pair with a 60-vote requirement in the Senate instead of 51, including at least 15 members of the minority party.

Budget resolution debt limit adjustment. The full faith and credit of the country should never be brought into question. By automatically spinning off legislation to increase the debt limit from the budget resolution, your proposal would increase the incentive to pass a budget resolution while reducing the likelihood of a

[dangerous debt limit standoff](#). It would reinforce [spending and revenue levels](#) set out in the budget resolution and encourage more realism from drafters of the budget resolution.

Special reconciliation. [Reconciliation](#) is a powerful tool in the Senate that can facilitate far-reaching policy reforms and deficit reduction. We support your proposal to create a new, deficit-reducing reconciliation process to help achieve the debt-to-GDP levels agreed to in the budget resolution. We especially appreciate requiring each committee receiving reconciliation instructions to put forward deficit-reduction proposals. We strongly encourage you to go further by also limiting traditional reconciliation to deficit reduction.

CBO transparency. We support your proposal to include interest costs in CBO estimates, and ideally such costs would be included for budget enforcement purposes. Lawmakers and the public deserve to be aware of the full cost of legislation. We are pleased to see your support for continuing improvements in CBO's analysis and presentation of budget information. We would also suggest that additional resources should accompany any new responsibilities.

Portfolio budgeting. We applaud your provision to ask CBO and GAO for portfolio budgeting analysis, including deficit-reduction options within each portfolio. Examining spending and tax provisions with similar goals together can help lawmakers make informed decisions about the most effective tools for achieving policy goals.

Thank you for your commitment to improving our broken budget process. No one should cling to the illusion that the current process is working, and a bipartisan set of smart reforms could help jumpstart a new commitment to better budgeting. We at the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget stand ready and willing to assist that mission, and we greatly look forward to working with you further on this project.

Sincerely,



Maya MacGuineas

President, Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget

CC: Members of the Senate Budget Committee