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ROBERT STRAUSS

January 13, 2014

The Honorable Reid Ribble
United States House of Representatives
1513 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Ribble,

I would like to express my appreciation for the bipartisan approach you have taken to address budgetary problems. The Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget is happy to express our support for a two-year budget cycle, which is the primary objective of the Biennial Budgeting and Enhanced Oversight Act (H.R. 1869), co-sponsored by you and many bipartisan House Members.

The primary benefit of a biennial budget cycle is the extra time it permits Congress and the White House to take a more careful look at our budget and federal programs, particularly those currently on auto-pilot. In order to fix our pressing fiscal problems, we must go through our spending and tax policies with a fine-toothed comb and determine what works, what needs fixing, and what doesn't work. If given additional time, Congress would have more authority to conduct this type of needed oversight. In addition, executive branch agencies will be able to devote more time and attention to ensuring appropriated funds are spent wisely and effectively instead of the time consuming process of producing budget requests and justifications every year.

In addition to increased oversight and exploration of federal programs, the tax code, and possible waste and inefficiencies related to the budget, Congress could use the additional year normally taken up by budget process to undertake a review of broader budgetary issues. These could include reviewing budget concepts, a more careful review of national priorities compared to our national needs, and broader strategic planning. It could also include an examination of the implications of current policies over a longer time horizon.

All of these ideas would help to improve the budget process and our fiscal performance, and would be possible with biennial budgeting. Further, biennial budgeting would provide agencies with funding stability and allow for better long term planning, while also preventing agencies from incurring un-needed payments for fear of reductions in the following year's budget.



While switching to a biennial budget cycle would have many benefits, it is important for policymakers to ensure a biennial system allows flexibility to respond to unforeseen events that occur over the longer budget timespan. For example, policymakers would be wise to consider allowing a process for amending or modifying the budget resolution in the second year in response to changing circumstances, such as an increase in the deficit or economic downturn.

I'd like to stress that while budget process reforms are important, they are still no replacement for the tough budget policy choices that need to be made to address our long term fiscal challenges. However, moving to a biennial system could provide the time needed to focus on important fiscal policy decisions. I greatly appreciate your bipartisan efforts to focus on important budget issues.

Sincerely,

Maya MacGuineas