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United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510–0104

June 30, 2011

The Honorable Kent Conrad
Chairman
Senate Budget Committee
624 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Conrad,

It has been 792 days since the Senate has passed a budget. With news reports indicating that you may bring forward Senate Democrats' FY2012 Budget Resolution early next week, I wanted to reiterate the request from all 11 Republican members of the Budget Committee that a copy of your proposed resolution be made available to the public 72 hours prior to the Committee meeting to work on it. We have sent two letters on this matter and have not yet received a reply. Those letters are attached.

I continue to believe that the most important budget we have ever worked on deserves the most open process we've ever had.

In past years, you have only provided a text of your resolution after members have delivered their opening statements—preventing us from evaluating the proposal before we must address our constituents and the public about its merits.

You have spoken eloquently about the extraordinary fiscal dangers threatening this nation. I believe that 72 hours to review a 10-year budget plan with trillions of dollars in spending—including the potential for complex and substantial changes to our tax code that may dramatically increase the tax burden on nearly every American family—is an appropriate and important request to make on behalf of the good people we serve.

I appreciate your leadership and your attention to this crucial matter.

Very truly yours,

Jeff Sessions
Ranking Member
Senate Budget Committee

JS:ph

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United States Senate
COMMITTEE ON THE BUDGET
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6100

May 5, 2011

The Honorable Kent Conrad
Chairman
Senate Committee on the Budget
624 Senate Dirksen Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Conrad,

We are pleased that you announced your intention to mark up a Senate budget resolution next week. The unprecedented size of our $14 trillion debt and the severe threat it poses to our country necessitate that this Committee meet as soon as possible to begin working on a responsible, disciplined budget that brings Washington spending under control.

Given the importance of this budget, on April 26 we requested that the Chairman's proposal be released and posted online no less than 72 hours before we first meet to mark up the budget so that Committee members, as well as the public, could review and ask questions about it. We also requested ample time to offer amendments in open public meetings. We are disappointed you have not responded to these requests despite the fact you intend to conduct a mark-up as early as Monday, May 9, 2011.

It is our continued belief that the most important budget we will have ever worked on requires the most open process we have ever had. Rushing a budget through the Committee, without a meaningful opportunity for public review or careful consideration from members of this body, is simply not acceptable. We owe the American people better than that.

Therefore, we reiterate our request for a 72-hour review and adequate time to offer and publicly debate amendments. That would mean providing and posting a proposal online by this Friday, May 6, if you intend to start a mark-up on Monday, May 9. If you are unwilling to do this, we would ask that you provide a response explaining why you feel such a request in these challenging times is not appropriate, and exactly when you do plan to make your proposal available to members of the Committee, the press, and the public. Last year your proposal was not shared with the Committee until opening statements were being delivered.

We are also deeply concerned that staff experts may not be allowed to participate in the public meeting and to answer questions before we propose amendments so that members

and observers can better understand the nature and background of the proposal and the baseline it adopts. As you know, this is a common practice in many Congressional committees, including the House Committee on the Budget, and was practiced by our Committee until only a few years ago.

We understand that you have already briefed your caucus on your budget plan. But with a mark-up only days away it is essential that members on both sides of the aisle are given an opportunity to evaluate the proposal on behalf of those we represent.

You have historically supported inclusive government decision-making. Our desire is to make sure this budget, which has the potential to dramatically impact the future course of our nation, is subject to robust public scrutiny and debate. In this time of growing fiscal crisis and deepening fears about the future, the American people deserve an honest budget and an open budget process.

We appreciate your attention to this matter and welcome any questions you may have regarding these requests.

Sincerely,

Jeff Sessions
Ranking Member

Charles Grassley

Michael B. Enzi

Mike Crapo

John Cornyn

Lindsey Graham

John Thune

Ron Johnson

Pat Toomey

Rob Portman

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United States Senate
COMMITTEE ON THE BUDGET
WASHINGTON, DC 20510–6100

April 26, 2011

The Honorable Kent Conrad
Chairman
Senate Committee on the Budget
624 Senate Dirksen Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Conrad,

Under your leadership, the Committee on the Budget has received testimony from witness after witness that this country is quickly heading for a fiscal and economic disaster. As you recently said, "the nation is headed for a fiscal cliff." We agree.

Given our current situation, the fiscal year 2012 budget resolution we hope you will bring forward very soon could be the most important budget the Senate has contemplated in our lifetimes. It is our belief that the most important budget we will have ever worked on deserves the most open process we have ever had.

In recent years, budgets have been presented, marked up and passed out of committee in less than 48 hours—with hardly any time for the public or committee members to read, much less analyze, the resolutions' content. However, in the more distant past, the Committee would sometimes take several days to review and amend the proposed budget.

We therefore request that the proposed budget resolution, the Chairman's mark for fiscal year 2012, be released and posted online no less than three days before we first meet to mark-up the budget so that every member of the Committee, and the public at large, can have a better chance to consider the proposal and ask questions about it. This is especially important because there is no clear consensus in the Senate on how to proceed with a budget this year and, if the differences between our two parties are to be resolved, it is here in this chamber where that must occur.

We also request that Committee members have ample time to offer amendments to perfect the resolution in open public meetings. Each of us, duly sworn Senators, were sent here by our constituents to serve the public interest, and we must ensure that their demands for imposing budgetary discipline in Washington are met.

Most importantly, having an open, public process in the Senate allows the American people to directly participate in the decision over how we spend their money. The American people do not, and should not, trust Washington with their tax dollars—for years it has frittered away those tax dollars and brought our nation to the brink of insolvency.

Only by holding an open and thorough review of the budget in committee can we directly engage the American people in a process that, by right, belongs to them. Our debate can be broadcast across the country so that the millions who are impacted by our decisions can participate in their making. It is they, not us, who are in charge.

You have been an advocate for transparent government. We hope to join you in ensuring that, as the Senate delves into this difficult but crucial process, the public we serve will not be locked out by yet one more closed Washington door.

The nation will be watching.

We appreciate your attention to this matter and welcome any questions you may have regarding these requests.

Sincerely,

Jeff Sessions
Ranking Member

Charles Grassley

Mike Enzi

Mike Crapo

John Ensign

John Cornyn

Lindsey Graham

John Thune

Ron Johnson

Pat Toomey

Rob Portman