

September 15, 2011

The Honorable Patty Murray
The Honorable Jeb Hensarling
The Honorable Max Baucus
The Honorable John Kerry
The Honorable Jon Kyl
The Honorable Rob Portman
The Honorable Patrick Toomey
The Honorable Xavier Becerra
The Honorable Dave Camp
The Honorable James Clyburn
The Honorable Fred Upton
The Honorable Chris Van Hollen

Dear Senator Murray, Representative Hensarling and Members of the Committee on Deficit Reduction:

The undersigned are writing to urge you to immediately take steps to voluntarily disclose the efforts of outside interests to lobby you on matters related to the Committee on Deficit Reduction. Likewise, we urge you to also disclose the campaign contributions you receive between now and the time the Committee submits its final recommendations to Congress. Failure to ensure transparency of these fundamental avenues of influence will reinforce the public's mistrust of the process and risks delegitimizing the Committee's work.

Your critical work on this Committee has begun, and yet the public remains in the dark about special interests' attempts to influence your decision-making process, whether by meeting with you or donating to your campaigns. Efforts to make the work of the Committee transparent by posting information on the Committee's new website are laudable, as are decisions to forego attending fundraisers during this time period. Unfortunately, neither shines a light on who may be lobbying or continuing to contribute to your campaigns. Because neither lobbying disclosure reports nor campaign finance reports are required to be made public until January, the public will not have access to the critical information contained in those reports until long after the Deficit Committee has completed its work.

Disclosing meetings from registered lobbyists and other special interests seeking assistance has precedent. The Obama administration required executive branch officials to disclose meetings on the implementation of the Troubled Asset Relief Program, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and the Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act. Disclosure of efforts to lobby Members of Congress sitting on the Deficit Committee is at least as critical.

Likewise, Congress has recognized that the public has a right to know who has given to a candidate's campaign prior to going to the polls, and thus mandated 48-hour reporting of campaign contributions for contributions given within 20 days of an election. Such reporting is standard practice for all campaigns. Similarly, the public is keenly interested in the contributions received by members of the Deficit Reduction Committee and should be informed of those contributions prior to the Committee's final recommendations.

The Committee on Deficit Reduction has unprecedented power to shape future spending in the United States, affecting all Americans. Members of the Committee should, therefore, take unprecedented steps to ensure that outside efforts to influence to the committee should be transparent.

Sincerely,

The Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law

Center for Responsive Politics

Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington

Common Cause

Fix Congress First

The League of Women Voters of the United States

MapLight

OMB Watch

OpentheGovernment.org

Project On Government Oversight

Public Citizen

The Sunlight Foundation

Taxpayers for Common Sense

U.S. Public Interest Research Group