September 19, 2011

Dear Senators Murray, Baucus and Kerry and Representatives Becerra, Clyburn and Van Hollen,

On behalf of the 1.6 million members of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, I am writing to urge you to be bold as you work within the Joint Select Task Force on Deficit Reduction to produce a plan by November that prioritizes job creation, is fair and balanced, raises much needed revenues and protects low income and vulnerable Americans.

As your committee tackles the charge to reduce the deficit by more than a trillion dollars, I urge you to make job creation your top priority to get our country back to work. As such, I urge you to embrace Sen. Merkley’s proposal to report the jobs impact of the committee’s proposal. With nearly 25 million unemployed or underemployed Americans struggling to make ends meet, our country has a serious jobs problem that needs to be addressed immediately. Job creation is essential to get the economy back on track, to help America’s struggling families, to address our long-term budgetary challenges, and to preserve the possibility of the American Dream. Chronic unemployment and underemployment has contributed to the highest poverty levels since 1965, depressing our economy, and creating a higher than normal demand for government safety net programs. Investing in job creation is the surest path to an economic recovery that works for everyone, not just CEOs and the most profitable corporations.

It is critical that the plan produced be balanced with significant revenues. Discretionary programs have already been cut by $42 billion for FY11 and more than a trillion dollars over ten years as called for in the Budget Control Act. Cuts to domestic discretionary spending are already contributing to tighter state and local budgets and 600,000 public sector jobs have been cut to balance budgets. In fact, public sector job losses are holding back economic recovery and will continue to do so as 37 out of 44 states plan to spend less on services in 2012 than they spent in 2008. The next step for Congress is to raise revenues fairly with corporations and the wealthy paying their fair share, so that federal investments can support economic recovery.

The 2010 U.S. Census data highlights the shocking figures on rising poverty and reminds us what is grimly at stake. In the richest country in the world, it is unconscionable that nearly one in four children and one in six Americans live in poverty, as corporations and CEOs make record earnings yet fail to pay their fair share in taxes. I urge you to protect critical low-income programs and preserve the integrity of the social safety net. Social Security does not add one dime to the deficit, and does not belong in this debate. Further, I urge you to oppose any cuts in Social Security benefits, Medicare benefits, and the federal contribution to Medicaid. Cuts to Medicaid would simply shift costs to states.

I commend you for your initial efforts to tackle this daunting challenge and urge you to pursue a jobs agenda for all Americans that will reinvigorate our economy.

Sincerely,

Gerald W. McEntee
President

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