



August 16, 2011

An Open Letter to the United States Congress: Support Transparency Efforts for Deficit Reduction “Supercommittee”

Dear Member of Congress:

On behalf of the 362,000 members of the National Taxpayers Union, I write to encourage your support for efforts to increase the transparency of the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction.

The Committee, established under the Budget Control Act of 2011, will be tasked with developing legislation to reduce the deficit by at least \$1.5 trillion. Despite the laudable goal, the Committee operates with no prohibition on tax hikes. Moreover, the final product will enjoy expedited floor consideration that limits debate, precludes the opportunity for amendments, and eliminates procedural checks available to the minority, such as the motion to recommit in the House and filibuster in the Senate. Given the stakes, and the very real threat of tax increases, Americans must be granted a seat at the proceedings to ensure that the Committee is held accountable for its work.

Inevitably, the content of the Committee’s deliberations and final bill will engender heated debate from the right and left of our political spectrum. Yet, everyone – regardless of where their opinions may lie on this spectrum – should be united in demanding an end to the closed-door discussions that have typified many recent policy battles. Crafting a solution to Washington’s historic overspending problem is one of the most important debates this generation will face and Congress must make certain that it is held in full view of those it will ultimately impact.

Toward that end, NTU encourages you to work toward the passage of S. 1501 and H.R. 2796, which would ensure that the Committee’s work is conducted in a transparent and accessible manner. These bills, introduced by Sen. Heller (R-NV) and Rep. Buchanan (R-FL) respectively, would require that all meetings, except those involving confidential information, in which a quorum of the Committee members are present, are open to the public and made available for television coverage.

NTU would also encourage Congress to pursue further measures to provide the transparency that the Committee’s work merits and that taxpayers deserve. Specifically, NTU believes that meetings between Committee members and lobbyists should be posted online, that financial disclosures of Committee members should be made available online, and that final legislative language should be posted at least 72 hours prior to the final Committee vote.

Openness and accountability in the legislative process is not an issue of politics, but of a fundamental belief in good governance. The issues with which the Select Committee on Deficit Reduction will be dealing have the potential to affect far too many lives and wallets to be handled behind closed doors. For that reason we encourage you to support S. 1501 and H.R. 2796 as well as other steps toward making the Committee as transparent as possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B. Greife".

Brandon Greife
Federal Government Affairs Manager