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December 16, 2013

Support Murray-Ryan Budget Agreement on H.J. Res. 59

Dear Senator:

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, we urge you to vote in favor of H.J. Res. 59, including on any motion to invoke cloture.

We take this position with reluctance. On one hand, we commend Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA) and Rep. Paul Ryan (R-WI) on their agreement on the need to make at least some changes to the budget sequester. The damage already caused by the sequester has been widespread, and it will continue to get worse unless Congress addresses it. Children have lost access to Head Start; class sizes have grown; health care programs have been cut back; law enforcement programs are being starved of resources; and badly-needed upgrades to our roads and bridges have been delayed. The Murray-Ryan agreement will not end the sequester, but it is a step in the right direction.

In addition, we are also pleased that the Murray-Ryan agreement will remain in effect through Fiscal Year 2015. It will reduce the number of manufactured budget crises that we have seen in the past several years, and it will allow Congress to focus more of its attention on other important priorities.

On the other hand, we are troubled by some of the details. Most notably, the Murray-Ryan agreement does not include an extension of unemployment insurance. This is something that could easily be done by closing tax loopholes that favor the wealthiest Americans, and it is unconscionable that Congress would leave our existing tax policies intact in order to kick an estimated 1.3 million working families out of a vital safety net – particularly when this would happen just in time for the holidays. We are also disappointed that the budget will demand more out-of-pocket sacrifices from federal employees, and that it will put new burdens on private pension programs.

The Leadership Conference urges you to support the Murray-Ryan agreement, but also asks Congress to take a better approach in the future. We believe that there are better ways to address our budgetary problems while protecting America's working families. If you have any questions, please contact either of us or Senior Counsel Rob Randhava at (202) 466-3311.

Sincerely,

Wade Henderson
President & CEO

Nancy Zirkin
Executive Vice President