

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 7, 2015

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
S-230, US Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Harry Reid
Minority Leader
S-221, US Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John Boehner
Speaker of the House
H-232, US Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Democratic Leader
H-204, US Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear President Obama, Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Reid, Speaker Boehner and Democratic Leader Pelosi:

We write regarding the current budget caps and appropriations process for Fiscal Year 2016. We appreciate your past support for bipartisan budget deals that secured necessary resources to support vital initiatives, both for defense and domestic priorities. But we are deeply concerned that a failure to reach a consensus on budget cap relief this summer will threaten our national security, undermine our economy and shortchange future generations. Additionally, it is possible this impasse leads to a long-term continuing resolution that diminishes Congress's oversight of the executive branch. Therefore, we respectfully urge you, without further delay, to begin serious negotiations on crafting a responsible bipartisan plan to provide adequate resources for all 12 appropriations bills for Fiscal Year 2016.

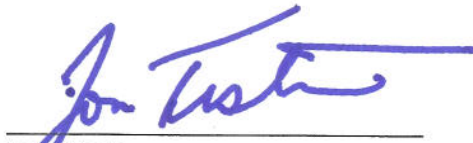
The current sequestration budget caps in place for Fiscal Year 2016 have already proven to be unworkable to our colleagues on both sides of the aisle. Earlier this spring, we saw Republican leadership in both chambers resort to the use of a budget gimmick to provide nearly \$40 billion to boost military spending above the budget caps. More recently, Senate Democrats made known their intent to reject consideration of any appropriations bills until a deal is made to lift the budget caps currently in place. Instead of relying on budget gimmicks and trying to score cheap political points, we urge everyone to focus on the fact that the American people are understandably sick and tired of these games. They expect us to find a responsible, bipartisan path forward to properly invest in our economy without increasing the deficit, just as Senator Patty Murray and Congressman Paul Ryan did in 2013.

While Republicans and Democrats on the Senate Appropriations Committee are doing their best to report bills to move our country forward, their efforts are significantly hampered by the sequestration level budget caps in place for Fiscal Year 2016. Sequestration caps make it nearly impossible to responsibly invest in critical programs, even when there is clear bipartisan support:

- The Senate's Military Construction-Veterans Affairs (MilCon-VA) bill fails our nation's veterans by underfunding the VA by \$857 million at a time when the Agency is facing unprecedented demand for services. The House bill falls short of the VA's stated needs by over \$1 billion. Ensuring that our veterans receive the care they have earned is not a partisan issue. Unfortunately, the MilCon-VA bills passed by the House and Senate Appropriations Committees fall short from what our veterans should expect from us. As the National Military Family Association recently wrote, "What is clear is that military families do not deserve the uncertainty resulting from sequestration and the threat of more budget cuts."
- National security leaders across the military services have stated that the approach taken in the House and Senate appropriations bills fail to provide the certainty that is required to implement the long-term strategies to keep our nation safe. The current proposals are inefficient, costly and inject greater uncertainty into a defense budget that relies upon carrying out long-term strategies to keep us safe. Additionally, these proposals would underfund the Department of Homeland Security and hamstring Agencies tasked with protecting Americans.
- Infrastructure funding for drinking water and wastewater projects in both rural and urban communities will be subject to significant cuts. The Senate Interior Appropriations bill proposes \$533 million in cuts, as compared to Fiscal Year 2015, to the State Revolving Loan Funds that support infrastructure projects that provide clean drinking water, upgrade aging wastewater systems, and put people to work. Based on EPA estimates of investment outcomes, these cuts will result in 230 fewer projects, 14,000 fewer jobs, and \$1 billion less in matching fund investments from states compared to the current year. Furthermore, we are troubled by the approximately 40 percent cut to mandatory transportation funding over the next decade included in the budget resolution that passed earlier this year. These cuts would have a tremendously negative effect on our nation's aging infrastructure and economy.
- The Senate Labor-Health & Human Services-Education bill fails to keep up with the demand for Head Start services by \$1.4 billion. The last time sequestration took full effect in 2013, more than 57,000 children lost access to Head Start and Early Head Start, with enrollment falling to the lowest level since 2001. Head Start has a proven track record of supporting our children during a critical stage of their development, thus setting them on a brighter path.
- The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) will continue to receive inadequate support. This popular bipartisan initiative has proven to improve management of our public lands, ensure public access to treasured landscapes and drive our outdoor economy.

It is critical that you begin negotiations now in order to avoid another manufactured crisis this fall. No one wins if Congress fails to craft a bipartisan plan to provide support for our veterans, children or economy, or if Congress simply gives up and allows all federal agencies to operate for another year without any direction or oversight from Congress. We are confident that Congress and the White House can develop common-sense solutions to replace sequestration and stand ready to work with all of you.

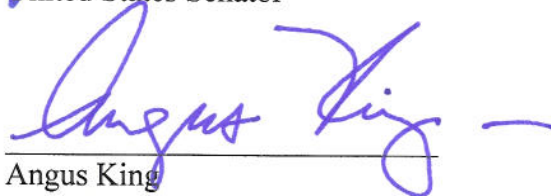
Sincerely,



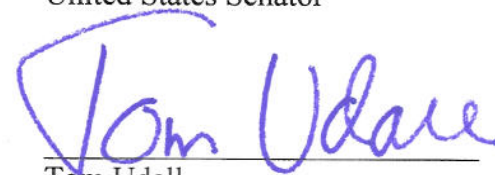
Jon Tester
United States Senator




Heidi Heitkamp
United States Senator




Angus King
United States Senator



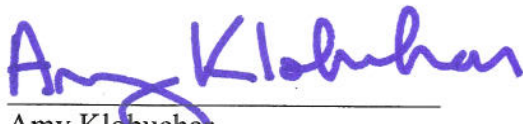
Tom Udall
United States Senator



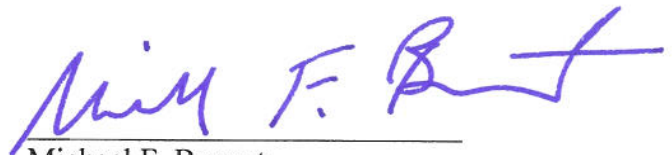
Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



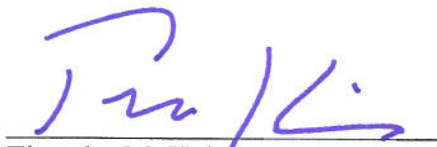
Mark R. Warner
United States Senator




Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



Timothy M. Kaine
United States Senator



Claire McCaskill
United States Senator