



For Immediate Release
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Floor Statement of Senator Max Baucus (D-Mont.)
Regarding the Task Force for Responsible Fiscal Action Act of 2009
(as prepared for delivery)

Mr. President, commenting on the budget process in the 1980s, former CBO Director Rudy Penner said:

"The process is not the problem; the problem is the problem."

The Chairman and Ranking Republican Member of the Budget Committee have proposed another new budget process.

No one has shown greater zeal in taking on the budget deficit than the Chairman and Ranking Republican Member of the Budget Committee. I commend their good intentions.

But we should reject this process. Instead, we should solve the problem.

In their press release yesterday, Senators Conrad and Gregg said: "everything needs to be on the table, including spending and revenues." But why stop there?

If Congress is going to outsource its core fiscal responsibilities, why stop with just those responsibilities? Why not cede to this commission all of the legislation in the next Congress? Why don't we just outsource the entire year's work, and then adjourn for the year?

Come to think of it, if we do cede all of our powers to this commission, what is to stop them from inserting any and all business for the next Congress into the commission's one, non-amendable, omnibus vehicle?

There's the rub. For if the commission were merely a farce, then we could be satisfied with merely ridiculing it.

But this commission and its new fast track process are truly dangerous. If we were to cede all of our responsibilities to this commission, and we were to tie our hands so that we could not amend its recommendations, then we would risk setting in motion some truly terrible policy.

Under the proposed fast-track procedures, we would not be able to amend the proposal. What if we didn't like the commission's recommendations? We would not be able to replace the commission's recommendations with our own.

And it is clear from their press release that Senators Conrad and Gregg have painted a big red target on Social Security and Medicare. That's what this commission is all about. It's a big roll of the dice for Social Security and Medicare.

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Advocates of the task force say that the regular order is not working. They say that we need a new process to address our long-term fiscal challenges.

But they're wrong. The regular order is working.

We are enacting health care reform. And serious people know that controlling the costs of health care is the central path to addressing our long-term budget challenges.

The lion's share of the reason why deficits are projected to grow so much in the long-run is the enormous increase in the costs of health care. We are doing something about it.

We are doing it the right way. We held open hearings. We legislated in committee. We are voting on amendments. We are legislating.

The Congressional Budget Office says that health care reform will cut the deficit \$130 billion in the first 10 years and \$650 billion in the second 10 years. That's nearly \$800 billion in CBO-certified deficit reduction in health care alone.

And next year, we will legislate fundamental tax reform.

But some appear to want to throw in the towel. Some want to punt our responsibilities away.

I can see that a commission may be attractive to some. After all, it's the easy way out. It takes away our accountability for what we do. Senators can blame it all on the commission. Senators can say, "The commission made me do it."

But this is no time to abdicate responsibility. This new administration and this Congress are less than a year old. We should not shirk our responsibility. Rather, we should do the job that our constituents sent us here to do.

And luckily, we already have a process to address the budget. It's called "the Congressional Budget Process."

Here's a novel idea: Why don't we use the budget process to address the budget deficit?

If the Chairman and Ranking Republican Member of the Budget Committee are in such broad agreement on their goals, why don't they just skip the commission and go straight to their recommendation? That is exactly why Congress created the budget resolution and the reconciliation bill.

We don't need a commission to do our work. We don't need a new process to solve the problem. To solve the problem, we just need to solve the problem.

I urge my Colleagues to reject this commission. Let's get back to solving the problem. Let's get back to enacting real health care reform.

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