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in order of seniority*

March 13, 2014

Chairman Paul Ryan
Committee on the Budget
U.S. House of Representatives
207 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Ryan,

As members of the Congressional Black Caucus, we were deeply troubled by your recent remarks on Bill Bennett's Morning in America show where you stated that there is a "tailspin of culture, in our inner cities in particular, of men not working and just generations of men not even thinking about working or learning the value and the culture of work." Your comments were highly offensive.

We understand that you have since clarified your comments, saying that you "were not implicating the culture of one community, but of society as a whole." You also stated that "we have allowed our society to isolate or quarantine the poor rather than integrate people into our communities." You continued, stating that "the predictable result has been multi-generational poverty and little opportunity. I also believe the government's response has inadvertently created a poverty trap that builds barriers to work. A stable, good-paying job is the best bridge out of poverty."

The problem many people in poverty face is not isolation, but rather the lack of resources to help ensure all people have the opportunity to succeed and contribute to society, such as adequate transportation, infrastructure, job training programs and other resources to search for jobs and become gainfully employed. A serious policy conversation on poverty should not begin with assumptions or stereotypes. Poverty in our nation is a critical problem that must be approached with diligence and the utmost respect for those who are trapped by poverty's grasp.

Each year, the Congressional Black Caucus releases a budget that seeks to create opportunity for all Americans, including those in both urban and rural communities. We encourage you to analyze our budget and work with us to positively address the great needs of impoverished Americans. We also encourage you to include key elements of the CBC budget in this year's Republican budget plan, such as the nonpartisan 10-20-30 plan that targets federal resources to communities across the nation that have historically been hardest hit by poverty.

We may have many disagreements on the best way to approach this critical issue, yet despite our differences, we all agree on the pressing need to eradicate poverty in our nation. Members of the CBC invite you to join us at one of our weekly meetings to discuss our perspectives on poverty in search of finding constructive common ground.

Sincerely,

Rep. Marcia L. Fudge
Chair, Congressional Black Caucus

Rep. Gwen Moore

