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June 19, 2014

Chairman Jeff Miller  
Ranking Member Mike Michaud  
House Committee on Veterans Affairs  
334 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Chairman Bernie Sanders  
Ranking Member Richard Burr  
Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs  
412 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairmen and Ranking Members,

As you begin your work as a conferee on legislation to address the tragic problems uncovered at the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget encourages you to work toward a final agreement that provides for quality and timely health care for our nation's servicemen and women in a fiscally responsible manner. Fully paying for new costs will strengthen the commitment to this national priority. We stand ready to work with you to achieve this goal.

It is a moral imperative that the United States takes care of its veterans. National priorities must be funded responsibly to provide a sustainable base for that commitment. Adding new costs to the nation's credit card by providing unlimited funds or designating costs as "emergency" would violate basic principles of fiscal responsibility and would demonstrate to veterans that Congress is unwilling to make difficult choices to provide them the care they deserve.

As you work with your colleagues to find a solution, we strongly recommend that new spending in the conference agreement be subject to appropriations within the discretionary spending caps, the same as all other Veterans Affairs health spending. If you and the other conferees decide to provide mandatory funding, the funding level should be for a fixed amount -- not an open-ended entitlement -- and fully offset by other mandatory savings or revenues. We encourage you to identify or allow for such offsets and subject the budgetary effects of the bill to statutory PAYGO rather than grant a blanket emergency exemption from statutory PAYGO or the discretionary statutory spending caps. Finally, there should be ongoing evaluation to ensure the funds are being spent wisely and that more timely health care is secured for our veterans.

The Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget has identified a long list of savings options in the discretionary budget, mandatory budget, and tax code that could help free up room to prioritize veterans' health needs. (Attached)

We welcome the opportunity to work with you on potential offsets, and hope that you will take a fiscally responsible approach to meet our nation's commitment to our veterans without saddling the next generation with additional debt.

Sincerely,

Maya MacGuineas  
President, The Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget



CC:

Senator Mark Begich  
Senator Richard Blumenthal  
Senator Sherrod Brown  
Senator Tom Coburn  
Senator Mazie Hirono  
Senator Johnny Isakson  
Senator Mike Johanns  
Senator John McCain  
Senator Patty Murray  
Senator Jay Rockefeller  
Senator Marco Rubio  
Senator Jon Tester  
Representative Dan Benishek  
Representative Corrine Brown  
Representative Julia Brownley  
Representative Mike Coffman  
Representative Bill Flores  
Representative Ann Kirkpatrick  
Representative Doug Lamborn  
Representative Phil Roe  
Representative Mark Takano  
Representative Jackie Walorski  
Representative Tim Walz  
Representative Brad Wenstrup