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United States Senate

Senator Tom Coburn, MD

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION,
LABOR, AND PENSIONS

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RANKING MEMBER
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE CONSTITUTION

March 23, 2010

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator McConnell,

I am writing to notify you that I would like to be consulted on any unanimous consent agreements regarding the consideration of H.R. 4851, the Continuing Extension Act of 2010, which would extend a number of federal programs for one month.

No one is arguing that Americans who are currently unemployed should not have their unemployment insurance payments extended. But once again, Congress is refusing to find a way to offset the **\$9.15 billion** cost of bill with cuts to less important federal spending.

Time and time again, Congress intentionally waits until the last minute to consider important legislation and then declares the billions of dollars in foreseeable costs as "emergency" spending in order to avoid having to find a way to pay for the bills' price tags.

In the last 6 months, Congress has passed four major extension bills. H.R. 4851 would be the fifth such bill. The total cost of these bills is almost **\$30 billion**. Additionally, over the last year Congress has increased funding totaling **\$64.9 billion** for the Highway and Unemployment Insurance Trust Funds without offsets.

This short sightedness sticks taxpayers with billions of dollars in additional debt and treats the unemployed, doctors and Medicare patients, hard working men and women who help make our roads and bridges safe, and others relying on federal funds as pawns in Congress' borrowing and spending game.

When the previous last-minute one month extension (H.R. 4691) was brought up days before the funding authority for numerous federal programs, including Unemployment Insurance and the Highway Trust Fund, expired at the end of February, 2010, a United States Senator was attacked for objecting to passing the bill without any debate or amendments because the bill was unpaid for and added **\$10 billion** to our nation's debt.

As always, those who prefer to borrow to avoid making tough budget decisions won out, and the taxpayers were stuck with another **\$10 billion** of debt.

Congress has continually resisted the need to act like every family in the United States of America and to budget and live within their means. Our debt is now over **\$12.6 trillion**. The 2010 deficit is projected to amount to **\$1.3 trillion** and we are borrowing 43 cents on every dollar; yet, Congress continues to increase spending without any correlating spending cuts.

Congress' inability to prioritize and manage national needs results in real consequences for Americans, whether it be furloughs, market uncertainty that leads to lower investment and job losses, or Americans being saddled with higher debt and taxes.

If Congress keeps approving temporary extension bills throughout the calendar year without finding offsets, Congress will have added almost **\$120 billion** to our national debt. Additionally, the Senate has already

approved more than **\$120 billion** in new federal spending not offset, even though it passed Pay-Go legislation just over one month ago claiming to prohibit such activity.

In the House, Appropriations Chairman David Obey has indicated that some new spending needs to be offset with unused, unobligated funds. Chairman Obey suggested rescinding **\$362 million** in reserved stimulus funds for the Women, Infants and Children nutrition program; **\$112 million** from a Commerce Department program designed to provide coupons to households to help buy analog-to-digital converter boxes; **\$103 million** from USDA rural development programs; and **\$44 million** from the Transportation Department's Consumer Assistance to Recycle and Save Program (also known as the "Cash for Clunkers" program) to offset the cost of a different spending bill.¹ The Senate should likewise find a way to offset this one-month extension bill and create a sustainable precedent.

The Senate could start with federal unobligated balances. According to the White House, in Fiscal Year 2011, 33 percent of all federal funds were unused and obligated. The total dollar amount of these unobligated balances was estimated at **\$703 billion**.² Rescinding only discretionary funding that has been available for more than two years would likely result in roughly **\$100 billion** in offset spending. The Senate could also tap into **\$228 billion** in unobligated stimulus funds as Chairman Obey has suggested.

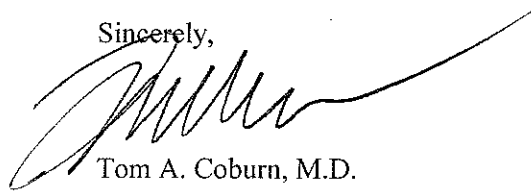
At the very least, Congress should reconsider transferring the almost **\$100 million** budget increase it approved for itself for 2010 to offset the cost of additional spending.³ Congress should not be increasing its budget by 4.5 percent when our economy shrunk by 2.4 percent⁴ and inflation was at less than 1 percent.

I have also detailed through numerous oversight hearings, reports, and legislation how the federal government wastes more than **\$300 billion** every year.⁵ I have suggested hundreds of offsets to new spending, including consolidating duplicative programs, and eliminating federal programs that address parochial concerns.

We all think our Americans in need of financial assistance are worth the **\$9 billion** bill cost, but do we think our children and grandchildren are worth paying for these costs up front, rather than passing the cost to them? I am willing to accept a unanimous consent agreement to pass the bill with my amendment included to offset the full amount. I am open to all other offset suggestions.

Thank you for protecting my rights regarding this legislation.

Sincerely,



Tom A. Coburn, M.D.
U.S. Senator

cc: Majority Leader Harry Reid

¹ Sanchez, Humberto, "Obey Introduces Disaster Aid Supplemental," *CongressDailyPM*, March 22, 2010

² "Fiscal Year 2011 Balances of Budget Authority; Budget of the U.S. Government," Executive Office of the President Office of Management and Budget, 2011, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/fy2011/assets/balances.pdf>

³ The reductions would not affect the Capitol Police or other congressional support offices such as the Congressional Budget Office, Government Accountability Office, or Congressional Research Service.

⁴ "Gross Domestic Product: Fourth Quarter 2009 (Second Estimate)," Bureau of Economic Analysis, February 26, 2010, <http://www.bea.gov/newsreleases/national/gdp/gdpnewsrelease.htm>

⁵ <http://coburn.senate.gov/oversight/?FuseAction=OversightAction.Home;>
<http://coburn.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=ConstituentServices.PorkBusters>