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*\* A copy of this letter was also sent to the House of Representatives*

November 9, 2009

United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

As a federal debt ceiling vote approaches, the Senate is again considering whether Congress needs to put in place a commission or special process to address the country's fiscal situation. The National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare would like to reaffirm the strong opposition of its millions of members and supporters to any commission or special process that would force changes to Social Security through the use of a Congressional fast-track procedure.

We appreciate the concerns of legislators who are looking for a means of reducing the federal deficit and slowing the growth in the debt. However, we have significant concerns about any process – including the Conrad-Gregg Commission – that would disenfranchise American voters and subject Social Security beneficiaries to harmful cuts in benefits.

Social Security is a critical lifeline for American seniors. They deserve to have changes to this program receive substantive consideration that focuses on the circumstances of old age not the need for reductions in the budget.

**Social Security is Not Responsible for the Current Deficit or the Federal Debt.**

As supporters of Social Security, we are surprised to see the federal deficit and the federal debt cited as the reason a commission needs to be established to make cuts in Social Security. The truth is that neither the \$1.4 trillion deficit nor the nearly \$12 trillion debt has anything to do with Social Security benefits.

For nearly three decades, Social Security has taken in more revenue each year than it has paid out in benefits. These excess funds have been invested in special issue U.S. government securities. Thus, Social Security has effectively been loaning its excess funds to the federal government to spend on other programs. Rather than increasing the federal deficit, Social Security's annual surpluses have actually been covering up the true size of the deficit in the general fund.

With respect to the debt, Social Security is a holder of U.S. government securities just like the United Kingdom or China. Neither the U.K. nor Social Security has caused the debt to rise to \$12 trillion, rather a portion of the \$12 trillion is a debt owed by the government to those holders of securities. In short, these lenders to the government are not responsible for the increase in the debt.

**A Vote for a Commission Will be Viewed by Seniors as a Vote to Cut Social Security Benefits.**

While the federal debt has increased, nothing about Social Security benefits has changed. Benefits are actually quite modest. For 2009, the average annual benefit for a retired worker was only about \$13,800. For the average beneficiary, benefits replace only about 40 percent of prior earnings and that percentage is dropping as the already-scheduled increase in the retirement age phases in.

Senior citizens will see a commission as an effort to reduce the deficit and the debt at their expense. We strongly object to the creation of a commission that will cut Social Security benefits and ask seniors to sacrifice to solve a debt problem they did not create.

**A Lack of Public Engagement Will Leave the American People Out of the Discussion.**

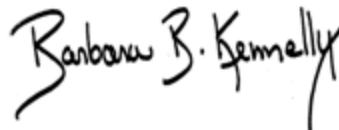
Under most commission proposals – including the Conrad-Gregg Commission – a very small group of legislators and administration officials would design legislation to address issues affecting Social Security, federal taxes and perhaps Medicare and Medicaid. The legislation would then be fast-tracked through Congress on a time-limited schedule with no opportunity for amendment. This runs counter to efforts of the new Administration to provide transparency to the American public about its activities. Enacting legislation that would push through changes of this importance to millions of Americans, especially seniors, without the opportunity for Members of an elected Congress to amend them, ultimately disenfranchises the public and undermines the legitimacy of the political process.

**Social Security is Needed Now More Than Ever.**

This is not the best time to be reducing Social Security benefits for either beneficiaries or the nation's economy. The recent economic meltdown has reinforced the importance of Social Security as the basic foundation for retirement for this generation and the next. The sharp decline in the value of savings and 401(k) accounts together with the collapse of housing values has significantly reduced the retirement security of millions of Americans. Social Security was created in times like these to be the rock in a chaotic financial world, and it has proved its usefulness once again. Cuts of almost any kind are not the right remedy in the current economy, but cuts in Social Security now or in the future will leave older Americans increasingly reliant on the uncertainties of the stock market.

The National Committee strongly urges you to oppose any measure authorizing a commission or special process that would create fast-tracked and non-amendable legislation affecting Social Security and the beneficiaries it serves.

Cordially,



Barbara B. Kennelly  
President and CEO