

Sample Letters to the Editor about Federal Budget Decisions

Some Letters to the Editor Tips (portions adapted from helpful advice from The Opportunity Agenda: <http://opportunityagenda.org/>)

Referencing the original piece. Letters are typically a reaction to a specific piece and should reference it including the author and title. However, sometimes headlines contain harmful frames and vocabulary that we would rather not repeat. In these cases, you can refer to the story's author and the date it ran.

Thinking about length and focus. Letters need to be short and straight to the point and shouldn't exceed 200 words, which can be a challenge. Because of these limitations, and the goal of getting your message across, it's best to focus on one point you want to make about an article, not try to refute or praise every piece of it.

Looking for opportunities. Almost any story can generate a letter to the editor.

(Our two cents): Think of comparisons or contrasts to the budget cuts or services you want to talk about. For example, if there is a story about corporate CEO's taking home big bonuses, you can refer back to the big tax breaks passed by Congress in December, and how unnecessary they are, in contrast to the services that can help families get and keep employment and pay for food and shelter.

Whether or not your letter is published, send a copy of it to your senators and representative.

The following are just suggestions – feel free to adapt and change – ideally, you will incorporate your own experience and ideas.

The Recent Senate Vote

To the Editor,

Hungry children, the Snow Belt poor, eager but underfunded college students and millions of other Americans struggling through the Great Recession all caught a rare break when the U.S. Senate refused to pass the House of Representatives' radical spending plan. Senators said no to cutting child nutrition programs, home heating assistance, college grants, and dozens of other programs that meet basic human needs, stabilize the economy, employ hundreds of thousands and are not primarily to blame for the government's deficits.

Senate, House and administration leaders are now working out a compromise spending plan, one presumably not as harsh and counterproductive as the House's H.R. 1, but still sure to demand too much from those with the least to give. By contrast, rational budgeting knows where to look for savings and resources: bloated defense spending, multinational corporate treasuries bursting with cash, and the windfall profits of reckless Wall Street speculators.

I'm [proud/disappointed] that my senator[s] _____ [and _____] voted to [reject/support] the House budget. I hope he/she will help craft a new spending plan that addresses government deficits while supporting American families and reflecting American values.

Sincerely,

If the Senator is in the News During the Recess

To the Editor:

It was heartening to read of Senator ____'s defense of [education? Social Security? other beneficial program?] ("*Senator __ Affirms Support for Something,*" ***Hometown News***, March 22). At a time when too many in Congress seem to be forgetting how fragile our economy is, Senator ____ makes the important point that [service x] is a cost-effective investment that will [help people get and keep jobs]. When the cost of food and gas is climbing and there still are far too few jobs, the federal government should not be cutting back on the help that low-income families and older people need, and should not close the door on education and job training for young workers and the unemployed. Some very deep cuts education, Head Start, community health centers, energy assistance, and much more will be before Congress in the coming weeks. Those who support these cuts say they want to reduce the deficit – but making things tougher for millions of families just means more painful years when they won't earn enough to pay much in taxes. Combine that with the enormous tax breaks for the wealthiest Congress passed in December, and expect high deficits as far as the eye can see. Instead, more support for [service x] will help families – and the economy- get back on track.

(or: It was disappointing to read of Senator ____'s determination to cut domestic programs. ("*Senator ____ Vows to Cut Something,*" ***Hometown News***, March 22). At a time when there are still too few jobs and the cost of food and gas is climbing, slashing services will cut hundreds of thousands of existing jobs, according to respected economists. The federal government should not be cutting back on the help that low-income families and older people need, and should not close the door on education and job training for young workers and the unemployed. Some very deep cuts education, Head Start, community health centers, energy assistance, and much more will be before Congress in the coming weeks. Those who support these cuts say they want to reduce the deficit – but making things tougher for millions of families just means more painful years when they won't earn enough to pay much in taxes. Combine that with the enormous tax breaks for the wealthiest Congress passed in December, and expect high deficits as far as the eye can see. Instead, more support for [service x] will help families – and the economy- get back on track.)

Sincerely,

The Will of the People

To the Editor,

Do the American people really support the drastic cuts to human needs programs being proposed in Washington? The service cutters often claim popular support, but that's only in the abstract. Asked if they think the federal budget can be reduced, most people will unsurprisingly say yes. But ask them if they support cuts to specific services like education or nutrition aid for the poor, — and the answer in poll after poll is no.

Over half (55 percent) of those polled in a recent CBS News/New York Times survey would rather cut military spending than Medicare (21 percent) or Social Security (13 percent). Sixty percent of respondents in an ABC News/Washington Post preferred a combination of raising taxes and cutting spending to reduce deficits.

When the question is not on "federal spending" but rather childhood nutrition, veterans housing, medical research and other specific programs on which real, flesh-and-blood people depend to survive and live better, the American people reject deep cuts as cynical and counterproductive. They want a balanced approach that asks most of those with the most to give, not the least. Let's have a budget plan that truly reflects the will of the people.

Sincerely,

Washington Chainsaw Massacre

To the Editor:

The rush in Congress to slash vital programs is turning into a horror film: “The Washington Chainsaw Massacre.” Instead of taking thoughtful steps to reduce the deficit and build foundations for a more prosperous future, conservative ideologues on the Hill seem intent on blazing a trail of destruction that will hurt millions of people who are struggling just to get by.

Indiscriminately cutting human needs funding would hinder the health and development of millions of low-income children, risk harm to seniors and people with disabilities, and threaten the survival of millions of families still hurt by unemployment and reduced income. How can we as a nation move forward if we allow more people to go hungry, more families to become homeless, more people to lose their jobs and access to health care, and fewer children to have educational opportunities?

Instead of slashing programs that help the most vulnerable, Congress should reduce the billions spent in tax breaks for corporations and the wealthy, and make conscientious cuts in wasteful military spending. Protecting the well-being of real people and helping them to get back to work is what will get our country moving again.

Sincerely,

Everyone Gets Hurt

To the Editor,

Who gets hurt by reckless spending cuts? It’s not just the “regular suspects:” the young, the elderly, the poor—though they certainly bear more than their fair share of the pain. But the federal government provides services on which we all rely, and which are all endangered by an ideologically-driven and careless approach to budgeting.

Cross your fingers next time you buy ground chuck at the supermarket, if the House-passed plan to lay off meat inspectors goes through. Expect the air you breathe and the water you drink to be dirtier, if the House majority’s efforts to stifle the Environmental Protection Agency are adopted. Say goodbye to Planned Parenthood clinics that provide a variety of health services for low-income women and their families, and to Big Bird and other Public Broadcasting programs. Oh, and the plans will also kill hundreds of thousands of jobs, so we can all enjoy the Great Recession much longer.

Last November, voters asked for more jobs and a responsive government. Instead, the House cuts will eliminate jobs and prevent the government from fulfilling many of its most basic functions. It’s the kind of political bait-and-switch that adds insult to very abundant injury.

Sincerely,

Education Cuts Will Make U.S. Less Competitive

Dear Editor,

Although politicians like to talk about how children are the future, the fact is that the U.S. is falling behind the rest of the world in education—especially in math and science. It doesn't take a Ph.D. to know that, sooner or later, our children won't be able to compete in the world, and neither will our nation.

The radical House Budget proposal would set us further behind by cutting more than 200,000 children from Head Start; reducing or eliminating programs that help disadvantaged kids, like Teach for America and YouthBuild; cutting K-12 aid to high-poverty schools; and cutting Pell Grants for 9.4 million low-income college students. The proposal would also essentially shut down job training under the Workforce Investment Act, meaning more than 8 million adults and youths would lose access to job training and other employment services.

Instead of cutting programs that invest in our future workforce, Congress should reduce the billions spent in tax breaks for corporations and the wealthy, and make conscientious cuts in wasteful military spending. Our future depends on it.

Sincerely,