

April 1, 2010

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House of Representatives
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Leader Reid and Speaker Pelosi:

As we enter the next work period, I urge swift action to complete Senate-House negotiations regarding the American Workers, State, and Business Relief Act and respectfully request that completion of this legislation be the first priority on the Congressional agenda when we return from the Easter state and district work period.

This important piece of legislation is critical to American families and businesses. It includes numerous federal tax provisions that expired in 2009, as well as assistance for unemployed Americans, fiscal relief for states to protect their Medicaid programs, increased Medicare payments for doctors, and \$1.5 billion in emergency disaster relief for our nation's farmers and ranchers who incurred significant agricultural losses last year.

In our continuing efforts to restore the nation's economy and create jobs, there is no step more important than providing a stable economic environment for our businesses. Without predictability in the tax code, our businesses lack the certainty needed to plan for the future, make capital investments and hire workers. In my home state of Arkansas, the lapse in the biodiesel tax credit has resulted in biodiesel production nearly ceasing for the entire first quarter of this year. Without a doubt, this unpredictability in the tax code has caused similar disruptions across the country and across the various sectors of the economy impacted by the tax provisions in this bill. Whether it be infrastructure investments, research and development activity or capital improvements to retail and restaurant properties, just to name a few, significant economic activity will remain stymied until this bill becomes law and these tax provisions are renewed.

Additionally, the bill includes a critical extension of the policy to increase Medicare physician payment and prevent a scheduled 21% cut from going into effect. It is long past time that Congress find a long-term and sustainable solution for physician payment under Medicare. While I was not in Congress when the so-called Medicare "sustainable growth rate," or "SGR," payment formula was passed as part of the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, I served in the House when it was first discussed. Even then, I opposed the notion that our government should try to balance its budget on the backs of our nation's health care providers. Since 2002 I have consistently supported the

short-term patches Congress has made to prevent SGR payment cuts from going into effect, since, as we have seen, this formula is anything but sustainable. I regularly hear from Arkansas doctors who are opting out of Medicare, and even more alarming, from seniors in Arkansas who have trouble finding a Medicare doctor, especially in rural areas. I believe in the promise our government made to working Americans – that if we work hard, Medicare will be there to help us in our golden years. Medicare has made a healthy and secure retirement possible for tens of millions of Americans, and I stand with my constituents in saying it is time for Congress to act once and for all to protect seniors' access to their doctors in Medicare now and into the future.

Finally, the agricultural disaster provisions would provide much-needed relief to our nation's farmers that were devastated by natural disasters last year. Arkansas farmers were especially hard hit. In fact, they were hit twice. Arkansas had extremely wet weather during planting season, forcing many producers to re-seed several times. Then, during harvest time, some counties in Arkansas had more than 20 inches of rain. Crops were devastated. Farmers had huge planting expenses, and all they had to show for their hard work was lower-yielding, poorer-quality crops. The legislation also provides funding for agricultural losses across the United States, including losses for specialty crops, livestock, sugar, aquaculture, cottonseed, and poultry.

For these reasons, it is absolutely essential this piece of legislation receive our urgent attention. Congress must act quickly to retroactively renew the important provisions that have already expired and to provide emergency relief, whether to farmers who have faced tremendous losses due to natural disasters, to families struggling with the loss of a job and their health insurance, or to states struggling to preserve the critical services they provide in Medicaid as part of our nation's health care safety net. After meeting with many concerned Arkansans during the state work period, I cannot emphasize enough the urgency with which this legislation should be enacted. I appreciate your continued commitment to getting our economy back on track and look forward to working with you in the weeks and months ahead on this and other legislation to put Americans back to work.

Sincerely,

Blanche L. Lincoln

cc: The Honorable Max Baucus
The Honorable Sander Levin