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United States Senate

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March 28, 2017

The Honorable Mike Enzi,
Chairman
Senate Budget Committee
624 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Enzi,

I am very concerned that the Budget Committee has not scheduled a single hearing on the President's preliminary budget request for fiscal year 2018. In my view, President Trump's budget includes unacceptably painful cuts to programs that senior citizens, children, persons with disabilities, and working people rely on to feed their families, heat their homes, put food on the table, and educate their children.

Here are just a few of the budget cuts contained in the Trump budget that are morally obscene and bad economic policy.

The Trump budget would eliminate the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) that keeps 6.3 million Americans warm in the winter and cool in the summer.

Under the Trump budget, funding for afterschool programs would be abolished which would throw 1.1 million children into the streets or leave them home alone instead of in a safe environment for care and learning when the school day ends.

Head Start could be cut by more than 10 percent – a cut large enough to take away early childhood education and child care from more than 90,000 kids.

The Trump budget would make college more expensive by taking away grant aid from over 1.5 million students by eliminating the Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (SEOG) program and slashing funding for Pell Grants.

More than 200,000 families, seniors, and people with disabilities could be put at immediate risk of eviction and homelessness by President Trump's proposed \$6.2 billion cut to affordable housing programs.

At a time when 43 million Americans are living in poverty, President Trump would eliminate the Community Services Block Grant which makes sure that 16 million low-income Americans receive the emergency food, shelter, heating assistance, transportation and health care they need simply to stay alive.

President Trump's proposal to abolish the Legal Services Corporation would eliminate the only legal resource available to thousands of low-income veterans and families with children throughout the country.

During the campaign, President Trump promised to invest \$1 trillion rebuilding our crumbling infrastructure. But his budget breaks this campaign promise by proposing deep and severe cuts in grants to states to repair our roads, bridges, railways, rural water and wastewater facilities, and to revitalize rural and urban areas.

President Trump's budget would slash funding for the National Institutes of Health by \$5.8 billion, or 18 percent. How can we possibly find a cure for cancer or other life-threatening illnesses if we starve federal funding for the medical research that could make these cures possible?

Further, the Trump budget would threaten the air we breathe and the water we drink by proposing to slash environmental protection by \$2.6 billion, or 31.4 percent.

And after making all of these devastating cuts, President Trump has proposed one of the largest increases in defense spending in the modern history of this country. President Trump's budget is a massive transfer of federal resources away from people who need our help the most – senior citizens, children, the disabled, and the most vulnerable – to the Pentagon.

The Pentagon is the only agency in the Federal government that has never been able to pass an audit. Moreover, the Defense Department's \$1.44 trillion acquisition portfolio currently suffers from more than \$469 billion in contractor cost overruns.

Over this year and next, President Trump is proposing an \$84 billion increase in the Pentagon's budget. At a time when our country spends more on defense than the next twelve countries combined; when virtually every defense contractor has committed fraud; and when the Pentagon has "buried evidence of \$125 billion in bureaucratic waste," according to a recent investigative report by the *Washington Post*, the last thing we should be doing is increasing the already bloated Pentagon.

The lack of hearings with senior administration officials upon the release of a new President's "skinny budget" is an unprecedented break with past practice of this Committee.

In 2001, President Bush released his 175-page "skinny budget" on February 28. The very next day, the Budget Committee held a hearing on the budget with Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill. The following day, the Committee heard testimony from Office of Management and Budget Director Mitch Daniels. This Committee also held budget hearings with Secretary of Health and Human Services Tommy Thompson and Secretary of State Colin Powell. Prior to those four hearings, the Committee held seven other hearings, on topics including defense spending and tax policy.

In 2009, President Obama released his 142-page “skinny budget” on February 26. Shortly thereafter, this Committee held hearings on the request with OMB Director Peter Orszag, Secretary of Energy Steven Chu, and Secretary of the Treasury Timothy Geithner. Prior to those three hearings, this Committee held 10 others, including a hearing with Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke and another on health care reform.

Under Section 300 of the Congressional Budget Act, Congress is supposed to complete the Fiscal Year 2018 budget resolution no later than April 15th, less than one month from today. I don’t see how that deadline could possibly be met. It is incumbent upon us to start scheduling hearings on the budget as soon as possible.

Sincerely,



Bernard Sanders
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Budget Committee