



January 1, 2013

U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the 1.5 million members of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), I write to say that we are pleased that a “fiscal cliff” agreement has been reached. The American Taxpayer Relief Act of 2012 will prevent tax increases for millions of Americans, extend unemployment insurance benefits for Americans struggling to find work, and provide extensions of critical tax credits for low-income and middle-class families. Extending unemployment insurance for Americans who have exhausted their benefits is an important outcome of this negotiation, and we are pleased to see it included in the agreement. Teachers and school employees see firsthand the devastating effect long-term unemployment has on children and their communities. If an agreement had not been reached, 2 million workers would have lost benefits.

We are, however, very concerned that critical issues have not been resolved—most specifically, a sequester whose across-the-board budget cuts will lead to debilitating cuts to programs affecting our students, schools and communities, among others.

The American Taxpayer Relief Act of 2012 rightly extends several tax benefits that will help working families, including: the child care tax credit, which helps families cover the costs of high-quality care for their children; the earned income tax credit, a refundable federal income tax credit for low- to moderate-income working individuals and families; and the American Opportunity Tax Credit, which will continue to provide low-income students an opportunity to pursue higher education. The agreement also rightly extends the deduction that educators can take for personal expenses they incur for supplies and materials, and the federal Qualified Zone Academy Bond program to upgrade and modernize schools.

As important as this relief is right now to the majority of Americans, the AFT remains deeply concerned about the lack of agreement to avert potential sequestration. While the proposed two-month delay gives Congress some time to address this, it is imperative that action be taken to prevent the disastrous effects of across-the-board cuts. Failure to do so will cripple public services in communities across the nation, many of which are already barely recovering from the recent recession and state and local budget cuts.

Over the last 40 years, nondefense discretionary spending has generally been limited to between [3 percent and 5 percent of GDP](#) and is currently on the decline. This has held true even in recent years when the federal government increased investments to aid in the economic recovery. As most programs targeting low-income and middle-class

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families are discretionary, the mandatory 8.2 percent cut that would be enacted as a result of not addressing the sequester would have devastating consequences.

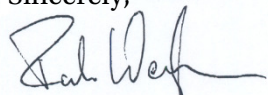
In human terms, this would mean:

- 100,000 children could no longer participate in Head Start, and 20,000 Head Start employees could be forced to leave their jobs.
- 500,000 students with special needs could be harmed by this cut, and 12,000 special education teachers and paraprofessionals could lose their jobs.
- Title I grants to 4,000 schools could end, affecting nearly 2 million students.
- More than 16,000 teachers and paraprofessionals could lose their jobs.
- 80,000 children from low-income working families could lose their child care.
- Up to 1 million patients could lose services provided by community health centers.
- Nutrition programs for women, infants and children could lose \$543 million.
- In healthcare, 659,476 fewer people could be tested for HIV; 48,845 fewer women could be screened for cancer; and 211,958 fewer children could be vaccinated.
- At a time when the unemployment rate is still above 8 percent, 1.6 million fewer adults, dislocated workers and at-risk youth could receive job training, education and employment services.
- An estimated 496,000 healthcare and related jobs could be lost within the first year, and as many as 766,000 jobs could be lost by 2021.
- Federal college access programs, such as TRIO and GEAR UP, could also see an 8.2 percent cut. And the 1 percent origination fee for unsubsidized Stafford student loans could be raised by 7.6 percent, to about 1.1 percent of a total loan. These cuts would have the greatest impact on lower-income and at-risk students.

Earlier today, the Senate passed (89-8) the fiscal cliff agreement, with overwhelming bipartisan support. If the House does the same, millions of Americans will be protected from tax increases, and unemployed Americans will continue to receive needed benefits.

In the coming weeks, the AFT urges the incoming new Congress to work together to avoid sequestration once and for all. Failure to do so is not a viable option, nor are 12th-hour negotiations that make our economic stability vulnerable. We join the great majority of Americans concerned with a legislative process that has turned toxic and corrosive; it's no way to govern a great nation and it undermines our democracy. When politics and ideology trump governing, the American people are the ones who pay the price. No more Band-Aids, no more temporary fixes—Congress must act immediately to prevent these across-the-board cuts and focus on strengthening, not undercutting, our economy.

Sincerely,



Randi Weingarten  
President

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