Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

September 7, 2005

Dear Majority Leader Frist, Speaker Hastert, Chairman Gregg, and Chairman Nussle:

As we assess the nation's needs in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, we urge you to suspend indefinitely consideration of the spending and revenue bills required by the reconciliation instructions in this year's budget resolution. Instead, we call for swift Congressional consideration of legislation that reflects the nation's needs after Hurricane Katrina.

Now is not the time to cut services for our most vulnerable, cut taxes for our most fortunate, and add $35 billion to the deficit. When the Congress narrowly approved this year's budget resolution in April, we argued that the budget and its reconciliation instructions reflected the wrong priorities for our country. The new circumstances created by Hurricane Katrina magnify these concerns, and suggest that an adjustment to the previous plan is needed.

The budget resolution's spending reconciliation instructions require authorizing committees to recommend $35 billion in spending cuts by September 16. If allowed to go forward, this bill would likely cut programs that many victims of Hurricane Katrina will be relying on, including Medicaid, food stamps, and student loans. Clearly, it makes no sense to consider such a bill at a time when the massive needs of those affected by Hurricane Katrina are still being assessed.

The budget resolution's revenue reconciliation instructions require the Ways and Means and Finance Committees to report a bill cutting taxes by up to $70 billion by September 23. The anticipated consideration of this legislation comes at a time of near-record annual deficits and ongoing expenditures in Iraq and Afghanistan totaling at least $6 billion per month. In light of these circumstances and, moreover, given that the cost to the federal budget of the response to Hurricane Katrina has yet to be determined, we should not rush through a further reduction in the resources the federal government has available to respond to our nation's challenges.

The budget resolution – including its reconciliation instructions – is a fundamental statement of our policy priorities. Hurricane Katrina will require a rethinking of these priorities. Under the present circumstances we believe it would be misguided to proceed with fast-track consideration of legislation that would place at risk services to those in need and divert resources that are necessary to fund the federal response to this tragedy.

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Sincerely,

Harry Reid
Senate Democratic Leader

Kent Conrad
Senate Budget Committee Ranking Member

Nancy Pelosi
House Democratic Leader

John M. Spratt, Jr.
House Budget Committee Ranking Member