We, the undersigned former Members of Congress, urge the House, Senate and President to come together to address our fiscal situation and the long-term drivers of the debt while prioritizing investments in the country’s future, strengthening vital entitlement programs and reforming our tax code to make the country more competitive. It is imperative that these crucial efforts be undertaken in a manner that generates sufficient savings to put our debt on a sustainable path while, in the short term, preserving the economic recovery and encouraging longer-term economic growth.

Procedurally, we believe that a return to Regular Order—including an active slate of committee hearings, mark-ups that produce well-vetted legislation for floor debate, legitimate conference committees to resolve inter-house differences, and passage of an annual budget resolution— is central to restoring Congress’ ability to tackle difficult issues such as this. Leadership is important, but not to the exclusion of meaningful participation of all Members.

We are not naïve about the politically difficult choices that real reform entails. We have been there, fought many of these same battles and have the scars to show for it. However, we believe that, despite recent decreases in near-term projected deficits, the fundamental imbalance between long-term projected revenues and spending demand that you act now to avoid strapping future generations with an even bleaker set of options for confronting what we all know is an unsustainable debt burden.

Meaningful deficit reduction will also require that you enact a comprehensive fiscal plan that is large enough to put the debt on a clear downward path relative to the economy, replaces at least part of the sequester with better-targeted deficit reduction measures, and includes a sensible mix of revenue, spending cuts, and entitlement reforms. We believe new revenues can and should be generated through tax reform which promotes long-term economic growth. Likewise, reforms of entitlement programs can and should be structured to protect vulnerable populations, while simultaneously maintaining their solvency for generations to come.
Fortunately, there are a number of well-vetted, thoughtful policy options. The recommendations below include choices that some of us might oppose if enacted in a one-off manner. Nevertheless, we support a comprehensive package that includes many of the following elements, in no particular order:

- A careful reexamination of the subsidies provided to businesses, farmers and other interests by the federal government
- Reforms to federal military and civilian health and retirement benefits
- Medicare payment and delivery-system reforms that realign incentives toward quality versus quantity of care, such as expansion of bundled payments and increased penalties for re-admissions
- A redesign of the Medicare benefit that rationalizes cost-sharing and requires more first-dollar “skin in the game,” but provides great protections against catastrophic costs
- Means testing of Medicare recipients that modifies benefits received or increases premium contributions made by the wealthiest beneficiaries
- Retirement and eligibility age adjustments that encourage work while providing protections for workers who are not able to work longer
- The adoption of the chained CPI as a more accurate measure of inflation, with benefit enhancements to offset impact on low income beneficiaries
- Comprehensive tax reform that reduces tax preferences in order to lower rates, promote growth, and reduce the deficit while maintaining progressivity. These could include making changes to the mortgage interest deduction, state & local tax deduction, tax exclusion for employer-provided health care, preferential treatment for investment income and other tax expenditures benefiting both corporations and individuals.

Congress and the President should also begin work on a parallel process to make Social Security sustainably solvent, thereby preserving and strengthening the vital safety net provided by Social Security. This can be achieved through some of the following: progressive changes in the benefit formula, increases in the retirement age or other adjustments to reflect increased longevity, increasing revenues and other changes.

We hope that you find these recommendations helpful in building the case for tackling the still central issue of reining in our national debt, and stand ready to support any and all Members with the courage to make putting the country’s fiscal house in order a priority.

Respectfully,
Former U.S. Senators

Sen. Evan Bayh (D-IN)
Sen. Pete Domenici (R-NM)
Sen. Mel Martinez (R-FL)
Sen. William Brock (R-TN)
Sen. Byron Dorgan (D-ND)
Sen. Frank Murkowski (R-AK)
Sen. Jim Broyhill (R-NC)
Sen. Judd Gregg (R-NH)
Sen. Sam Nunn (D-GA)
Sen. Richard Bryan (D-NV)
Sen. Gary Hart (D-CO)
Sen. Charles Robb (D-VA)
Sen. Kent Conrad (D-ND)
Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX)
Sen. Alan Simpson (R-WY)
Sen. John Danforth (R-MO)
Sen. George LeMieux (R-FL)
Sen. John E. Sununu (R-NH)
Sen. Dennis DeConcini (D-AZ)
Sen. Joe Lieberman (I-CT)
Sen. George Voinovich (R-OH)

Former U.S. Representatives

Rep. Jason Altmire (D-PA)
Rep. Rod Chandler (R-WA)
Rep. Vic Fazio (D-CA)
Rep. Alvin J. Baldus (D-WI)
Rep. William Clinger (R-PA)
Rep. Ronnie Flippo (D-AL)
Rep. Steve Bartlett (R-TX)
Rep. Jim Coyne (R-PA)
Rep. Ed Foreman (R-TX, R-NM)
Rep. Charlie Bass (R-NH)
Rep. Bud Cramer (D-AL)
Rep. Bill Frenzel (R-MN)
Rep. Jim Bates (D-CA)
Rep. Buddy Darden (D-GA)
Rep. Lou Frey (R-FL)
Rep. Robert Bauman (R-MD)
Rep. Hal Daub (R-NE)
Rep. Don Fuqua (D-FL)
Rep. Mike Blouin (D-IA)
Rep. Lincoln Davis (D-TN)
Rep. Bob Garcia (D-NY)
Rep. Sherwood Boehlert (R-NY)
Rep. Jack Edwards (R-AL)
Rep. Dan Glickman (D-KS)
Rep. Mary Bono (R-CA)
Rep. Mickey Edwards (R-OK)
Rep. Bart Gordon (D-TN)
Rep. Glen Browder (D-AL)
Rep. Brad Ellsworth (D-IN)
Rep. Frank Guarini (D-NJ)
Rep. Beverly Byron (D-MD)
Rep. Glenn English (D-OK)
Rep. Steve Gunderson (R-WI)
Rep. Bob Carr (D-MI)
Rep. Philip English (R-PA)
Rep. Bill Gunter (D-FL)
Rep. Mike Castle (R-DE)
Rep. Thomas Ewing (R-IL)
Rep. Gil Gutknecht (R-MN)
Rep. John Hiler (R-IN)  
Rep. Baron Hill (D-IN)  
Rep. Joe Hoeffel (D-PA)  
Rep. Marjorie Holt (R-MD)  
Rep. Darlene Hooley (D-OR)  
Rep. Amo Houghton (R-NY)  
Rep. Earl Hutto (D-FL)  
Rep. John Jenrette (D-SC)  
Rep. C. Donald Johnson (D-GA)  
Rep. Jim Jones (D-OH)  
Rep. William J. Keating (R-OH)  
Rep. Martha Keys (D-KS)  
Rep. Larry Kissell (D-NC)  
Rep. Jim Kolbe (R-AZ)  
Rep. Ernie Konnyu (R-CA)  
Rep. Ken Kramer (R-CO)  
Rep. Nick Lampson (D-TX)  
Rep. Larry LaRocco (D-ID)  
Rep. Elliott Levitas (D-GA)  
Rep. Dave McCurdy (D-OK)  
Rep. Matthew McHugh (D-NY)  
Rep. Alex McMillan (R-NC)  
Rep. Thomas McMillen (D-MD)  
Rep. Charlie Melancon (D-LA)  
Rep. Enid Greene Mickelsen (R-UT)  
Rep. David Minge (D-MN)  
Rep. Walt Minnick (D-ID)  
Rep. Jim Moody (D-WI)  
Rep. Connie Morella (R-MD)  
Rep. Bruce Morrison (D-CT)  
Rep. Jim Nussle (R-IA)  
Rep. Glenn Nye (D-VA)  
Rep. Mike Oxley (R-OH)  
Rep. Liz Patterson (D-SC)  
Rep. Lewis Payne (D-VA)  
Rep. Tim Penny (I-MN)  
Rep. John Porter (R-IL)  
Rep. Jack Quinn (R-NY)  
Rep. Carlos Romero-Barcelo (D-PR)  
Rep. J. Roy Rowland (D-GA)  
Rep. Marty Russo (D-IL)  
Rep. Ronald Sarasin (R-CT)  
Rep. Chris Shays (R-CT)  
Rep. David Skaggs (D-CO)  
Rep. Jim Slattery (D-KS)  
Rep. Peter Smith (R-VT)  
Rep. Zack Space (D-OH)  
Rep. Charlie Stenholm (D-TX)  
Rep. Dick Swett (D-NH)  
Rep. Robin Tallon (D-SC)  
Rep. John Tanner (D-TN)  
Rep. Tom Tauke (R-IA)  
Rep. Lindsay Thomas (D-GA)  
Rep. Esteban Torres (D-CA)  
Rep. Jim Turner (D-TX)  
Rep. Jim Walsh (R-NY)  
Rep. Zach Wamp (R-TN)  
Rep. Ed Weber (R-OH)  
Rep. Albert Wynn (D-MD)  
Rep. Bill Zeliff (R-NH)