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October 27, 2015

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the three million members of the National Education Association (NEA) and the students they serve, we urge you to Vote Yes on the *Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015* which could be voted on as early as Wednesday. We applaud the bipartisan leadership exhibited to craft a bill that takes needed steps toward ending harmful sequester level funding so that necessary investments can be made in programs that will grow our economy and our future. Votes associated with this issue may be included in the NEA Legislative Report Card for the 114th Congress.

This bill will increase the budget caps by \$80 billion over the next two years while also extending the debt ceiling through March 2017. NEA has been a long time, vocal advocate for putting an end to sequester level cuts and creating more room for investments in formula-funded education programs like Title I, IDEA, and Head Start, which help our students most in need. This bill takes another step in the long road to recognizing that the austerity approach to budgetary policy has prevented the investments that will grow our economy and create the opportunities our students and country require.

Importantly, the increase in funding will be split evenly over the next two years between non-defense discretionary (NDD) programs such as education, health care, and job training, as well as defense. Parity of budget treatment for NDD and defense funding is a priority for educators and this bill's continuation of the precedent set forth in the Murray-Ryan bipartisan Budget Control Act of 2013 deal is appreciated.

While we are pleased to see the looming Medicare Part B premium increase being significantly reduced, we are disappointed that the bill doesn't extend the "hold harmless" provision to all Social Security beneficiaries. Under the bill, Part B premiums will now increase by \$15 per month instead of \$54 per month for approximately 30 percent of beneficiaries. Many of these beneficiaries live on a fixed income and cannot bear the additional financial burden this increase will cost, though the agreement does dramatically reduce the amount they were facing. These increases are especially unfair to the seniors who are already punished by the Government Pension Offset (GPO) and Windfall Elimination Provisions (WEP) Social Security offsets which eliminate or greatly reduce benefits.

The federal budget should ensure everyone has a fair shot and make the investments necessary for economic growth. While the *Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015* does not fully relieve sequester level budget cuts, the two-year deal does provide essential sequester relief. It also prevents the

specter of a national default that would severely damage the economy. Therefore, we urge you to Vote Yes on the bill. We look forward to work with members of Congress to advance policies that give all families a fair shot at reaching the American dream.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary Kusler". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

Mary Kusler
Director of Government Relations