

June 15, 2011

Representative Lamar Smith,
2138 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Representative John Conyers, Jr.
2426 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Smith and Ranking Member Conyers:

On behalf of our millions of members and activists we are writing to express our strong opposition to the balanced budget amendment being considered by the House Judiciary Committee, House Joint Resolution 1 (H.J. Res.1). The proposed constitutional amendment would cap spending at an unreasonably low 18 percent of the gross domestic product, require a two-thirds super majority before raising additional revenues, and require the budget to be balanced with revenue from that same year starting in 2018. These draconian provisions would undermine the government's ability to fund programs essential to protecting public health and the environment and leave Americans vulnerable to pollution, toxic chemicals, and other threats to human health.

Tough choices will have to be made to put our fiscal house in order, but funding is necessary for our government to defend our health and environment. H.J. Res.1 would require Congress to cut non-defense discretionary spending to levels even below those in the Republican Study Commission, which recommends reducing non-defense discretionary funding by 70 percent in 2021 relative to the funding levels approved for fiscal year 2011. Protecting the environment and public health are investments in our future that reduce the burden on our healthcare system, protect valuable natural resources and reduce the costs of environmental cleanup. This bill would simply make it impossible for the federal government to fulfill this important role.

Requiring a two-thirds supermajority to raise additional revenues would lock our country in to an unfair tax system which advantages dirty and dangerous industries such as coal and oil. Some of these tens of billions of annual subsidies have been on the books for almost 100 years, and it is well past time that the American public stopped subsidizing some of the world's most profitable corporations. We should not require a supermajority of Congress to end billion dollar giveaways to some of the largest, most profitable and most polluting corporations in America, or to raise the revenue necessary to protect the environment.

This Constitutional amendment would result in a fundamental reshaping of the role of the federal government, and a blatant effort to protect the wealthy and corporate special interests at the expense of the environment and other essential government functions. We strongly encourage

members of the House Judiciary Committee to oppose H.J. Res. 1 or any other Constitutional balanced budget requirement.

Sincerely,

Mary Beth Beetham,
Director of Legislative Affairs
Defenders of Wildlife

Michelle Chan
Economic Policy Project Director
Friends of the Earth

Scott Slesinger
Legislative Director
Natural Resources Defense Council

Craig Lasher
Director of U.S. Government Relations
Population Action International

Tyson Slocum
Energy Program Director
Public Citizen

Alan Rowsome
Director of Conservation Funding
The Wilderness Society

Sandy Newman
President
Voices for Progress