

For Immediate Release:

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**AMERICANS COME TOGETHER TO SEND STRONG MESSAGE TO CONGRESS
ABOUT FISCAL FUTURE:**

“We are prepared to make tough choices, we expect congress to also do so.”

Support for Increased Taxes Paired with Moderate Reductions in Spending

PHILADELPHIA, PA -- Thousands of Americans across 60 cities participated in a national discussion today on America’s fiscal future. Reflecting the nation’s rich diversity, approximately 3,500 participants sent a strong message to leaders about the importance of action to strengthen the nation’s economy in the short-run and their willingness to make tough choices to address growing deficits over the long-term. Reforms that were preferred by participants at the National Town Meeting included options that:

- Raise the limit on taxable earnings so it covers 90% of total earnings.
- Reduce spending on health care and non-defense discretionary spending by at least 5%.
- Raise tax rates on corporate income and those earning more than \$1 million.
- Raise the age for receiving full Social Security benefits to 69.
- Reduce defense spending by 10% - 15%.
- Create a carbon and securities-transaction tax.

Using keypad polling devices and networked computers, participants identified and prioritized the messages that they were interested in sending to Congressional leaders and the President’s National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform.

The nonpartisan discussion, called *AmericaSpeaks: Our Budget, Our Economy*, originated in Philadelphia and linked 19 meeting sites across the country. Small group discussions were held throughout the day and keypad polling was conducted to identify shared values and priorities. The sites were connected via satellite so that the participants could see and hear fellow Americans across the country.

In addition to Philadelphia, other sites included Albuquerque, NM; Augusta, ME; Casper, WY; Chicago, IL; Columbia, SC; Dallas, TX; Des Moines, IA; Detroit, MI; Grand Forks, ND; Jackson, MS, Overland Park, KS; Pasadena, CA; Louisville, KY; Missoula, MT; Portland, OR; Portsmouth, NH; Richmond, VA; and Silicon Valley, CA. Volunteers convened more than 40 conversations in other communities across the country.

AmericaSpeaks Founder and President, Dr. Carolyn Lukensmeyer, led the discussion in Philadelphia. Current and former members of Congress participated either in person or via video and included Senator Kent Conrad (D-ND), Senator John Cornyn (R-TX), Senator Jim DeMint (R-SC), former Senator and co-chair of the Bipartisan Policy Center’s Debt Reduction Task Force Pete Domenici (R-NM), Representative Chaka Fattah (D-PA), Senator Lindsey Graham (R-SC), Senator Judd Gregg (R-NH), Representative Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX), Representative Bobby Scott (D-VA) and Representative John Spratt (R-SC). Senators Conrad and Gregg serve on the President’s National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform. Dr. Alice Rivlin, senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, President’s fiscal

commission member and co-chair of the Bipartisan Policy Center's Debt Reduction Task Force, was also in attendance.

Sixty-one percent of participants said that in the short-term they believe the government should be doing more to strengthen the economy. Participants expressed more mixed views about the recent stimulus bill that failed to pass the Senate last week. Fifty-one percent of participants supported the legislation, while thirty-eight percent of participants said they were not supportive of it. The concerns about the state of the economy spanned unemployment and the need for more jobs, personal and federal debt and deficit, the slow pace of economic recovery, too much spending and government involvement, the increasing gap between the rich and poor, lack of support for small businesses and distrust of elected officials to fix what is broken fiscally.

The participants prioritized balancing the needs of current and future generations and placing a greater burden for reducing the deficit on those who are more financially able as the core values that should guide our country's fiscal future. Americans were split when rating whether the government should hold primary responsibility for those most vulnerable or individuals should be responsible for taking care of themselves. Social Security, including preserving benefits for all Americans served as the spending option most participants agreed must be preserved when balancing the budget.

"At a time when many are focused on things that divide us as a nation, it is refreshing to have so many Americans come together to find common ground on long-term fiscal choices and inform the efforts of our national policymakers," stated Dr. Lukensmeyer. "'We The People' have prioritized what is most important for America's future: creating equality of opportunity for future generations, maintaining a free country where individuals can maximize their potential, guaranteeing children receive a quality education, securing prosperity for future generations and ensuring a stable economic environment."

Specific messages participants asked to have sent to Congress and the President's Commission to address our fiscal challenges included:

- Please find the political will to use this input as if it were coming from a powerful lobbying group--because we are.
- Abandon the failed politics of partisanship. You can't demonize each other and expect us to trust you.

Dr. Lukensmeyer will present the findings from today's discussion to the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform on June 30th in Washington, DC. The presentation will be followed by briefings with Congressional leaders over the coming weeks.

The National Town Meeting was hosted by the nonprofit, nonpartisan *AmericaSpeaks*, which accesses the collective wisdom of the American people on local, regional and national decision-making on the most challenging public issues of the day.

AmericaSpeaks: One Budget, One Economy was made possible by support from a diverse group of private foundations, including the Peter G. Peterson Foundation, W.K. Kellogg Foundation and John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

Resources

B-ROLL VIDEO: <http://transfer.fc-tv.com/ftp/fcb/fcvideo/americaspeaks/as-wmv-edit1.wmv>

Satellite coordinates:

AMC15 K02 Slot A9

9MHz

Orbital Location: 105 Degrees West

DL: 11728.50 MHz Horizontal

FEC: $\frac{3}{4}$

Symbol Rate: 6.1113

NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE: <http://usabudgetdiscussion.org/about-2/national-advisory-committee/>

LOCAL OUTREACH PARTNERS: http://usabudgetdiscussion.org/local_partners/

FEDERAL BUDGET 101 GUIDE: <http://usabudgetdiscussion.org/release-of-federal-budget-101-guide/>

BUDGET OPTIONS WORKBOOK: <http://usabudgetdiscussion.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/Budget-Options-Workbook-Final.pdf>

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About *AmericaSpeaks*

AmericaSpeaks is a nonprofit organization that provides citizens with a voice on the most important decisions that impact their lives. The nonpartisan organization has convened more than 150,000 people to shape policy making. For more information, visit www.americaspeaks.org.

About the Peter G. Peterson Foundation

Founded by Peter G. Peterson with a commitment of \$1 billion, the Foundation is dedicated to increasing public awareness of the nature and urgency of key fiscal challenges threatening America's future and to accelerating action on them. To address these challenges successfully, we work to bring Americans together to find sensible, long-term solutions that transcend age, party lines and ideological divides in order to achieve real results. For more information, see www.PGPF.org.

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About the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation

The MacArthur Foundation supports creative people and effective institutions committed to building a more just, verdant, and peaceful world. In addition to selecting the MacArthur Fellows, the Foundation works to defend human rights, advance global conservation and security, make cities better places, and understand how technology is affecting children and society. Visit www.macfound.org for additional information.

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About the W.K. Kellogg Foundation

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation, established in 1930, supports children, families and communities as they strengthen and create conditions that propel vulnerable children to achieve success as individuals and as contributors to the larger community and society. Grants are concentrated in the United States, southern Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean. Visit www.wkkf.org for more information.

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