

THE CONCORD COALITION



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CONCORD COALITION REPORT SHOWS EAGERNESS FOR REFORM, READINESS TO MAKE TOUGH CHOICES ON FISCAL PRIORITIES

WASHINGTON—Hoping to protect their children and grandchildren from a dismal economic future, concerned citizens across the country are prepared to make the difficult choices necessary to put government finances on a more responsible path.

This becomes clear in a report released today by The Concord Coalition on the first year of its Fiscal Stewardship Project. Supported by a grant from the Peter G. Peterson Foundation, the project established six advisory councils around the country to study the long-term fiscal and economic challenges facing the United States and to recommend possible solutions.

The fiscal advisory councils were formed in Atlanta, Iowa, Milwaukee, Northern California, Northern Virginia and Philadelphia. In addition, a special student engagement project was conducted in Denver.

“Politicians may be surprised at how emphatic ordinary citizens are about fiscal responsibility and what solutions they are prepared to consider once they have studied the issues,” said Robert L. Bixby, executive director of The Concord Coalition. “The work of the fiscal advisory councils should demonstrate to elected officials that their constituents are ready and willing to help make the hard choices that good fiscal stewardship requires now and for future generations.”

Concord’s report includes an overview followed by individual reports from each of the advisory councils that present their findings and recommendations on everything from new taxes to reductions in entitlement benefits.

While each fiscal advisory council approached its work differently, eight central themes emerged:

- Disappointment and frustration with Washington
- A preference for broad, sweeping reforms rather than piecemeal efforts
- A sense of urgency
- The essential need for improvements in the health care system
- A willingness to consider significant changes in Social Security
- Deep concern for future generations
- The need to better educate the public
- Commitments to future action

“Advisory council members across the country are disappointed that Washington has failed to exercise greater responsibility in handling the nation’s finances,” the project overview says. “They decried a long and continuing pattern of elected and appointed federal officials failing to set meaningful budget priorities, borrowing more than was necessary, and refusing to pursue obviously needed reforms in both the public and private sectors.”

The advisory councils generally believe that the fiscal and economic threats facing the country now call for big, systemic changes. And while the deep recession may have required extraordinary short-term spending, council members do not think this should preclude work on reforms to address long-term structural problems. Further procrastination, they say, will only deepen the problems and make the necessary changes more painful and controversial.

Even before this year’s debate over health care legislation began making headlines, some of the advisory councils had identified health care reform as critical to reining in federal deficits and strengthening the American economy. The overview says council members “noted that spiraling costs combined with an aging population and growing demand for services have put the United States economy at a competitive disadvantage.”

Health care recommendations from different advisory councils included: Moving away from the fee-for-service payment system, requiring wealthier Medicare beneficiaries to pay more of their own expenses, limiting Medicare coverage of treatments that lack scientific evidence of effectiveness, using “lean techniques” that have cut costs and increased efficiency in other industries, expanding preventive and primary care, publicly reporting more data on provider performance, expanding insurance coverage, encouraging healthier lifestyles, and improving communication among doctors and between doctors and patients.

The project overview notes that many advisory council members were particularly motivated by concern for future generations: “They argued that American adults today should be trying to build a better future for those who will follow us, not leaving them with a mountain of debt and liabilities.”

The advisory councils see a need for elected leaders, journalists, educators and community leaders to help the public become better informed about the fiscal and economic challenges facing the country. Many council members also are determined to continue their efforts in some form in the coming year, including programs to foster more public engagement on these issues.

Dozens of people of all ages and different political views helped develop the recommendations from the advisory councils. In Atlanta, Milwaukee and Northern California, the councils also took into account the views that were expressed in day-long dialogue sessions conducted by Viewpoint Learning, Inc. with community leaders and randomly selected residents. The special student engagement project in Denver helped hundreds of college students learn more about fiscal and economic issues.

The Concord Coalition released its report as part of its National Conference on Fiscal Stewardship this week in Washington. Press copies are available. The report is also posted at www.concordcoalition.org

Link to report: http://www.concordcoalition.org/files/FAC_ReportFINAL.pdf

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The Concord Coalition is a nonpartisan, grassroots organization dedicated to balanced federal budgets and generationally responsible fiscal policy. Former U.S. Senators Warren B. Rudman (R-NH) and Bob Kerrey (D-NE) serve as Concord's co-chairs and former Secretary of Commerce Peter G. Peterson serves as president.