March 20, 2013

Dear Senator:

National Skills Coalition—a broad-based coalition of business leaders, union affiliates, education and training providers, community-based organizations, and public workforce agencies advocating for policies that invest in the skills of U.S. workers—strongly supports S. Con. Res. 8, the Fiscal Year (FY) 2014 budget resolution offered by Senate Budget Committee Chair Patty Murray (D-WA). We urge you to vote in favor of the Murray budget resolution.

Efforts to reduce the federal deficit have so far been unbalanced, with discretionary programs absorbing disproportionately deep spending cuts. Discretionary programs have contributed $1.5 trillion in spending cuts from the bipartisan American Taxpayer Relief Act (ATRA), the Budget Control Act (BCA), the FY 2011 Continuing Resolution and the FY 2012 Consolidated Appropriations Act, while new revenues have contributed just $600 billion.

Discretionary programs—including federal employment, training, and adult education programs—simply cannot absorb any additional funding cuts. Despite federal disinvestments of more than 40 percent since 2001—with more than $1 billion in cuts just since 2010—education and training programs already face additional cuts under the sequester of more than $5.5 billion over the next decade, which means that 24 million fewer people will have access to critical services to help them succeed in the labor market. There is simply nothing left to cut from these programs: A recent survey of workforce providers found that more than three quarters expected to reduce training and educational services as a result of already reduced funding levels, and nearly half believed they would have to cut back on services for employers seeking skilled workers.

The Murray budget resolution begins to address this problem by fully cancelling the sequester for both defense and non-defense discretionary (NDD) programs. Senator Murray’s budget resolution instead offers a balanced approach to deficit reduction, proposing $1.85 trillion in additional deficit reduction over the next decade, equally divided between revenue and both defense and NDD spending cuts. While we would prefer to see no further cuts to NDD programs, we believe that the balanced approach adopted in the Senate budget resolution is vastly superior to simply leaving the sequester in place or, even worse, the $1.1 trillion in additional NDD program cuts proposed in the House budget resolution.

We are particularly pleased to see that the Murray budget resolution includes $10 billion in new funding for federal job training programs. Despite 12 million unemployed workers, employers
across the country continue to report difficulties finding workers with the right skills to fill more than 3.5 million current job openings. Workers and employers alike rely on the federally-supported workforce development system to meet their skilled workforce needs. In 2011, more than 9 million individuals received training and related services through the federally-supported workforce investment system—an increase of nearly 250 percent in just two years. Millions more received training and employment services through youth, career and technical education, green jobs, adult education, vocational rehabilitation, and veterans’ programs that will help them pursue good jobs or further postsecondary education. It is vitally important that Congress continue to invest in and improve our nation’s workforce development system.

We recognize the challenging fiscal conditions, and know that policymakers face difficult decisions. However, NDD programs—including employment, training, and adult education programs—have already done more than their fair share to help reduce the federal deficit. The Murray budget resolution recognizes this reality, and begins to move in the right direction by adopting a balanced approach to federal deficit reduction while also making necessary new investments in critical job training programs. For these reason, National Skills Coalition strongly supports the Murray budget resolution and urges you to vote in support of S. Con. Res. 8 when it comes to the Senate floor.

If you have questions about this letter, please feel free to contact me at rachelg@nationalskillscoalition.org or 202-223-8991, ext. 102.

We appreciate your consideration of these important issues.

Sincerely,

Rachel Gragg, Ph.D.
Federal Policy Director