

**Transcript of Press Gaggle with Senate Budget Committee Chairman  
Kent Conrad (D-ND) Following Hearing on Bipartisan Fiscal Task Force  
October 31, 2007**

*Question:* ....what is the next step?

*Conrad Answer:*

We have to consult with colleagues on what makes sense. We need to fashion a consensus proposal. I don't think anything could be more clear than the need for something like this. Senator Gregg and I are flexible. We are ready to consider – really the reason we had this hearing – constructive suggestions, and we heard constructive suggestions here today. Now, we have to talk to more colleagues.

I think the fact that the (House) Majority Leader was here talking about the need to do this, the wisdom of Leon Panetta who has been down this road saying that a structure like this is essential to success.

You know, some of the earlier reporting has focused just on entitlements, but this is a much bigger effort than that. This is to deal with our real enormous budget gap we have here between revenues and expenditures -- and certainly entitlements are a part of that – but to have a process to bring all the key players to a table with the goal to address these. And the need for this kind of commission is there are so many cross-cutting jurisdictions in Congress between the House and Senate and of course the administration. You have to involve all of those in this effort.

*Question:* Any thoughts on the call by some of the panelists to push it back a year?

*Conrad Answer:*

We are listening very carefully to that. You heard recommendations along those lines today from a number of sources. We've heard it before. I would say there are three or four major areas we have to consider. One is the matter of timing. Second is can alternatives be offered? I believe Senator Gregg is right that could unravel any potential to achieve a result. Third, the idea of maybe a supermajority for the recommendation, but then a simple majority to pass. We've heard that from a number of witnesses. So, obviously, we are listening and consulting and we'll be discussing those issues and trying to reach a conclusion about what has the best prospects.

*Question:* You think there is any chance you'd have that this year?

*Conrad Answer:*

Yes, we might well. Senator Gregg and I have talked about, we have to be talking to the Presidential candidates, we've got to be talking to our colleagues, we've got to be dealing with

these suggestions that people are making to us, and listen carefully and try to come up with a consensus proposal.

*Question:* How about Senate leadership, have they made any recommendations, or said they're willing to support your proposal?

*Conrad Answer:*

You've got back from a number of people the two things I mentioned: the timing issue, clearly that is significant, you heard it from Congressman Hoyer, we've heard it from the leadership on both sides; the second is the question of options. One suggestion is, rather than to have amendments, to have actuarially equivalent alternatives, and we heard that today from some. But there is a downside to that and that is if you go down that road we're concerned – Judd and I are concerned – that you go right back into a kind of partisan free-for-all. So, we have a lot to think about.

*Question:* Your counterparts on the House side haven't been very enthusiastic about this sort of independent commission. Have you been speaking with Chairman Spratt or ranking member Ryan?

*Conrad Answer:*

Yes.

*Question:* Are you making any headway?

*Conrad Answer:*

Well, I think your characterization is correct. They're not terribly enthusiastic. But we need to continue to talk, and listen to them and hear their concerns and try to take that into consideration as we move to alter.

You know, we start with a proposal. This is a legislative process. It will have to go through a number of iterations before we reach any kind of final conclusion, and we understand that. We're going to be patient. We're going to keep working on this because we believe it is essential to do.