

“We have a big responsibility to the people of this country and to our colleagues in this Congress to meet the twin challenges of doing everything within our power to put Americans back to work, and to put America on a steady, predictable path to deficit reduction. These are not competing goals – in fact they overlap.

“Every day that the economy is stalled is another day that the American people are hurting and another day that the deficit is growing. So the quickest, most effective way to reduce the deficit in the short-term is to kick the economy into a higher gear and grow jobs. Indeed, the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office has projected that for every one-tenth of 1 percent increase in the gross domestic product, we can reduce the 10-year deficit by about \$310 billion.

“Additionally, the biggest obstacle to economic growth is weak consumer demand. It is simple. Businesses are not going to hire new employees unless they have customers for their goods and services. We must address that issue, and I know the American people are looking forward to hearing the President’s jobs plan tonight. The President is going to need a partner in Congress to get the economy back on track, and I hope we will work with him to do that.

“Now getting the economy moving again is job one, but it will not, by itself, be sufficient to reduce the debt. It must be coupled with a credible plan to cut long-term deficits.

“The good news is that we don’t have to start from scratch. We don’t have to reinvent the wheel. We have two recent bipartisan Commissions, as well as the work from the Gang of Six, that have provided a framework for the general approach we should take. Now I don’t agree with every proposal made by these groups– and I doubt anyone here does. But they provide the overall scaffolding and the framework for a serious deficit reduction plan.

“These bipartisan proposals have two things in common. First, they warn against any actions that could harm the economy, and the Rivlin-Domenici Commission made specific recommendations to boost consumer demand. Second, they both attack the long-term deficit challenge from both the spending and revenue sides of the equation. They take a balanced approach.

“They recognize that we need to modernize certain programs to achieve savings. They also recognize we need to reform the tax code by cutting the pork, subsidies, and many tax preferences that disproportionately benefit a slew of special interests and the very wealthy. Simple math tells us that cutting \$1 of a tax expenditure or subsidy does just as much to reduce the deficit as cutting \$1 in program spending.

“Now all of us need to recognize that huge tax cuts, while we engaged in two wars, helped create the fiscal mess we are in now. We also need to recognize that it is unrealistic to try to balance the budget – now or in the future – with added revenues alone.

“We have just 77 days left to complete our work. The clock is ticking. There are already plenty of ideas for reducing the deficit that have been thoroughly debated, and we have a menu of options. If this Committee fails, it won’t be for lack of ideas – it will be for lack of political will.

“There are some people who believe that the next election will somehow bring about a huge new political alignment that will allow either Republicans or Democrats to get 100 percent of what they want in the way they want it. It is a dangerous illusion that will put the long-term economic health of our nation at risk. It is time for both sides to bite the bullet – put the country first, get the economy moving, and implement a long-term plan to reduce the deficit and debt.

“I stand ready to reach a reasonable compromise for the good of the country. Compromise is not a dirty word. In fact, it is the difference between a divided government that works for the country and a dysfunctional government that doesn’t.

“This Sunday marks the 10 year anniversary of the awful day when our nation was attacked. In the aftermath of that terrible September day our nation showed its true character as we rallied together to meet a common challenge. We must unite now to put America back to work, to get our fiscal house in order, and to ensure a brighter future for our children and our country.”