

United States Senate

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ENERGY AND NATURAL
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ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

January 10, 2012

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20502

The Honorable Harry Reid
Senate Majority Leader
U.S. Capitol S-221
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John Boehner
Speaker of the House
of Representatives
U.S. Capitol H-232
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Minority Leader
U.S. Capitol S-230
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
House Minority Leader
U.S. Capitol H-204
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. President, Leader Reid, Speaker Boehner, Minority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Pelosi:

With our nation facing such grave economic and social challenges, we can't let Washington's dysfunction continue unabated for another year. We must change. We must seize the moment ahead to build greater levels of trust across the political aisle. We must make government work better for the American people. Now is the time for us to stand up for common sense, not settle for more political dysfunction.

For the sake of our future, we must take immediate commonsense steps to rebuild a bipartisan spirit of cooperation that will be critical if we are going to tackle our tough challenges. This will take a lot of hard work, back-and-forth conversations, patience and a willingness to look beyond party and politics – but now is the right time to do this hard work. So, I am writing to urge each of you to embrace three initiatives that offer all of us a chance to refocus Washington on doing what the American people sent us here to accomplish.

As a first step, I am asking you, as the leaders of this country and Congress, to once again support the simple step of sitting together as Americans – not Democrats and Republicans – when we hear the President deliver his State of the Union address. Last year, when Democrats and Republicans broke the

longstanding tradition of sitting along party lines, and instead sat together, it reminded all Americans that violence and tragedy can't divide this great country. We should repeat this tradition this year during the President's State of the Union address on January 24th, and we should expand this practice to committee meetings, so that every day when we're working on legislation, we're working with each other and not against each other.

In the days that follow the speech, we can and must build on that bipartisan spirit and take additional steps to stand up for what is right for the nation, not our individual parties. To that end, I ask you as the President and leaders of Congress to hold a 2012 bipartisan forum to discuss our major challenges and the ways we can find common ground. To be effective, the forum should provide an opportunity for members of Congress to ask each of you how you plan to work together in the coming year.

Finally, the people of West Virginia believe that Congress and the President communicate too little and that we could work together more effectively if we routinely spoke to one another. To increase communication across the aisle and between the executive and legislative branches, we in Congress should hold monthly bipartisan caucus meetings, and invite the President to participate.

Looking ahead, I hope we don't let the politics of an election distract us from our commitment to this nation. For the sake of our children's future, we must focus on the next generation, not the next election. And, while these steps will by no means bridge our political divide, they will help begin to restore the trust and confidence in our system that so many Americans have lost.

I hope that all of you will take these proposals into consideration and join me in my mission to stand up for common sense and the righteous endeavor to put politics last and the American people first.

Sincerely,



Joe Manchin III
United States Senator