



Sisters of the Good Shepherd

The National  
Advocacy Center

July 24, 2006

Dear Representative,

On behalf of the National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, I am writing to express our organization's deep concern about the sunset commission legislation that is coming to the floor next week. Our commitment to a just federal budget and to good government compels us to oppose the creation of a sunset commission and we urge you to vote against *any* sunset commission legislation.

Over the past several years, the National Advocacy Center has written to Congress many times to express our vision for a moral budget and our opposition when budget policies fail to meet this vision's values of community and the common good. We feel strongly that all budget decisions must protect the most vulnerable members of society and promote greater economic justice. While previous statements have mostly addressed the priorities revealed in specific tax and spending decisions, we also believe the budget process plays an important role in shaping priorities and are compelled to speak against provisions like the proposed sunset commission that threaten these values.

The National Advocacy Center is specifically concerned that sunset commissions would:

- **Expand executive power and limit accountability.** Some of the proposals under consideration would give the President sole authority to appoint commission members without congressional confirmation and would exempt the work of the sunset commission from the oversight of Congress. In addition, neither H.R. 5766 nor H.R. 3282, the bills that could come to the floor, guarantees meaningful public participation and they would most likely be exempt from important open government requirements.

*The common good or general welfare of our country is dependent upon the openness of government and the accountability provided by the democratic process and our system of checks and balances. Limiting oversight and restricting who can participate in critical decisions regarding the funding and structure of government programs undermines our shared responsibility for good governance.*

- **Threaten vital human needs programs and further distance the evaluation of programs from those who will be impacted by the decisions.** In recent years the President has recommended the termination, reduction, or alteration of a wide range of education, housing, health care, child welfare, and job training programs, including many that support Good Shepherd programs throughout the country and the people they serve. Congress has wisely chosen to reject many of these proposals as a result of strong constituent involvement in the budget process. With the recommendations of a sunset commission controlled by the Executive Branch "fast-tracked" through Congress, the people's elected representatives would be limited to a single up or down vote, with little debate, and with no opportunity for citizen participation. The voices of vulnerable program participants, which are rarely heard during the normal congressional reauthorization and review processes would be even further marginalized.

*Catholic Social Teaching states, "Decisions must be judged in light of what they do for the poor, what they do to the poor, and what they enable the poor to do for themselves (Economic Justice for All, #24)." With the blunt axe wielded by a sunset commission likely to fall most heavily on programs serving the most vulnerable and with the potential for public advocacy further restricted, sunset commissions clearly violate this moral test.*

- **Fail to restore meaningful fiscal responsibility.** Taking important spending decisions away from Congress and placing them in the hands of the President and an unelected commission only shifts tough funding decisions away from Congress and creates a new layer of government bureaucracy. According a 1998 Congressional Research Service evaluation, a sunset commission would do little to stop waste and duplication and would itself be “an example of an agency ‘for which a public need does not exist.’”

*As a faith-based organization, the National Advocacy Center values good stewardship and supports balanced efforts to restore fiscal discipline, however, sunset commission proposals represent neither.*

Sunset commission proposals are a threat both to important government programs and to core values of the faith community and the nation as a whole. The National Advocacy Center urges you to vote against H.R. 5766, H.R. 3282, or **any** legislation that contains the harmful sunset commission proposals.

Sincerely,

Alison L. Prevost, *Lobbyist*