

**Statement of Robert J. Fersh, President and Founder,
Convergence Center for Policy Resolution, First Annual Better Budget Process Summit
February 26, 2018**

Good afternoon. I am Rob Fersh, President of Convergence, an organization that works to build consensus-based solutions to issues of national consequence through a process we call dialogue-to-action. I am pleased today to set the stage for the distinguished panel that will present the proposals of the Convergence Building a Better Budget Process project, known as B3P.

This session includes three of our stakeholder participants and is moderated by our Project Director Susan Willie. You will hear how this group—which could well be one of the most politically and policy diverse groups ever to work to consensus on a key national issue—found common ground on practical, politically realistic ways to vastly improve the federal budget process. In addition to their breathtaking differences on actual budget and policy priorities, this group is unique because:

- 1) Its members primarily represent interest groups whose constituencies are all directly affected by and incur costs from dysfunction in the federal budget process. Up to now those advocating for reform have mainly been experts on the process, including think tanks and current and former members of Congress and their staffs.
- 2) Almost none of these groups has reform of the federal budget process among its top policy priorities, yet all have put in extraordinary effort to design reforms for the benefit of the country. They have met fourteen times over the past 17 months to develop their ideas and iron out their differences.
- 3) And very importantly, they have put together a package of reform ideas that do not tilt toward one political or policy ideology or another. This package is intended to be fair to all perspectives.

I suspect none of our participants would claim that this package is perfect or could not be improved. But it should be a very strong starting point for Congress' newly created Joint Select Committee on Budget and Appropriations Process Reform that must report recommendations by next November. We hope Congress will take a careful look at these recommendations and the underlying principles that guide them as a pathway for proposing widely supportable, bipartisan budget process reform.

The work of this highly diverse group demonstrates that it is possible for people of good will with starkly differing perspectives to work together on issues of critical national importance. In addition to this project on budget reform, Convergence has successfully convened divergent stakeholders on K-12 education, health care reform, incarceration, economic mobility, long term care and other issues. Our work and that of others suggest that the country is not as hopelessly divided as many people think.

In closing, I would like to thank the Madison Initiative of the Hewlett Foundation for primary support of this project and recognize the invaluable contributions of our Program Officer Jean Parvin Bordewich. Special thanks also to the Stuart Family Foundation for support of this project.

Thanks also to the Center for a Responsible Federal Budget, and Maya MacGuineas in particular, for their active participation in our B3P project and for hosting today's important Summit.

Finally, I would like to recognize the team at Convergence that made this project possible. Our Project Director Susan Willie, Senior Associate Mike Veselik, facilitator Pat Field of the Consensus Building Institute, Kristin Truong and Aakif Ahmad.

Now I will turn it over to Susan Willie. Thank you.