

seniors, children, veterans, and needy families the safety net that keeps them from descending into poverty.

Most of the headlines are focused on the hours the sequester has cost travelers in airports across the Nation. The frustration and the economic effects of those delays should not be minimized.

The sequester could also cost this country, and humankind, a cure for AIDS, Parkinson's disease, or cancer. These arbitrary cuts have decimated funding for medical researchers seeking cures for diabetes, epilepsy, and hundreds of other dangerous and debilitating diseases.

The National Institutes of Health has delayed or halted vital scientific projects and reduced the number of grants it awards to research scientists. Thousands of research scientists will lose their jobs in the next few months. Research projects that can't go on without adequate staffing will be cancelled altogether. Ohio State University, which is known for more than a good football and basketball team, is also one of the premier research centers in America. Grants for cancer research and infectious disease control have been axed. They are over. At the University of Cincinnati, which is at the forefront in research on strokes—a leading cause of death in the United States—scientists are bracing for some more cuts. Vanderbilt University and the University of Kentucky are accepting fewer science graduate students because of funding reductions. At Wright State University, scientists researching pregnancy-related disorders, such as preeclampsia, will lose their jobs. Boston University has laid off lab scientists, and research laboratories in San Francisco have instituted hiring freezes and delayed the launch of important studies. Grants to some of Harvard University's most successful research scientists were not renewed because of the sequester.

The research I have talked about today—and these are only a few of them—saves lives and saves misery. These scientists are looking for the next successful treatment for Alzheimer's or the next drug to treat high cholesterol. They might never get the chance to complete their groundbreaking work or make their lifesaving discoveries because of these shortsighted cuts.

We have seen the devastating impacts of these arbitrary budget cuts. Now it is time to stop them.

Be prepared, everybody—the House is now working on another bill because we have the debt ceiling coming soon. They are working on another bill to make it even more painful for the American people.

Last night I introduced a bill that would roll back the sequester for the rest of the year, and just like the editorial indicated, it is something we should do. The bill would give Democrats and Republicans time to sit down at the negotiating table and work out an agreement to reduce the deficit in a

balanced way. It wouldn't add a penny to the deficit. It would use the savings from winding down the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq to prevent cuts that will harm our national security and our economy.

Before the Republicans dismiss these savings, they should recall that 235 Republicans voted to use these funds to pay for the Ryan Republican budget. They didn't consider it a gimmick when it served their own purposes.

We can stop the flight delays and the pink slips. We can stop the devastating cuts to programs that protect low-income children, homebound seniors, and homeless veterans. We can stop the cuts to crucial medical research. But Democrats can't do it without Republicans' help.

Republicans overwhelmingly voted for these painful, arbitrary cuts, and Republicans bear responsibility for their consequences. Remember, these cuts came about because of the debt ceiling they refused to move on until these devastating cuts came about, and Republicans bear responsibility for the consequences, from travel delays to cuts to vital programs. Now Republicans must accept that they have an obligation to cooperate with us to help stop these Draconian cuts and mitigate the consequences.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the leader time not count against the hour that is set aside for morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican leader is recognized.

SEQUESTRATION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, something really remarkable happened in the Senate last night. It was sort of late in the day, so for those who missed it, here is a little recap.

Late yesterday afternoon the majority leader handed us a hastily crafted bill and then asked if we could pass it before anybody had seen it. Apparently, someone on the other side realized they had no good explanation for why they hadn't prevented the delays we have seen at airports across the country this week, so they threw together a bill in a feeble attempt to cover for it. It is pretty embarrassing.

It actually proposes to replace the President's sequester cuts with what is known around here as OCO. I know this isn't something that will be familiar to most viewers, so let me borrow an explanation provided by Senator Joe Lieberman in a letter he signed with Dr. COBURN last year. Here is what Senator Lieberman said about OCO:

The funds allocated for OCO or "war savings" are not real, and every member of Congress knows this. The funds specified for Overseas Contingency Operations in future budgets are mere estimates of what our nation's wars cost may be in the future. And since it is likely that future OCO costs will be significantly less than the placeholders in the Congressional Budget Office's estimates, it is the height of fiscal irresponsibility to treat the difference between the assumed and actual OCO costs as a "savings" to be spent on other programs.

Let me read that last part again.

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This is from the man who was once the Democratic nominee to be Vice President.

There is bipartisan consensus that this thing we call OCO is a fiscally irresponsible gimmick. The director of the Concord Coalition has called it "the mother of all . . . gimmicks." The president of the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget called it a "glaring gimmick." Whether OCO is the mother of all gimmicks or just a glaring one, everybody other than the majority leader evidently agrees on one thing: It is the height of fiscal irresponsibility.

Now, just as important as what the majority leader's proposal is, however, is what it isn't. It isn't a tax increase. That is actually news. The majority leader is clearly ditching the President on this issue. As you may recall, the President has said he would only consider replacing the sequester with a tax hike. Whatever you want to say about OCO, it is not a tax hike—it is borrowed money that will have to be repaid later.

Still, it doesn't punish small businesses the way the President's proposals would. So this is, in a sense, big news. It represents a significant break from the President's favored approach on this issue.

As I said yesterday, the President rejected the flexibility we proposed on the sequester for obvious political reasons. He wanted these cuts to be as painful as possible for folks across the country and to provide an excuse to raise taxes to turn them off. Well, it is simply not working. Even his own party is starting to abandon him on this issue.

The broader point is this: Even without the flexibility we propose, he already has the flexibility he needs to make these cuts less painful. He has it right now. He should exercise it.

I also think we should all acknowledge that there is now a bipartisan agreement that tax hikes won't be a replacement for the sequester. The real solution, as I said, is for the administration to accept the additional flexibility we would like to give them to make these cuts in a smarter way and to get rid of wasteful spending first.

Surely, in the \$3.6 trillion we are spending this year, we could find a way to reduce the spending we promised the

American people we would reduce a year and a half ago when the Budget Control Act was passed and do that in a sensible way. This is what we have consistently said. There is more flexibility in the law right now. We would be happy to give the President even more to achieve the cuts we promised the American people we would achieve. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

Mr. REID. Remember, Congressman RYAN, when he came up with one of these budgets, used these overseas contingency funds to balance his budget.

Let's not even worry about that for purposes of this conversation, the overseas contingency fund. Let's just talk about the war in Afghanistan. What my friend is saying is that it is OK to borrow money for the war in Afghanistan but not to use that same money to reduce pains being felt all over America today.

Even Joe Scarborough on "Morning Joe," a former Republican Congressman from Florida, said today that he can't believe that the pain is being felt all over America today and no one is concerned about the war in Afghanistan.

Does anyone think we are going to be fighting a war in Afghanistan 5 years from now, 10 years from now? That is the money people are trying to protect. I hope not. For the sake of my children and grandchildren, I hope we are not still fighting in Afghanistan 5 or 10 years from now.

We are asking to take a few dollars of the \$650 billion that is there—billion dollars—to relieve the pain we are feeling now for 5 months. That is it.

I think it is really unfair that it would be so easy to turn the sequester around and allow us to do something for a long term to take care of this issue, but, no, the Republicans like the pain.

One Republican Senator who came here last night said: Well, why don't we take the money from the construction fund for airports?

Those create jobs.

He said: Why don't we take it from essential air services?

That dog has been here and fought lots of times. That has been stripped bare.

As I indicated in my opening statement, this is supposed to be fair and equal. You can't jimmy things around. It is the same amount of money. The Republicans say: Well, it is the same amount of money, but give more pain to somebody else than the other; just balance it out. The pain is too severe; it can't be balanced out.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. HEITKAMP). Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will be

in a period of morning business until 10:30 a.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with equal time divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with the Republicans controlling the first half.

The Senator from Indiana.

FAA SEQUESTRATION DELAYS

Mr. COATS. Madam President, I rise as a member of both the Senate Appropriations Committee on Transportation and as a member of the Senate Commerce Committee to discuss what I believe is a shocking display of mismanagement and incompetence by the leadership of the Department of Transportation and the Federal Aviation Administration.

The Federal Aviation Administration says the sequester will result in as many as 6,700 delays per day. To put this in context, on the worst weather day in 2012, we had 2,900 flight delays. So the FAA's projected 6,700 delays per day would more than double the worst day in 2012.

To me, this is disturbing evidence of the lack of planning on the part of both the Department of Transportation and the FAA, leading up to what we all knew was going to take place—in fact, since the law was signed by the President. We have known for 1 year this may happen. The President signed it into law, and we are now many months down the line and suddenly the FAA came along just a few days ago and said: Oh, we just need to let you know, by the way, we are going to implement this part of the sequestration.

This across-the-board furlough is especially surprising given the previous announcements their guiding principle when implementing sequestration would be to enact a plan that "maintains safety and minimizes the impact to the highest number of travelers." Announcing 3 days or so before they implement this plan that potentially results in as many as 6,700 delays per day minimizes the impact of the highest number of travelers?

This is disingenuous. It is mismanagement at its worst. It is incompetence at its worst. It is a failure to do what every agency has been required to do; that is, plan for this. Now that it has been in law for several months, there is no excuse for simply saying: Oh, we didn't have time to put this in place, so this is what we are going to do.

I voted against sequestration because it treats every Federal program on an equal basis regardless of its necessity, its effectiveness, or whether it is an essential function of the Federal Government.

Clearly, keeping our skies safe and getting our passengers from point A to point B is an essential function. We need those air traffic controllers. The plan that was put forth by the FAA flies in the face of their own judgment and their own statements in terms of what they needed to do.

Instead of furloughing 47,000 employees and causing significant delays for travelers, they should have been seeking reductions elsewhere. We tried to give these essential agencies additional flexibility necessary to do so. Unfortunately, the President did not support that effort, and the majority party in the Senate did not support that effort. Therefore, they have no reason to point their fingers over here and say: Oh, sequestration is so terrible. We never should have been in this position in the first place.

The FAA, for the record, could have considered cutting back on the \$541 million it spends on consultants—in other words, those who have been hired to work at the FAA because the FAA can't do the job themselves, so they need to spend \$541 million to hire outside consultants—and the \$2.7 billion it spends on non-personnel costs. But instead of looking at how to better manage their own administration, they turned to furloughing up to 10 percent of the air traffic controllers, creating up to 6,700 delays per day on the traveling public.

Then they say they haven't had time to work this out. Haven't had time? They have had months' worth of time since the law was signed. How about the time people now wasted standing at airports for 3 and 4 hours waiting to board their plane and the overall disruption this causes? And this is in good weather. That in itself is a lame excuse the FAA has put forward.

I did not vote for the sequestration, as I said before. I thought it was an inadequate way to deal with the necessary need to cut spending here. But the Federal Government says: We would like to do that, but we can't afford to do that right now and still focus on the essential services and give them the opportunity to manage that. Clearly, the FAA and the Department of Transportation have not managed this well at all. This is incompetence.

As I mentioned, Congress was only informed just days ahead of the time of these furloughs. This decision kicked in to the surprise of the airlines and to the surprise of Congress. But clearly what we have learned, despite 1 year of advance warning and refusals to analyze all possible alternatives to minimize impacts to the traveling public—and it is hard to come to any other conclusion—is this is a politically motivated decision to inflict as much pain on Americans as possible in an effort to make the case that sequestration never should have taken place in the first place; that a 4-percent across-the-board cut to the FAA budget is simply something they can't manage. In other words, we would have asked the FAA to do what they did in 2010 with the money that was allocated to them, but they can't do that now. This is 2012–2013 and they need this extra money and they need these hundreds of billions of dollars to continue to hire consultants. They don't want to be asked to make the kinds of decisions every