

SEQUESTER LEADERSHIP

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, we are facing a very serious problem with the sequester that will impact our Defense Department and other government agencies. It is a very serious matter. It has been out there for well over a year. We have known this is coming, and it is time—long past time—for the Democratic Senate and the President of the United States to provide some leadership on the issue.

I was pleased with Senator MCCONNELL this morning when he raised this matter, suggesting we are in a pattern here of how business is being done in the Senate. It goes something like this, Senator MCCONNELL said: Phase 1, Republicans identify a challenge and propose a solution; phase 2, the liberals sit on their hands until the last minute; phase 3, they then offer some gimmicky tax hike designed to fail and then blame everybody when it does.

This is essentially, I am afraid, where we are. We are now at the time where they are about to sweep in with some gimmicky solution that won't be successful. I don't know where they are in that. We have seen a 1-page outline that suggests there is a plan out there, but we haven't seen legislative language, I don't believe, unless it was produced in the last few hours. So we are 2 weeks away from a sequester that will include cuts that I believe will be too damaging to the U.S. military and can be avoided and should be avoided.

The sequester, remember, was part of an agreement that was reached in August a year ago—August 2011—between the President of the United States, the Democratic leadership in the Senate, and the leadership in the House of Representatives. It was designed to raise the debt ceiling because we had borrowed all the money that could legally be borrowed and the administration wanted to spend more and borrow more money. We were borrowing well over 35 cents out of every dollar we spent at that time—and still are—and the President wanted to raise the debt ceiling. The people holding the credit card—the U.S. Congress—said: Wait a minute. You have run up too much debt. You have to lay out a plan that, at least over 10 years, would equal the amount you want to raise the debt ceiling. The Administration could spend that money now—and it was spent in 18 months, because we have already hit the debt ceiling again—and we will raise the debt ceiling \$2.1 trillion.

So an agreement was reached to reduce spending over the next 10 years by \$2.1 trillion. That was the agreement. The President signed that, the Democratic leader in the Senate agreed to that, the Speaker of the House, the Republican, agreed to that, and that became the law.

These are numbers we live with every day. I am the ranking Republican on the Budget Committee, and it is a constant item in our face out there. We were then spending \$3.7 trillion a year. So if you extend that for 10 years, we

would spend \$37 trillion over 10 years. But the budget was expected to grow. It was expected to grow so that we spent \$47 trillion over 10 years. At the end of that time we would have increased spending by almost \$10 trillion over 10 years. This deal would have said that we wouldn't spend \$47 trillion but \$45 trillion, therefore reducing the increase by a modest amount.

These were the first significant cuts we have had in the Congress in a long time. It is the first time we have actually made some alteration in the growth of spending. And really, it is not a cut in spending; it is reduction to the growth of spending. But the President not only agreed to the sequester, he actually proposed the sequester as part of the deal.

The sequester came about under the theory this would be a stopgap emergency measure if the committee of 12 didn't reach some long-term fiscal plan to alter the debt course of America, and the committee didn't reach that agreement.

The agreement fell apart and the sequester happened. The sequester was put in the bill at the last minute, according to Bob Woodward in his book, at the request of the President and the White House. It was put in there, and nobody knew what it meant. That is the reason primarily that I voted against it. I didn't like this situation that looked to me as though it would be a meat-axe cut that would fall disproportionately on the Defense Department. At any rate, good people disagreed, the bill passed, and it became law. So that is how the sequester came to be, and it is set up in a way that disrupts the Defense Department.

If you cut the Defense Department as much as is presently scheduled to be done now, it would hurt under any circumstances. But if it is done the way the sequester says, everybody agrees it will be far more damaging than it needs to be because it gives the Defense Department very little control over how to manage their money in a way that has the least adverse circumstances, and that is why we should not let the sequester go forward.

The sequester needs to be reevaluated for a lot of reasons. One-sixth of the federal budget is the Defense Department. One-sixth of the amount of money we spend is by the Defense Department. One-half of all the cuts in the sequester falls on the Defense Department. It is disproportionate.

Some people are under the impression that it is the war costs that are being cut. This is not what we are talking about. The war costs are funded in a separate account. All of these cuts fall on the base defense budget of the United States of America.

It means too rapid and severe a reduction in our military and civilian personnel, and it endangers the smart management of the war, while entire portions of our government—almost one-half of our government—have no cuts at all. Amazingly, there is no re-

duction in the growth of the spending of one-half of our government; and defense spending increases are less than half of what you see in many of the other major spending programs in our government.

The base defense budget has not been surging out of control. It has been increasing at about the rate of inflation in the last several years. But defense has already reduced its budget as part of the first part of the Budget Control Act agreement last August. That was \$487 billion. So this sequester would be an additional \$500 billion, should it go through. It would be a cumulative reduction of almost \$1 trillion over 10 years. That is a big reduction. It alters the ability of the military to function in the way they have been functioning, and it threatens the ability for them to carry out the missions they have been assigned to carry out today.

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Dempsey, said this week:

If sequestration occurs, it will severely limit our ability to implement our defense strategy. It will put the nation at a greater risk of coercion, and it will break faith with the men and women in uniform.

That is a serious statement and we should respect it. I know right now they are threatening all kinds of draconian cuts, and probably when the dust settles it won't be quite as draconian as they tell us. But the fundamental truth is, this is disproportionate and dangerous to the Defense Department, and it is not necessary.

Remember how we got here. We saw this coming. The defense authorization bill was not brought up before the election maybe for the first time in 50 years. Why was it not brought up in July, August, September, or October? Why was it not?

One of the reasons I think was that everybody knew the sequester was out there. It needed to be fixed, and this would have been the opportunity to fix it when that bill moved through the Senate. And so Senator REID wouldn't bring up the defense bill. He refused to bring it to the floor.

Senator MCCAIN came to the floor and said, shame, shame, shame, as ranking Republican on the committee, pointing out this failure was the first time I believe in 50 years that the defense bill had not moved. No other appropriations bill had moved, either; not a single one. But not passing the defense authorization bill was historic—again, I think in big part because they didn't want to talk about the sequester.

In the debate, I believe last October, with Governor Romney, the sequester came up. What did President Obama say? It will not happen. The sequester will not happen. And here we are, with no plan to fix it from the White House, no plan to fix it from the Democratic majority—which apparently wants to lead this country, wants to be in the majority, wants to justify their leadership position. Senator REID has not brought forth—unless it is today, until

this late, late minute—a plan to fix the sequester, an alternative. We have seen the one-page outline, but that is it.

I would note, I think I indicated, the House has already twice passed legislation months ago that would fix the sequester and not allow this event to occur in the way that it is. They have done their duty.

So what is the Senate going to do? What are we going to have from the Senate? Another do nothing, no budget, no fix to the economic threats of America? Now no fix to the sequester? The only thing we have to do now is raise taxes?

The truth is, the way to fix this and the way to do this is to have all the departments and agencies of the government be evaluated, not just a small portion of them, and have all of them tighten their belts, and we could easily avoid the draconian cuts that are lurking out there right now.

Over half the government spending was not touched in the 2011 Budget Control Act deal. It just wasn't, including some of the fastest growing items such as food stamps, which have gone from \$20 billion in 2001 to \$80 billion last year. It has gone up four times in 10 years and not a dime was reduced from it. Medicaid is at 6- to 7-percent-a-year increases. These programs alone add \$300 billion to government spending each year. They aren't having any review at all.

I am disappointed we don't have a legislative plan on the floor that we could actually evaluate to see what it means, and then begin to debate it and discuss it. It should long since have been brought up in this Senate. We should already be aware of it.

But there is a game played around here, as Senator MCCONNELL said. There is a game around here to wait until the last minute. And the President, using the power of the Presidency and his skill as an orator, feels he can once again dominate the media and be able to extract the kind of legislation he wants in the end, and somehow gain political advantage, I guess.

I don't think it is going to work this time. I am worried about it. I am afraid we are not going to have an agreement. I am afraid cuts are going to take place in a way that shouldn't occur, and that they could be done smarter and more effectively with less damage than we have.

So we are told that in this Democratic plan, in this outline that is floating around, after we passed just a few weeks ago a \$600 billion tax increase, that now we want to have another tax increase. I have to say this with clarity: Any plan that attempts to replace the cuts in the Budget Control Act with tax increases will not happen. They cannot happen. It will be a fundamental breach of the commitment we made to the American people in August of 2011. We told them, We have an agreement. We will raise the debt ceiling \$2.1 trillion. A lot of people did not want that to happen. A lot of people

are fed up with borrowing in Washington. A lot of people said, Don't raise the debt ceiling a dime.

We said, OK, we are going to raise the debt ceiling, but we are going to promise you, American people, that we will contain the growth of spending by \$2.1 trillion, so the increase in spending over 10 years will be about \$8 trillion instead of \$10 trillion. Surely, that is not going to break America. Surely, that is not going to destroy this Republic. It could be exceedingly damaging if we do as the sequester says, though, and target the Defense Department far more severely than any other area of government.

But, fundamentally, reducing the growth in spending from \$10 trillion in expected increases to \$8 trillion is not going to damage America. And it can be done. In fact, it must be done.

What we have to understand is that the President of the United States and Senator REID, the Democratic leader in the Senate, agreed in August of 2011 that we would raise the debt ceiling, we would cut spending, and we would not increase taxes. We would not increase taxes. It was a simple, small, but significant, noticeable reduction in the growth and spending, and that was the agreement. Before the ink was dry on it, we had people wanting to weasel out of it, to change it.

What would the American people think of us if less than 2 years after this agreement, this promise to them, we capitulated, we couldn't follow through, and we couldn't maintain those growth reductions we promised the American people we would do?

The plan I am hearing that is being floated now is a direct contradiction of the promise we made to the American people. I don't believe it will pass. I don't believe it will pass the House and I don't believe it will pass the Senate.

And remember, this is current baseline law now.

The Budget Director of the Congressional Budget Office testified before the Budget Committee this week, and he showed us what the projected deficits will be over the next 10 years. The good news was that deficits would be reduced some—less than half of what they are today—by 2015. And a big part of that was the sequester, because it is in law. The law says: These reductions will occur. He scored them as we passed it. And now we are saying, We want to give that back and we don't want to follow through on that.

The only way you can not follow through on the reductions that were in the Budget Control Act would be to increase spending—to increase spending above what we are currently projected to have the government grow over the next 10 years. We would have to increase spending.

So make no mistake about it, the plan that is being proposed is to tax and spend—to spend more and tax more. That is not where this country should be going. I reject that as the right approach. Particularly, it is contrary to the steps we took in August.

One reason the agreement was reached on the fiscal cliff in early January of this year was that we had spending cuts last August and they got some tax increases in January, but not more. And those tax increases should have been for the purpose of reducing debt, not funding new spending.

So to sum up the matter, in August 2011 Congress and the President agreed and passed legislation to reduce by a small amount Federal spending from \$47 trillion to \$45 trillion over 10 years. The spending of the United States would increase approximately \$8 trillion instead of \$10 trillion. That would not damage the American Government. We certainly should be able to function as a nation with that kind of substantial increase in spending, and it is happening every day in cities, counties, and States throughout America. They are dealing with far worse reductions than that.

There was no tax increase agreed to at all—not one penny of tax increases. Those reductions in spending are in law. They are in the new baseline on which we are now operating. To alter that and give back that spending without finding reductions in spending elsewhere would be to increase spending above that agreed to in the Budget Control Act, and that is what the Democratic outline we have seen would do. It increases spending and it increases taxes. They say: Don't worry about the increased spending. We have taken care of it. We have raised taxes. So that is the deal. They raised taxes to pay for the increase. That is in clear violation of the terms of the agreement and the moral agreement we had with the American people. It is in violation of what was told to the American people a little over 18 months ago, and to that extent it is not acceptable.

I urge my colleagues not to proceed with this approach.

Let's find ways to spread out the spending cuts so that more government agencies tighten their belts—and not so disproportionately on the Defense Department—and we can resolve this matter going forward.

I am worried because we have had no response from our Democratic partners, no response from our President of the United States, who is the Commander in Chief of American forces. To my knowledge they have not laid out a detailed plan yet. We are going to reach that deadline, and it looks as though it is going to take place. I hope it can be avoided. It should be avoided, and I am willing to work to avoid that.

I call on my colleagues to not continue to delay. Let's move forward to an effective agreement that preserves the legislative intent of the Budget Control Act and the promises that we made to the American people.

I thank the Chair, yield the floor, and note the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BEGICH). The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

THE DREAM ACT

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, today and throughout the coming weeks, I hope this body will move closer to comprehensive immigration reform. Actually, accountable immigration reform would be a more appropriate term to call it—accountable to the people of the United States who overwhelmingly want this dysfunctional, broken system to be mended.

We are a nation of immigrants, and the people of our Nation know it. They know it not only intellectually and abstractly; they know it in their gut because they see on the walls of their homes the proud photographs of their parents, their grandparents—people who have come to this country as a beacon of economic opportunity and freedom, some of them struggling through the most horrific kinds of trials and tribulations to reach this great land, the greatest Nation in the history of the world.

I have told my colleagues in the past—and I will state again—one of the most inspiring things I do—and I had done it as attorney general for a long time but now as a Senator—is to visit our courthouses where immigration and naturalization ceremonies take place. Those ceremonies are profoundly inspiring because they come—new citizens, people about to become citizens—with their families. It is a day of joy and pride unmatched and unexcelled in their lives. They come with friends, and they come to celebrate with their friends and families, with tears in their eyes and their hearts and their throats. There is no time when I have seen one of these ceremonies that I have not been deeply moved and uplifted.

If you ever have a down day, if you are ever discouraged about this Nation, see one of these ceremonies. You will know what it means to be a citizen of the United States of America and how important it is and how important we should regard it.

So I approach immigration reform with a profound appreciation of its importance to people who seek liberty and economic opportunity and justice in this great land but also how we are enriched as a nation of immigrants by the diversity, the talent, the dedication they bring to our factories where they work, to our laboratories where they invent, to our military where they serve and sacrifice and give their lives.

So I hope we will embark on accountable immigration reform that provides a path to earned citizenship for the 11 million people or more now in this country undocumented. Many times they pay taxes, they live here, and

they regard the United States as their home. They have no criminal background. They have done nothing wrong. We need to find a way to bring them out of the shadows and provide earned citizenship, with background checks to show they have no criminal records, that they will learn to speak English, if they do not now do so, go through all the other steps that may be set, and then go to the back of the line behind people who have legally sought to come here.

That reform should also include much stronger security at the borders, a crackdown on employers who hire undocumented immigrants—people in this country who are here illegally but who can be exploited by those employers—and, of course, a streamlined immigration process. The elements of this reform are becoming clearer and attracting a growing consensus. If nothing else, we should make sure we provide an expedited route for people who now come with H-1B visas.

Some of the details of these proposals need to be resolved so we give those people who come to this country with extraordinary skills or who are educated here and are now forced to leave the country, to the detriment of our tech corporations—and many are in my home State of Connecticut. And maybe, first and foremost, we need to make sure we give the DREAMers what this country so richly deserves—one would think, I might say, what they deserve, but truly the country deserves what they have to contribute and give back to this country.

For some time I have come to the floor of the Senate to talk about individual DREAMers. I wish to talk about a young person, Cinthia Perez, whose photograph is here in the Chamber and who is one of those DREAMers—many of whom are brought to this country as infants or very young children. They know no other country. They often know no other language but the one spoken here. Their lives are rooted in this country. Their friends are here. They are going through our schools. They are serving in our military. Yet they can be deported at any time.

Right now, the President has commendably offered the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals—DACA—system for them, but it is only for a limited period of time. It does not provide the certainty and security they need to do what Cinthia Perez wants to do with her life. That is why the nearly 2 million immigrants nationwide who would benefit from the DREAM Act—between 11,000 and 20,000 in Connecticut—deserve the benefit of a more secure route, an expedited route to citizenship. That has to be part of accountable immigration reform.

Cinthia Perez was born in Mexico. She was brought to America at the age of 5. She has not left America since. Her family settled in New Haven, CT. She went to the New Haven public schools from elementary school through high school.

It was in high school that Cinthia came to understand how her undocumented status would actually affect her future, because during her senior year of high school, Cinthia attended a college preparation class. From the start of that class—supposedly to prepare her for college—Cinthia could not fully take part in the course because she thought she would not be eligible to go to college because of her undocumented status.

Still, she continued in that class as a way to stay motivated about her future and to experience the college application process, as many Americans do. In fact, she eventually applied to four universities—some State and some private. She was accepted by how many? All four.

Her excitement and her family's soon faded as she realized the choice she faced. She would not be able to attend any of these schools because she could not afford it, and her dream school looked even further out of reach because her parents could not afford to pay full tuition and Cinthia could not share the financial burden because she was afraid to seek work. She is ineligible to work in this country, and she felt hopeless because all she wanted to do was attend college, work her way through, so she could create a better future for herself and make a difference for the country.

Around that time, Connecticut passed a State law—and I advocated it—to allow undocumented students who have graduated from high school in Connecticut to pay in-state tuition rates that are available to other Connecticut residents. With that financial burden slightly lessened, Cinthia was able to enroll at Southern Connecticut State University.

She is now proud to be in her sophomore year at SCSU, and she hopes to use her education to pursue a career in community development or environmental management. Basically, she wants to help improve education and support for children in need—children such as herself who simply want an education so they can give back to this country, children such as herself who are motivated and inspired to contribute to America, and children such as herself who are undocumented and, therefore, hampered and impeded in their aspirations.

I have no doubt Cinthia will continue to contribute to Connecticut. She will, unfortunately, face the dangers of deportation from her home and may be sent back to a country she has not seen for many years—in fact, since she was 5 years old.

I hope every DREAMer is given deferred action status under the President's program. I hope Cinthia's application will be favorably received. I hope she will be able to pursue her education and work and give back to this Nation and that she will be eligible at some point for financial aid.

But the full measure of relief from deportation will not come to her or any