

that would close corporate tax loopholes and wasteful subsidies; and revenue from the very wealthiest among us—Americans making millions of dollars each year.

It is critical Republicans and Democrats come together to find a balanced way to avert these drastic cuts. The consequence of the so-called sequester cuts is real, not only for our national defense but for millions of American families and businesses alike. Three-quarters of a million jobs—750,000 jobs—are at stake. Across the country, tens of thousands of teachers, including thousands who work with disabled children, would be laid off; 70,000 children would be dropped from Head Start; 373,000 adults living with serious mental illnesses and children dealing with severe emotional problems will go untreated.

Airports could close due to a shortage of air traffic controllers and other essential personnel. And lines at airports that do stay open will stretch out the door, as TSA workers are furloughed.

At McCarran Airport in Las Vegas last year more than 40 million people used that airport in coming to visit the bright lights of Las Vegas, the Las Vegas strip and downtown Las Vegas. Those lines are going to get longer, waiting to take off from Las Vegas. That is too bad.

From coast to coast hundreds of thousands of civilian employees from the Department of Defense will face furloughs that will devastate their families and devastate our economy. These cuts will take place.

On Friday, when this kicks in, not everyone is going to see these cuts on Saturday, but they are going to kick in for the people who run these agencies, the people who run the Pentagon. I met with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff before we left for our break. These cuts are going to take place. They are going to be felt in Defense more quickly because the civilian agencies have not rehired the people they could have, and they have done other things because of the essential nature of what the military does. They haven't done that, so the cuts in the military are going to kick in more quickly. The other cuts are not going to come immediately, but as the weeks move on, we will see more and more people who have been hurt in the non-defense fields. The effects are cumulative and they are going to hurt and hurt badly.

We want to work with the Republicans to come to a balanced, responsible way to reduce the impact of this sequester, but my Republican colleagues are standing in the way of a solution. They only want cuts and more cuts. They are willing to sacrifice 750,000 American jobs rather than ask multimillionaires to pay a penny more.

Mr. President, 56 percent—almost 60 percent—of the Republicans around the country support this balanced approach we have. Republicans, I repeat,

around the country support this, in addition to the Independents and the Democrats. The only Republicans in America who don't support this balanced approach are the Republicans who serve here in Congress—in the Senate and in the House.

Three-quarters of Americans, I repeat, including almost 60 percent of Republicans, are crying out for a balanced approach. With only 3 days left to protect American families and our economic recovery from this latest crisis, it is time for Republicans to work toward a solution instead of being part of the problem.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

THE SEQUESTER

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I wish to say a word about the sequester.

The President's top aides proposed this sequester as a way to help the White House avoid a debt limit debate during last year's campaign. In essence, the deal we struck was that in exchange for avoiding a second vote before the election, the debt limit would be paired with spending cuts only—spending cuts only—and would not involve a tax increase.

The President had more than a year and a half to revisit his proposal and to work with us to prevent it. He obviously thought his time and energies would be better spent elsewhere. In fact, I note that today he is off campaigning again in Virginia instead of working with us to resolve the issue.

So here we are. Here we are. The President has been running around acting as though the world is going to end because Congress might actually follow through on an idea he proposed—he proposed—and signed into law, all the while pretending he is somehow powerless to stop it. Well, it is time to put the record straight. As someone who was personally involved in the 2011 budget talks, I think I am in a pretty good position to do that.

On the question of who came up with the idea in the first place, it originated, as I noted, in the White House. I was less than 100 yards from this very spot when Vice President BIDEN called me at my desk to lay it out. He explained the sequester in exquisite detail. And then, as has been reported, the administration stubbornly stuck by those details throughout the negotiations, refusing any effort by Republicans to adjust the design in any meaningful way.

More important than who came up with the idea of the sequester, however, is the fact the bipartisan agreement that included it, and that brought us to this point, envisioned \$2.1 trillion in spending cuts. That is what we voted for in August of 2011.

Democrats and Republicans agreed to \$2.1 trillion in spending reductions as part of the 2011 Budget Control Act.

So we can all go back and talk about what might have been or what the President wanted or what he now wants, but let us be clear about the facts. Those cuts were to come in two steps: First, through an immediate \$900 billion spending reduction in the form of budget caps, and then by an additional \$1.2 trillion in cuts to be achieved in one of two ways, either by the so-called supercommittee or, if that failed, through the President's sequester proposal, meaning automatic spending cuts to both domestic and defense programs.

While the President tried repeatedly to make tax hikes a part of the backup plan, he ultimately gave up on that in exchange for avoiding a second vote on the debt limit before his election. The President made a deliberate decision to give up on getting any tax hikes or revenue enhancements, or whatever the White House wants to call it, as part of negotiations over the sequester mechanism. He made the calculation that avoiding a second vote on the debt limit before the election was more important.

So any effort to bring taxes into the picture now is a ploy to move the goalpost, as the primary chronicler of this whole episode, Bob Woodward, has noted.

Of course, the White House has tried to refute those historical facts, but it hasn't gotten anywhere because we know what happened.

As the chairman of the Finance Committee helpfully reminded us last week, "The President is part of the sequester" because "the White House recommended it . . . and so now we're feeling the effects of it."

So it is time for the administration to at least accept reality so we can all move forward and focus on what the White House is actually doing right now. It is asking the American people for permission to break its word on spending.

Look, we reached an agreement to cut \$2.1 trillion in government spending over 10 years, and we intend to keep our word. Should these cuts be implemented in a smarter way? You bet. But the President and his Cabinet Secretaries had a year and a half to think about that. They just can't show up now at the last minute and expect the American people to bail them out of their own lack of responsibility.

We can either secure these reductions more intelligently or we can do it the President's way with across-the-board cuts. But one thing Americans simply will not accept is another tax increase to replace spending reductions to which we already agreed.

It was my hope that the supercommittee would succeed. The Senators I appointed took their assignments very seriously. They put real skin in the game because they wanted it to work. They didn't like the sequester idea either. Had the President engaged in a

serious and supportive way at that time, the supercommittee may well have succeeded. But he was busy. He was campaigning and, I would argue, undermining the process instead.

But even after the supercommittee failed, Republicans continued to work to find another way to achieve these spending cuts. We repeatedly called for replacing the sequester with smarter cuts rather than tax hikes, according to the original pact. House Republicans actually passed two bills to do just that. But again, instead of engaging with us, the President just set up more roadblocks. For more than 1 year, he resisted and dismissed every Republican attempt at a compromise. He refused to offer any kind of reasonable alternative, and he even threatened to veto other proposals aimed at averting the sequester.

Now here we are, with the President presenting the country with two options: Armageddon or a tax hike. Well, it is a false choice, and he knows it, but the President is a master at creating the impression of chaos as an excuse for government action—do nothing, fan the flames of catastrophe, and then claim the only way out is more government in the form of higher taxes.

Look, the choice we face isn't between the sequester and tax hikes. Remember, we are only talking about cutting 2 to 3 percent of the budget. Any business owner or middle-class parent will tell you it is completely ridiculous to think Washington can't find a better way to cut 2 or 3 percent of the Federal budget at a time when we are \$16 trillion in debt. Every single working American had to figure out how to make ends meet with 2 percent less in their paychecks just last month when the payroll tax holiday expired. Are you telling me Washington can't do the same? It is absurd. It is utterly absurd.

There is no reason in the world these cuts need to fall on essential services or emergency responders. After all, even with the sequester, Washington will be spending more than when President Obama got here. We are only talking about cutting one-tenth of what the President spent on the stimulus bill. Enough. Enough.

Step 1 in this process of getting to a serious solution is to end the White House's denial of historical reality. We are starting to get there, slowly but surely. More important, though, is the next step, and that is when the President and his Democratic allies actually come to the table and negotiate in a serious way, without gimmicks and without games, on how best to reduce Washington spending. So let's shelve the tax hikes and the endless campaigning.

Finally, I think there is an even larger point to be made. The President has been going around warning of utter chaos if the sequester takes effect. While I agree that those cuts could be made in a much smarter way and I

don't like the fact that they fall disproportionately on defense, what does it say about the size of government that we can't cut it by 2 or 3 percent without inviting disaster? Doesn't that really make our point? Hasn't government gotten too big if just cutting the overall budget by a couple of percentage points could have that kind of an impact? Personally, I don't believe the world will end if the President's sequester takes effect, but our country would be much better served if the Democrats who run Washington would get off the campaign trail and work with us to trim the budget in a more rational way.

Americans are tired of the manufactured crises. I know my constituents in Kentucky are. It is simply time. They want us to work together, and Republicans are ready to do just that.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

Mr. REID. Would the Chair announce the business of the day.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

NOMINATION OF CHARLES TIMOTHY HAGEL TO BE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to consider the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

Department of Defense. Nomination of Charles Timothy Hagel, of Nebraska, to be Secretary.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the motion to proceed to the motion to reconsider the vote by which cloture was not invoked on the nomination is agreed to and the motion to reconsider is agreed to.

Under the previous order, the time until 12 noon will be equally divided in the usual form.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Michigan.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, I believe the business before the Senate now is the vote on the reconsideration of the motion to end debate on the Hagel nomination. Is that correct?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator is correct.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, I believe it is now time for us to vote on the Hagel nomination.

Mr. INHOFE. Excuse me. Would the Senator from Michigan yield for a question?

Mr. LEVIN. Of course.

MR. INHOFE. It is my understanding that we have equally divided our time between now and noon. That is about 1 hour 40 minutes. I ask unanimous con-

sent, on the Republican side, that I be given the first 10 minutes and the last 15 minutes of our Republican time.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, it is now time for us to vote up or down on the nomination, for many reasons.

The nomination has been before us for an adequate length of time for us to get the information our colleagues have asked for, but also there is the looming fact of sequestration. We need to have a Secretary of Defense who is not only in office but whose leadership is not in limbo but is there. Our troops need it. Their families need it. Our country needs it.

As of today we have 66,000 military personnel in harm's way in Afghanistan. The President of Afghanistan has just directed the United States to remove its special operations forces from a key Afghan province. Our military faces key decisions about the pace of the drawdown between now and the end of 2014, the size and composition of a residual force, and the terms and conditions for the ongoing presence in Afghanistan of the United States and our coalition partners after 2014.

At the same time we face new and growing threats elsewhere, including the ongoing threat posed by Iran's nuclear weapons program and the increasingly destructive civil war in Syria, with the risk that that conflict could result in the loss of control over that country's substantial stockpile of chemical weapons. There is also the growing instability in other countries affected by the Arab spring; the growth of al-Qaida affiliates in ungoverned regions, including parts of Yemen, Somalia, north Africa; and the continued unpredictable behavior of the nuclear-armed regime in North Korea.

We face these challenges at a time when the Department of Defense budget is under unique pressure as a result of cuts previously agreed upon by Congress, the budgeting by continuing resolution, and the impending threat of a sequester. These across-the-board cuts will affect Defense and just about every other agency we have. Those cuts are going to be disastrous in many ways. I hope we can still find ways to avoid them, but as of right now the threat of a sequester is a real one. It is within a few days.

The Department of Defense has already instituted civilian hiring freezes, reduced or eliminated temporary and term employees, deferred facilities maintenance, and begun canceling or postponing the maintenance of ships, aircraft, and ground vehicles. In the next few days, the Department will begin to implement additional actions, including furloughs for most civilian employees, cutbacks in flying hours, steaming hours and other military training, and cancellation of contracts. And those contracts, when they are cancelled, have major costs to the Treasury. Those are not savings, except in the short term, perhaps. But in