

This Congress and our Nation have considerable challenges ahead. These challenges require fortitude and understanding. I join you in praying for our country, and greatly value your prayer today and your service.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader.

THE SEQUESTER

Mr. REID. Mr. President, this week, Speaker BOEHNER made some harsh accusations. I will not repeat them here on the Senate floor. Suffice it to say he thinks the Senate isn't moving quickly enough to avert the sequester—the across-the-board-cuts that will cost 750,000 Americans their jobs unless Congress acts and acts quickly.

The Speaker's charge is really weak sauce, considering that House Republicans spent 2 months refining the art of doing nothing. The allegation is stranger still given the Speaker doesn't even have his own proposal to prevent the deep cuts that will strike within 2 days. In fact, the House Republicans' entire strategy for the Congress is to sit on the sidelines.

And Republicans won't work with Democrats. The Republicans have failed to make their own proposals and refuse to compromise on a balanced plan to avoid harsh austerity measures. Democrats, on the other hand, have proposed a balanced solution to this sequester—a proposal to reduce the deficit by making smart spending cuts, closing wasteful tax loopholes, and asking multimillionaires to pay a little bit more.

We will vote this week on our plan—a plan supported by three-quarters of Americans and almost 60 percent of Republicans. But once again, Republicans are too busy fighting amongst themselves to unite behind a course of action. They are, instead, doing nothing—zero.

Benjamin Franklin once said:

The man who achieves makes many mistakes, but he never makes the biggest mistake of all—doing nothing.

Republicans appear poised to make the biggest mistake of all. They are prepared to let the sequester's painful arbitrary cuts take effect.

Across the country, meat inspectors, air traffic controllers, FBI agents, and Border Patrol agents will be furloughed and 70,000 boys and girls will be kicked out of Head Start.

These cuts will not be felt in the next few days, but they will start quickly, Lord knows. The notices that go out in 90 days will cut off all contractual payments to whoever gets a warning notice. So within a matter of weeks, we are going to feel these cuts and feel them really painfully.

As I said, 70,000 boys and girls will be kicked out of Head Start, thousands of researchers working to cure diseases such as cancer, Alzheimer's, and other dread diseases will be laid off, hundreds of thousands of Defense Department employees will take forced furloughs,

creating hardship for their families and threatening national security.

To make sure everyone understands, this is not President Obama's sequester, because 174 House Republicans voted for this and 28 Republican Senators voted for this. That is 60 percent of Republican Senators and 75 percent of the House Republicans Members who voted for this. Congress has the power to avoid these self-inflicted wounds, but Democrats can't do it alone. Republicans must do their part. Compromise is never easy, but surely it is better than doing nothing at all.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

THE SEQUESTER

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, for months now I have been coming to the floor to urge my colleagues on the other side to help us replace the President's sequester proposal. Yet here we are, just 2 days to go until the cuts hit, and the Democrats who control Washington still haven't put forward a serious bipartisan plan—not the President and not his allies in Congress. They prefer to keep it alive as a political issue instead. Now, less than 48 hours before the clock runs out, all we are offered is a gimmicky tax hike that is designed to fail.

Look, I hope they are not expecting a round of applause for this particular act of political bravery. Is it any wonder the American people are so fed up with Washington? The American people didn't send us here to play games, they sent us here to solve problems. That means getting spending under control and putting the economy back on track.

The American people are clearly tired of the gimmicks. I can't tell you how many letters and e-mails and phone calls I have received about this sequester issue in particular, and the messages my constituents keep sending are simply this: Replacing spending cuts that both parties already agreed to, and to which the President already signed into law, with tax hikes is simply unacceptable.

One Kentuckian from Springfield put it this way:

Hold strong and do not give in to more spending . . . Normal folks must adjust their budgets . . . so must the government.

Another constituent said it was important to stand firm in the face of the President's endless campaigning. "Make him keep his promise of a balanced approach," she wrote, and that means one thing: "Cut spending."

A woman from Bowling Green urged me to "hold firm against spending and kicking the can down the road."

She wants me to hold firm against that—spending and kicking the can down the road. She said:

I have had to cut, cut, cut. The least our government should do is seriously make cuts.

And, of course, she is entirely right. It is absurd to think the government cannot get by with a little more than a 2-percent reduction in spending when every working American had to figure out how to make do with 2 percent less in their paychecks just last month.

Some have raised concerns about a proposal that would give agency heads more discretion in prioritizing these cuts. I understand those concerns, but let's be clear about the goal here. The goal isn't to hand over congressional authority, it is to make sure these cuts actually happen and that we don't cut a penny less than we promised the American people we would cut a year and a half ago.

Look, we know most Americans think Washington's spending problem should be addressed by cutting spending. So when the President goes off on a campaign for higher taxes instead of working with Republicans to replace the sequester with smarter cuts, and when Senate Democrats put forward tax hike gimmicks instead of negotiating serious spending-cut solutions, Americans feel as though they are not being listened to.

And they have reason to be upset. They sent a divided government here to Washington, but they expect it to work. The President may not like that fact. He may wish things were different. But he wasn't elected to work with the Congress he wants, he was elected to work with the Congress he has, and that means working with both parties to get things done. It means leaving the gimmicks behind and working with us to hammer out a smarter solution to his sequester.

Republicans have been calling for Democrats to work with us on the sequester over and over. We are still ready to work with them to get something responsible passed, but we can't do it alone. The President's party runs Washington. It is time they got off the campaign trail and started working with us to govern for a change.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business for 1 hour, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the time equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with the majority controlling the first half.

The Senator from Maryland.

SEQUESTER IMPACT

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, today I rise to speak on the impact of sequester on the American people, on their safety, their security, our economy, and the way local and State governments can use wise resources to protect their people.

I know we have each been assigned 10 minutes. I have a robust number of Appropriations Committee members who want to speak. I will ask the Chair to let me know when I have used 5 minutes, and if Senator LANDRIEU arrives, I will then yield to her.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator will be so notified.

Ms. MIKULSKI. I come today not only as the chair of the entire Appropriations Committee but as the chair of the subcommittee that funds the Commerce Department, Justice Department, and the majority of our science agencies.

I wish to talk about the impact on public safety and our future, but you have to know I come with a heavy heart.

I note and bring to the attention of my colleagues that a guard was killed in a Federal prison on Monday. This guard worked at the Federal penitentiary in Canaan, PA. He was stabbed and attacked by a prisoner with homemade weapons. The entire Justice Department, the Office of Prisons, the union people who represent them, all mourn at Mr. Eric Williams' death. We don't know the full extent, and I will be asking for a report on the investigation on how this happened. But one of the things I do know as the chair of the committee, we face prison overcrowding. We have Federal prisons, some we don't even open because we refuse to put the money in.

You can say: Well, Senator BARB, you are on the committee. Why don't you put the money in? We are in gridlock, deadlock, hammerlock on not being able to move our bills in regular order with due diligence and oversight. That is why we are at this crisis of sequester: Oh, boy. Can't we just cut 2 percent like American families?

American families don't run prisons. They don't build their own roads. They don't have to put out their own local police department. They depend on their government to do that. They are willing to expend revenue, pay taxes so they are protected. There are reasons people are in Federal prison. They were bad guys and gals who did bad things, and when they are in prison, they still want to do bad things, such as attack a prison guard. Do you know what sequester will mean? Across-the-board cuts. It will have a direct impact on America's prisons.

Oh, sure. The prisoners will still have their food. They will still have their hour to be able to do their exercise. But the prison guards will face furloughs, layoffs, and even reductions in the workforce. We are placing them at risk while they protect us from risk. Where are our national priorities?

One of the ways we can honor this man is to get serious about our appropriations process. I wish to cancel the sequester and come up with a balanced solution of revenues and strategic, targeted cuts, not across-the-board cuts to 1,300 correctional guards who might face layoffs.

About our Federal prosecutors. We in Maryland have one of the best U.S. attorneys going after violent gangs, drug cartels, child predators, mortgage frauds. But we are going to say to those smart lawyers who can make megabucks in law firms, stick with us. But when you do, you can be laid off and furloughed. Why is it that the criminals are able to hire the lawyers, but the Federal Government doesn't want to pay for them? Priorities.

We need to be able to have the right law enforcement at the Federal and State level to catch the bad guys, whether it is white-collar crime, such as mortgage fraud, or street crime, or despicable crimes such as trafficking in women and children.

We have to look out for our FBI, our major force in counterterrorism. They face, again, layoffs, and it will go to our local law enforcement. We will be cutting the funds for things such as the Byrne grants, which enable local law enforcement to put cops on the beat and buy the equipment they need to protect themselves. There is a program here that we have a line item. It is not the biggest thing in the Federal budget, but it is the biggest thing to cops. Why? Because it buys bulletproof vests.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. I advise the Senator she has consumed 5 minutes.

Ms. MIKULSKI. I could talk another 55. I could talk another 505. But I want everyone to get the point that cuts have consequences. So things such as, oh, why don't we cut the budget as families do—well, let's do what families do. They, first of all, make plans and stick to them. I think it is time we have a regular order.

I want to deal with this sequester now. I want to look at this thing called the continuing resolution so it resolves the funding for fiscal 2013, for fiscal 2014, to work on a bipartisan basis across the aisle and across the dome. Let's look at our spending, how we protect the American people, and make public investments that help create jobs today and jobs tomorrow.

In conclusion, before I turn to my most able subcommittee chair on Homeland Security, Senator LANDRIEU, I just wish to say to the family of Officer Eric Williams, the entire Senate wishes to express its condolences to the family. I believe we can show our deepest sympathy by making sure it doesn't happen in our Federal prisons. Let's get on and solve the problem of sequester. Let's work together and get the job done.

I yield to Senator LANDRIEU, the chair of the Subcommittee on Homeland Security, a very crucial committee.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Louisiana.

Ms. LANDRIEU. Mr. President, I appreciate—and we all do—all the Senators, even Senators on the other side of the aisle I think admire her tenacity and her leadership and, most importantly, her knowledge and understanding of the importance of the Federal budget on the private sector economy. Obviously, the Senator from Maryland understands its impacts on Maryland, but she also understands the impacts to our Nation.

No one speaks more passionately and more knowledgeably about the challenges before families than Senator BARBARA MIKULSKI from Maryland, from a working-class family herself. Her parents and grandparents, immigrants to this country, operating a small business, a bakery—a wonderful business—not only understanding how to run their own business themselves but for all the neighbors who came in every day to talk about their problems.

When the Senator says she knows what families do in tight budget times, she is correct. Families do cut back, but they plan their reductions. They don't pull the rug out from underneath the college tuition for their kids. They don't kick grandma out on the street and put her in a homeless shelter. They make smart decisions about budgets. Let me say to my colleagues on the other side who fail to understand the other part of the equation, they also try to bring in more revenue to the family base. Either the wife gets a job or the husband gets a job or the wife goes back to school to get a nursing degree so instead of making \$6 an hour, she can bring in \$16 or \$18 an hour.

Families work on both sides of the equation. But for some reason, we have half this Chamber that only wants to work on one side of the equation. It is only about cuts, cuts, and more cuts, even though they are senseless, they are dangerous, they do not make sense for our country, and they most certainly don't just impact the government—of course, which is the enemy of the other side—they impact our economy. They impact our ability to grow this economy. Every cut that comes down in a senseless way, and even cuts that are planned, are harmful to the private sector.

I know this not only as a Senator from Louisiana and chair of the Homeland Security Committee but particularly as chair of the Small Business Committee. Our phone has been ringing off the hook with small businesses—not government workers but private sector workers and contractors—that are afraid, and have every reason to be, about the results of this sequester to their bottom line because they are providing the government a good service or a product the government needs, whether it is in health care, whether it is in education or whether it is in homeland security. But I digress a little bit. So let me get back to the central message as chair of Homeland Security.