

has led the effort to make sure that won't happen anymore, and that is part of our legislation.

Our bill would also ask the wealthiest among us—those making, for example, \$5 million a year—to pay a minimum of 30 percent in taxes. I don't think that is too outrageous. It is called the Buffet rule because that multibillionaire said he should pay as much in taxes as his secretary, which he doesn't. So this legislation would make it more fair in that regard.

Almost 60 percent of Republicans around the country favor this balanced approach, revenue from the richest of the rich and continuing with governmental cuts. This proposition would ask millionaires and billionaires and wealthy corporations to contribute a tiny fraction more, as I have already indicated.

And everybody agrees—Republicans around the country and about 80 percent of the American people agree—it is the right thing to do. Almost 60 percent of Republicans around the country agree it is the right thing to do. The only Republicans in America who don't agree are those who serve in Congress.

Republicans in Congress are going after our proposal because it goes after their special interests. Now, after days of infighting, Senate Republicans have announced their plan. But instead of replacing the pain of sequester with something smarter and more responsible, their plan would embrace these devastating cuts while abandoning any of the responsibility that goes along with them.

One of the Senators in our caucus we had on Tuesday said the Republican plan we thought was coming—and it did—would be like being told you have to have three fingers cut off, and their proposal is to send this to the President and have him decide which finger is going to go first.

Republicans call the plan “flexibility.” Let's call it what it is: It is a punt. They are punting. As President Obama said yesterday, it would simply raise the question: “Do I end funding that helps disabled children or poor children? Do I close this naval shipyard or that one?”

The Republican plan is not a solution. And even members of the Senate Republican Caucus have questioned the wisdom of this proposal, and they have said so publicly. Why would the Republicans, part of the legislative branch of government, cede more power to the White House?

The Republicans should give Congress true flexibility—the flexibility to cut wasteful subsidies, the flexibility to close unnecessary tax loopholes, and the flexibility to ask the richest of the rich to contribute a little bit more. Instead, they have become completely inflexible, insisting we risk hundreds of thousands of American jobs as well as programs that strengthen families and small businesses across the Nation.

I am sorry to say that should come as no surprise. As usual, the Republicans

have put the demands of special interests and protection of the richest of the rich—people making up to \$5 million a year and not being asked to contribute 30 percent of what they make—over the needs of the American people, especially the middle class.

Will 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.

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 Republicans controlling the first half.

The Republican whip.

THE SEQUESTER

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, here we are again, on the eve of this administration's latest manufactured crisis. Tomorrow, as we all know—anybody who has been paying attention knows—the sequester will go into effect. And if we believe the majority leader, the President, and his Cabinet, this will be devastating for our economy and for our country. But I wish to suggest that the majority leader, the President, and his Cabinet put down the beltway Koolaid, because they are predicting a disaster that will not occur.

Let's put the responsibility for this where it lies. The sequester was the President's idea in the first place. As much as he and his press secretary and staff try to deny it, the fact is, as he wrote in his recent book, Bob Woodward has made the point that they told him it was their idea. The White House proposed it to Congress and the President signed it into law on August 2, 2011.

In the year and a half since the Budget Control Act became the law of the land, the President has done virtually nothing—nothing—about it. He has ignored it. He suggested during the Presidential campaign that the sequester would not happen, and it was as if he tried to simply wish it away. Certainly we know one thing, and that is neither the President nor his Cabinet nor the Defense Department nor any part of his administration has done anything to plan for it—no planning whatsoever—which, of course, makes the implementation more challenging, to be sure.

At times, the President has pretended the sequester didn't even exist, even though he signed it into law, such as when the Department of Labor notified government contractors they didn't have to abide by another Federal

law called the WARN Act, which requires them to notify their employees of potential layoffs that could result from sequestration. The timing, it seems, was inconvenient. Those notices would have gone out roughly around November 1, just 5 days before the last election.

To be sure, there is bipartisan consensus the sequester is ham-fisted. These across-the-board cuts don't amount to smart budgeting. But what would we expect after nearly 4 years of no budgeting? And what I mean by that, as this chart reflects, is that it has been 1,401 days since the Senate, under Democrat control, has passed a budget. This is a shameful record and one that needs to be rectified as soon as possible.

We are now told the President himself has missed his statutory deadline for sending his proposed budget for the year over to Congress. That deadline was February 4. And now they are saying we may not get it until after we have had to act ourselves on a budget. So they are predicting it will be roughly 7 weeks late.

Well, no one could argue with a straight face—contrary to the doom and gloom and the apocalyptic predictions—that 2.4-percent cuts from our anticipated \$3.6 trillion annual spending amounts to devastation or the end of Western civilization or whatever sort of apocalyptic terms you want to use. So let's look at what 2.4 percent in cuts would mean to the average American family.

If you use 100 gallons of gasoline to run your car every month and you had to cut that back by 2.4 percent, that means you would be able to use 97.6 gallons of gas.

If you have a \$250-a-month grocery budget, you would need to find \$6 in savings. And on a monthly utility bill of, let's say, \$175, you would have to trim it down by \$4.20.

These are the kinds of cuts the American people have had to make for themselves during the recession of 2008 and due to slow growth and high unemployment since then. Yet President Obama is either unwilling or unable to propose similar cuts to replace the sequester.

If he doesn't like it, well, let's have his proposal for how he would fix it since he signed it into law. Instead, what we get is a proposal that we will vote on this afternoon from our friends across the aisle that would just raise more taxes after one of the largest tax increases in American history as a result of the fiscal cliff negotiations just in late December.

So the President is content to push through more spending to grow the size of government, notwithstanding the fact that the Federal Government is now spending more money than it ever has as a percentage of our economy. And we have \$16.5 trillion in debt. We have important programs such as Medicare and Social Security that are unsustainable—unless Congress and the President act on a bipartisan basis.

This is not a mystery. This is not something that Republicans know that Democrats don't know; we all know it; and the President knows it because his own bipartisan fiscal commission told him in December 2010.

According to the Congressional Budget Office, the White House-backed bill offered by our Senate Democratic friends to replace the sequester would actually raise the deficit this year by tens of billions of dollars. Now, you may be wondering about that, thinking that the sequester was supposed to cut spending. But, actually, the proposal made by our friends across the aisle would raise the deficit this year by tens of billions of dollars—not exactly what I would call progress. It is absolutely ludicrous, especially when we consider that even with the sequester spending by the Federal Government will still be higher this year than it was last year.

Let me repeat that in case people weren't listening. Even with the spending cuts mandated by the sequestration, \$85 billion in cuts, this administration will still have more money to spend this year than last year. It is hard to see how that would wreak devastation. Yet last year we didn't see planes falling out of the sky, we didn't see empty supermarket shelves for lack of safe food, nor did we see the national parks shutting their front gates. We didn't see any of the doomsday scenarios the President and his Cabinet are now warning about after 1½ years of doing nothing.

Of course, the President talks endlessly, it seems, of the need for a so-called balanced approach. Well, he got his pound of flesh. He got his \$600 billion in additional tax revenue from the American people. So where is the balance to that? When all he and his party proposes is more taxes and more spending, that is not balance.

Now is the time to cut spending. That is the only way forward, and that is the only way to begin—with one small step—to return our country to sound fiscal footing.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

SEQUESTRATION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, earlier this year, the Democrats who run Washington promised America things would be different under a reelected President Obama. Instead of politics, they would focus on policy. Instead of leaving everything until the last minute, they would get the people's work done ahead of time for a change—and through the regular order. Well, those promises didn't last very long.

Later this afternoon, less than 24 hours before the President's sequester

proposal takes effect, we will vote on a Senate Democrat plan that does more to perpetuate the culture of irresponsibility around here than it does to fix the culture of spending that Washington Democrats claim to be concerned about.

Point of fact: Not only would their legislation fail to fix the spending problem facing our country, it would actually add billions more to the deficit. In other words, it isn't a plan at all. It is a gimmick.

Top Democrats already concede it will never garner enough votes to pass the very legislative body they control, much less the House. But let's be very clear: For the President and for his allies, that is really the whole point. They want it to fail so they can go around the country blaming Republicans for a sequester the President himself proposed. In fact, they are so concerned about preventing anything from actually passing the Congress they have limited the ability of Senators on both sides to debate the issue openly and to offer different ideas.

For instance, Senators AYOTTE and PAUL have introduced bills that deserve our consideration. And there are others too. Senator COLLINS has been working on a proposal, and Senator WHITEHOUSE has a plan that would replace the sequester with a series of huge tax hikes. I don't support that approach, but his legislation at least merits a vote.

Republicans will get just one chance to offer a bill, and I will discuss that legislation a little later in my remarks. But if the President's sequester is going to be as horrible as Washington Democrats have proposed, shouldn't we spend more than just a few hours debating it? Is this really the best Senate Democrats can do?

As for the President, he too has yet to put forward a serious plan that could pass either the House or the Democrat-controlled Senate, and he has refused to engage in substantive discussions with congressional leaders. Now, this week, he finally invited Speaker BOEHNER and me to discuss the sequester; that is, tomorrow, the day it takes effect. In short, instead of changing as they promised, Washington Democrats are just turning back to the same old campaign-first strategy they have employed literally now for years.

Now, after thwarting every bipartisan attempt to avert the sequester, the President is ready to make it bite as hard as possible—all to send a simple message to the public: Do you want to control Washington spending, America? Fine. Let me show you how much I can make it hurt. That is the President's strategy: Let me show you how much I can make it hurt.

Instead of directing his Cabinet Secretaries to trim waste in their departments, he is going after first responders and teachers and almost any other sympathetic constituency you can think of. He will arbitrarily close parks and monuments too, all to force Americans to accept higher taxes.

He will claim his hands are tied. He will say he has no choice but to release criminals into the streets and withhold vaccinations from poor children. Somehow it will be everybody's fault but his. Nonsense.

Look, our country has a spending problem—a pretty massive one. Most of us in the Chamber at least acknowledge that fact. But we can either address the problem in a smart way or we can do it in the way he has proposed. That is what the Toomey-Inhofe legislation we will vote on this afternoon is all about. It is about giving agency heads greater flexibility to ensure the sequester cuts are implemented in a smarter way.

Some have raised concerns that this would give the administration too much power; that the President would just use the authority to punish his critics. I certainly understand those concerns. But the goal here is twofold: One, to make sure the American people get the same amount of spending cuts that were promised to them in 2011; and, two, to guarantee some accountability on the President's part so those cuts are administered in a more intelligent way.

You would think the President would welcome a proposal such as ours. Given his complaints and those of his Cabinet Secretaries about their hands being tied on cuts, you would think he would be banging on our doors demanding flexibility. But now—get this—he is complaining that having extra authority might mean he would actually have to choose which programs to preserve and which ones to cut; that he would have to prioritize spending within the Federal Government.

Well, with due respect, Mr. President, I think a lot of people who voted for you think that is your job, to make those tough decisions—especially tough decisions to implement the plan you, yourself, proposed and insisted upon. Surely, you can find a little more than 2 percent to cut from the Federal budget, and surely you can do it without raining down a phony Armageddon on American families. They had to find ways to cope with the 2 percent less in their paychecks just last month after the payroll tax went back up. Why in the world can't Washington?

Look, the American people will simply not accept replacing spending cuts agreed to by both parties with tax hikes, and I plan to make all of this clear to the President when I meet with him tomorrow. He already got hundreds of billions of dollars in new revenue earlier this year when the tax law expired. Now it is time for the balanced part of the equation, and that means keeping our promise to reduce spending.

So the time for games is over. No more protecting waste and broken promises at the expense of those who actually need government help. The American people were promised more spending control, and Republicans are going to help them see that promise is fulfilled in the smartest way possible.