

it is a significant investment which Michigan has made over the years in keeping America strong, one we want to continue for many generations to come.

I am pleased Senator PETER's family was here to be part of this official opening of his service in the Senate, and I certainly look forward to working with him for many years to come.

SEQUESTRATION

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, this morning the majority leader and the Republican leader Senator MCCONNELL came to the floor to speak to us about the challenge we are going to face, as soon as this week, when it comes to the Department of Defense. This is a department I have paid special attention to over the last several years during the time I chaired the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee and now serve as ranking member or vice chairman of that same subcommittee.

First, I salute the chairman of the Appropriations Committee and Defense Subcommittee, THAD COCHRAN of Mississippi. It has been a joy to work with him. He is a professional. He is a kind and gentle man and fair in every respect. I told him on the floor yesterday what I have said publicly in my caucus luncheon, the Democratic caucus luncheon. I am fortunate to have a partner in this effort from the Republican side who is so good to work with.

But we face a real serious challenge this week, and we have to decide as a nation what we are going to do about it. Most people, if you ask them on a final exam what does sequestration mean, they would basically throw up their hands and say: It sounds like something out of Washington. It doesn't mean much to me.

Sequestration is the penalty we face if we don't hit certain budget spending numbers, and that penalty is virtually mindless. Here is what it says: We will make across-the-board cuts in spending. Think about that in your own family life. If you were looking at the budget for your family and had some misfortune—a paycheck didn't come in—you would have to gauge priorities. While sitting at the kitchen table, you might say: What do we have to pay this month? Well, we have to pay the mortgage or we will be foreclosed upon. We better pay the light bill or they will turn off the electricity. So what can we cut back on? We are going to spend less at the grocery store.

Families make those decisions—many of them—on a weekly or monthly basis. But sequestration says we will cut across the board. We will take a 5-percent cut off the mortgage, off the utility bill, and off the groceries. It doesn't make sense, does it? But we did it. We did it for 2 years, and it was devastating.

We cut across the board when it came to medical research, for goodness' sakes. Here we were trying to find cures for cancer and heart disease and

diabetes and Alzheimer's, and we said we are going to make a 5-percent cut across the board. It made no sense whatsoever, nor did it make sense for the Department of Defense. They said: How in the world can we prepare for America's defense with across-the-board cuts? We are supposed to be recruiting and training the very best men and women to serve our Nation. They need to be ready for combat. We have to make them battle-ready so they will win any battle they are sent to and come home safe. We have to decide what equipment to purchase. We have to decide how to invest in long-term investments in technology and equipment so that we never come in second in any battle. Yet you are going to give us an across-the-board cut, Congress? Stop it. Stop sequestration.

That is what this debate is about.

What we have now is a proposal from the Republican side of the aisle to stop sequestration—across-the-board cuts—in only one Agency: the Department of Defense. I think that is a good thing, to stop it, but it certainly isn't a balanced approach.

We have a lot of other things we do as a government that are important to the people of this country. We finance the education of young people who want to go to college. We do it with Pell grants and we do it with government loans. If we make across-the-board cuts there, we will create hardships and lack of opportunity for a lot of young people in America. When it comes to education, sequestration makes no sense.

When it comes to health care, it certainly makes no sense. We have obligations that we have entered into when it comes to our veterans and their health care. Are we going to make across-the-board cuts when it comes to veterans' health care? God forbid. We promised those men and women that if they would serve our country, we would stand by them when they came home.

Sequestration is a mindless cut when it comes to education and health care and medical research, as I mentioned earlier. So Democrats are saying to Republicans: Here we are on June 17, and our fiscal year ends on October 1. Let's not wait until the last minute to sit down and work out this problem. But what we hear from the other side of the aisle is this: We are not going to do it. We are just going to ignore it.

That is the problem in Washington when you don't face challenges squarely, honestly, on a bipartisan basis.

So here is what is likely to occur this week. We are going to vote for an authorization bill on the Department of Defense. Some of us will oppose the way it is being funded, but others will vote for it. Then we will come to the Defense appropriations bill, and I think what you will find is a unified effort on the Democratic side to say to the Republicans: Now is the time to sit down, not just on this appropriations bill but all the appropriations bills. Let's come up with an answer and solution to sequestration.

I heard the Republican leader say: Well, this is an indication that the Democrats are not committed to the defense of America. I couldn't disagree more because, you see, when we look at those who agree with us on the need for a different approach to budgeting, they include our Secretary of Defense, Ash Carter, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Dempsey. These are the men who have been assigned the responsibility of leading this great military and keeping America safe, and they say this budget process which the Republican leader endorses is not a good one for the safety of America.

So let's do the right thing for the men and women in uniform, for our country, and for all the agencies of government. Let's sit down and solve this budget challenge now before it reaches the last minute in a crisis. Let's do it in June rather than in September, October, November, or December. Let's do it calmly, on a bipartisan basis, and engage the President as well as our colleagues from both sides of the aisle in Congress. That is the responsible, bipartisan, honest way to face the problem. I hope the Republican leader will join us in that effort.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

THE BUDGET

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I just want to commend our leader from Illinois for bringing up what is so critically important, which is the entire budget of the country. It is important that we get it right in supporting the authorization in front of us.

I understand the defense of our country is much more than just the Department of Defense. As a border State in Michigan, border security, which is not in the Defense appropriations bill, is incredibly important, as is cyber security, which we are hearing more and more about; the frontline of our men and women, the first responders, police officers, firefighters—who do we think actually answers the call in a community when there is some kind of local challenge or a terrorist attack; airport security—I could go on and on. These are all things that are not in the appropriations bill for the Department of Defense.

Unfortunately, without a bipartisan agreement to continue what was a very positive 2-year agreement put together that has been called the Ryan-Murray agreement to be able to balance out all the security needs as well as the economic security needs of our country—without that, it is a mistake to begin the appropriations process one bill at a time.

So from my perspective, on behalf of the people of Michigan, whatever appropriations bill comes up next, no matter what it is, we should not begin that process until we have a bipartisan agreement, as we had for the last 2