The bigger picture in Illinois is equally devastating. Sequestration will cost Illinois more than 53,000 jobs and $5.3 billion in the State’s economic output. Nationwide, sequestration threatens our physical safety as well as our economy. Ten percent of the FAA’s workforce could be furloughed, leading to reduced air traffic control, longer delays, and economic losses for our tourism industries. Meat and poultry inspectors at USDA would also face furloughs, potentially shuttering meat processing facilities and even affecting restaurants and grocery stores. Layoffs at the FDA would mean 2,100 fewer safety inspectors. There would be 25,000 fewer breast and cervical cancer screenings for low-income women. Mindless cuts to military and law enforcement affect our ability to protect our borders and meet the ever-present threat of terrorism, both here and abroad.

Madam Speaker, this is unacceptable. Somehow we are along the way, buried in the din of the 24-hour news cycle and partisan bellowing, we lost the art of compromise. But that’s what allowed the passage of civil rights legislation in the 1960s and saved Social Security in the 1980s. Legislators of both parties, sat down to each other, not past each other, to hammer out their differences and achieve something that made this country better.

I have no illusion that everyone in this body agrees with my ideas about reshaping entitlement spending and reforming entitlements to ensure they provide benefits for generations to come; but I do know that making the changes that are best for the long-term interests of this country can’t be accomplished overnight. These decisions require our best effort and precise planning. As the threat of sequester has painfully revealed, a chain saw is no way to create a budget for the most powerful country on Earth.

JUMP-STARTING THE ECONOMY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. POCAN) for 5 minutes.

Mr. POCAN. Madam Speaker, as a lifelong Wisconsinite and a proud resident of Madison for the last 30 years, I am deeply humbled and honored to represent Wisconsin’s Second District in the House of Representatives. Wisconsin’s Second District is home to a world-class university, innovative small business owners, and hardworking dairy farmers and cheese makers who produce the best milk and cheese you can find. I ran for Congress because I wanted to ensure these voices, the voices of south central Wisconsin, are heard, respected and represented in Washington. And I am committed to serving their needs by working with my colleagues— all of them— irrespective of party affiliation. But I hate to say it, Madam Speaker, right now the people of Wisconsin’s Second District are frustrated, and I understand why. When I went home last week, I met with people from all kinds of professions and all walks of life, and their concerns could not have been more different from what we talk about right here in Washington. What they care about is what we can do to help them make a living so they can pay their bills, provide for their loved ones, and create opportunities for their children. They don’t care about political finger-pointing. They care about how we can support an environment where businesses can attract more buyers for their products, hire more workers, and increase wages; in other words, how do we grow the economy.

What I told them, and what I’ll repeat here today, is that the sequester and its irresponsible, indiscriminate, and across-the-board spending cuts is the exact opposite of what we need to be doing right now to grow our economy. Taken as a whole, these spending cuts represent a harsh austerity policy that I fear could only move our country backwards.

We’ve seen in Europe the severe effects austerity policies have had on fragile economies, one way back from recessions. Four years after the global economic crisis, our friends across the ocean are at risk of a triple-dip recession. Unemployment is climbing; and even with these massive spending cuts, countries have seen their debt loads increase. Is this the model we want to follow in our country?

Madam Speaker, we must remember that the biggest threat to our long-term economic security is not the deficit. It’s the economy. It’s a lack of jobs, and it’s about the more than 12 million people who are unemployed in this country.

I own a printing shop in Wisconsin; and as a small business owner, I can tell you that it’s about the lack of access to capital because of economic uncertainty; it’s about a lack of consumer confidence, and it’s about people needing to get back to work. These are the issues we need to address, not austerity; and we are not going to create jobs or help spur spending by gutting critical government programs without any thought to the consequences.

To people in Wisconsin, that’s just politics as usual.

We need to change the conversation right here in Washington. We need to be talking about what people are talking about in Beloit, in Baraboo, and in Sun Prairie. Instead of asking about the small business owners who are the backbone of our communities. That’s how we’ll fix the economy.

We must support education, infrastructure projects, research and development, and new industries such as green energy that will help lead to job growth and bring our unemployment rate down. And by growing the economy, we will fix our fiscal problems.

Now, that doesn’t mean I don’t see a place for responsible restraint. As the former chair of the Joint Finance Committee in Wisconsin, I understand that we must put tough decisions have to be made, and you can stay up all night agonizing over the smallest details, the tiniest programs, because these programs make a difference in people’s lives. It’s a lot of work, and it should be, because our budget priorities have a direct effect on our middle class families and on long-term economic growth. But the sequester trades in the tough work and replaces it with massive, indiscriminate, and irresponsible spending cuts. It’s like taking a meat cleaver to the budget instead of a scalpel.

It could cost 750,000 jobs nationwide, including 36,000 jobs right in Wisconsin. It could mean 70,000 students across the country, and 1,000 in my State, would see their Head Start services eliminated this year, and it would mean $900 million less in loan guarantees to small business owners nationwide, including in Wisconsin.

I am a co-sponsor of a plan put forward by Representative Van Hollen that would avert these disastrous spending cuts and replace them with a balanced approach that promotes economic growth while responsibly reducing the deficit. I strongly urge my colleagues to come to the table, stop this irresponsible sequester, and then refocus our efforts.

The time has come to stop talking about harmful spending cuts and start talking about getting the people of Wisconsin and of America back to work. We need less austerity and more prosperity. We don’t have time to waste.

SEQUESTRATION AND WEST POINT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New York (Mr. Sean Patrick Maloney) for 5 minutes.

Mr. MALONEY. Madam Speaker, for 5 minutes.

This is the day that the United States Military Academy, the West Point Cadet Corps, the gemstone of West Point, graduates 1,000 of our finest young men and women to lead the Army of our nation in peacetime and in war. For 223 years, the United States Military Academy has trained our Nation’s next generation of military leaders—36,000 leaders—three Heisman Trophy winners, a Nobel laureate, and an Olympic gold medalist in track and field. It is the oldest military academy in the world, second in age only as the Nation itself. Each year, West Point trains 1,000 Officer in Waiting to be commissioned as second lieutenants. We graduate 1,000 West Point cadets on this day, and I believe it is the greatest day of their lives.

Today, the world is waiting for the West Point Class of 2013. These men and women will be the generals and admirals of tomorrow. They will be the heads of state and owners of multinational corporations. They will be the legislators who shape our laws and the judges who interpret them. They will be the world leaders who will shape the world in which we live. They will be the nuclear engineers who will ensure our safety and the engineers who will build our cities.

West Point is a world-class academic institution that will provide leaders of character and distinctive intellects to this country. We stand here on this day because of the excellence of West Point, the excellence of the Class of 2013, and the excellence of the West Point Corps of Cadets.

West Point is special. It is a military college, but it is also a civilian institution. It is a national university. It is a public institution, and it is an international institution. It is the jewel of the United States armed forces, and it is the jewel of our nation.

West Point has produced 15 of the 42 living presidents of the United States. It has produced 11 chief justices of the United States Supreme Court, 5 of the 12 members of the National Academy of Sciences, and 32 of the 44 members of the National Academy of Engineering. It has produced 29 astronauts, 12 astronauts on the moon and the shuttle, and 20 astronauts who are currently in space.

West Point is America’s premier undergraduate military college. It is America’s finest university. It is America’s finest honor system. It is America’s finest institution.

West Point is a national treasure. It is one of the greatest institutions in the world. It is the West Point of the United States military. It is the West Point of the United States.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time has come to close this debate and proceed to other business.