

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.