

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.