

Our government is no longer effective

We were all waiting last week for Congress and the President to come up with some sort of last-minute deal to avoid the across-the-board cuts known as the "sequester." They always come up with some kind of deal, right?

Simple tricks and nonsense

Kevin Bottrell



Wrong. First, a little history. The sequester was something put in place back in 2011. It is \$84 billion in cuts from every federal department, defense and otherwise. It offered no flexibility.

At the time, the government was haggling over the debt ceiling, again, and after House Republicans insisted on spending cuts, President Obama and House Speaker John Boehner reach an agreement on the Budget Control Act of 2011, which included the sequestration.

The idea was to put in place a time limit, that if reached would result in harsh, across-the-board cuts so that congress and the president would be forced to come to the table and hammer out something more reasonable and targeted to avoid it. In this respect, it failed, miserably.

Both parties supported the plan, and it passed with major bipartisan support, but that support was short lived. The "supercommittee" that was supposed to come up with that reasonable plan, never came up with anything. So here we are.

To dispel some myths, the sequester is not as huge a thing as some claim it to be. It will not directly result in homes burning down from under-funded fire departments, nor are thousands of teachers being laid off immediately. It may, however, result in furloughs for many federal employees, which may include, as is so often said, air traffic controllers. The sequestration will cut about \$600 million from the Federal Aviation Administration. Other possible furloughs being talked about are meat inspectors and judicial employees.

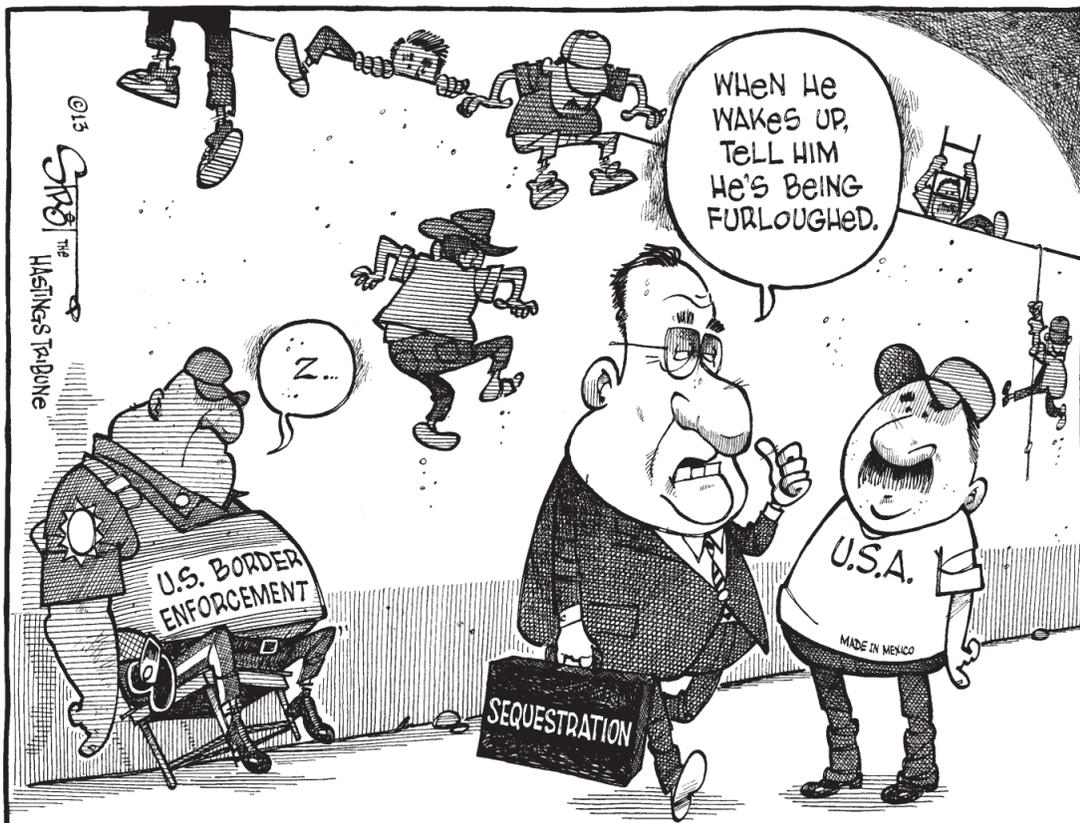
Actually the word "cuts" is a little misleading. What the sequestration does is reduce the amount federal agencies can spend in the future, rather than cut what they are spending right now. Even this year, the effect of the reductions is less than one percent of the \$8.7 trillion. The effects of the sequestration will trickle down as the years rolls on.

There is also talk that it will negatively impact the economy, but at this point it can only be speculative.

The sequester was meant to be avoided. But we haven't avoided it. Friday was the deadline, and it passed, and so by law, the sequester goes into effect. We arrived where we are because no one seemed willing to compromise. Each side put forward proposals they knew were dead on arrival, and neither side was willing to meet in the middle.

Perhaps then, the sequester is necessary since both parties in Congress and the president seem unable to make agreements without being forced to do so. This isn't a good thing though, because it means we have arrived at a place where our government no longer effectively governs. We should all think about this when the mid-term elections come up in 2014.

—Kevin Bottrell



An entertaining trip with friends

What do you get when you take six women and four children on a road trip? More fun than should be legally allowed.

Five of my friends, ranging in age from 22 to let's just say "old enough," and I had been planning this little trip for several weeks. Time in the van was even fun. Each row of seats was carrying on their own conversation with some carry-over to those in front or behind.

I pulled out all the stops and entertained (at least I thought it was entertaining) the kids with my repertoire of songs. I sang, "I had a little chicken and she wouldn't lay an egg," next was, "We are the gopher girls," followed by "I just called up to tell you that we're rugged but right."

To add to the entertainment, the 8-year old on our trip told a funny joke. He asked, "Did you know worms are musical? Yeah, they're decomposers. They really break it down."

We took plenty of rest breaks and seemed to find food at every stop. Judging from the level of crumbs on the floor we missed our mouths more than

Out Back

Carolyn Plotts



we hit them. Everyone complained, "There goes the diet." Oh, well. Monday we'll start again.

To keep expenses down, we booked two adjoining rooms. That meant four women and two kids in one room; two women and two kids in another. My fellow senior citizen and I both unpacked, hung up our clothes in the closet, emptied out suitcases into the bureau drawers; and staked out our portion of the bathroom counter. When our junior counterparts joined us in the room with children in tow, one asked, "Does clutter bother you?"

My friend said, "Well, as a matter of fact, it does. But you just keep it on your side of the room and we'll be fine." Occasionally, the clutter crept to our side, but constant monitoring kept

it controlled. However, our roommates could never find anything they had previously used, because we had put it away. I guess no one would ever think to look for clothes in a closet or toothbrushes in the bathroom.

Our room arrangements also meant doubling up in beds. Now, men won't do that, but women don't seem to mind. A quick survey to find out who liked what side and bed assignments were made. The 22-year old asked if anyone in her room snored to which we all answered, "No."

The next morning she informed us that we had all lied. She had even tried making a pallet on the floor to get as far away from us as possible, but that proved too uncomfortable. She solved the problem by buying earplugs and going to bed early.

Somehow, it all worked and I think the kids even had fun. We all agreed we would like to go again, but not anytime too soon.

One thing I learned; it's great to have girlfriends of all ages, and better yet, if they have great clothes to borrow.

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Ah, for those good old days when Uncle Sam lived within his income – and without most of ours.

If memory serves me, our country operated in the black in the '90s with a Democratic president, Bill Clinton. Although the Republicans continued to hold a majority in the House and Senate, the president and Congress were able to compromise on deficit-reduction legislation in 1997.

Economic growth was so robust that the reduction targets were met much sooner than expected. The budget shortfall that stood at \$290 billion in 1992 turned into a surplus of almost \$80 billion in 1999. The stock market remained strong throughout the Clinton presidency, and the unemployment rate dropped to just above 4 percent, which many economists consider full employment.

But that's ancient history. Today, our government is mired in gridlock. Politics is supposed to be the art of compromise. There is none today in Washington.

Economic policies of the past including funding government, spending cuts and balancing the budget were all forged through compromise within the legislative and executive branches. This is sorely lacking today at either end of the political spectrum.

Government spending cuts, labeled sequestration, are ready to become the plan of action for 2013. With sequestration, an estimated \$85 billion will be cut from this year's budget and \$1.2 trillion is slated to be cut during

What ever happened to serving the American People

Insight

John Schlageck



the course of a decade.

For the sake of our republic, President Obama and Congress must work together and carry out their responsibility of running a government that lives within a budget while prioritizing programs that effectively and efficiently serve the American people.

There is no way money coming into the federal treasury can keep up with the money pouring out. We cannot expect the federal budget deficit to decrease until members of Congress and the President make up their minds to reduce spending.

Slowing the growth of government spending will begin to shift control of resources away from politicians and bureaucrats to the people who have earned and saved the money.

We've already passed \$16.4 trillion in debt at the end of 2012. We are mortgaging our children and grandchildren's futures. This spending cannot go on.

Another segment of our economy that remains under the knife with sequestration is the agricultural community and farm programs that help feed us. Cuts in spending must be across the board. Every sector of our

economy should shoulder this debt burden and receive less of the budget pie.

Unfortunately, sequestration would cut funding from farm programs called direct payments. The problem here is that Congress is still trying to write a new farm bill that would likely cut direct payments and use that money to pay for other safety-net and risk-management programs.

If those cuts are made to the farm bill now, Congress will be unable to write a farm bill with an adequate safety net. Farm country is in the throes of a three-year drought with the probability of a fourth year on the way. The crop protection plan has worked well to ensure farmers are protected against such natural disasters.

Take away this protection through cuts in crop insurance and agriculture will be back to asking Congress for disaster assistance each and every year.

In the past, increased government involvement was necessary to meet the needs of its people. Today, government needs to slow down, to be less involved in the lives of its citizens.

Living within our means while cutting back on spending is a step in the right direction; however, we will not see a turnaround overnight. Still, the sooner President Obama and Congress come up with a plan that will reduce federal spending and lower our national debt, the sooner we can move toward better times in this country.

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