

Few were caught by surprise when the bipartisan, bicameral congressional committee responsible for pinpointing at least \$1.2 trillion in spending cuts fell short of an agreement last week. While the dust is still settling, the failure of the 12-member deficit reduction committee does not mean that budget cutting is dead. The question now shifts from "if" cuts will be made, to "where" they will be made.

The deficit committee's November 23 deadline ticked away without the ominous media countdowns that characterized other budget-cutting showdowns this year. Perhaps the lack of drama might have had more to do with the fact that the \$1.2 trillion in cuts will occur anyway – with or without a recommendation from the committee.

Under the terms of the Budget Control Act passed by Congress in early August, \$917 billion will be cut from the federal budget over ten years and another \$1.2 to \$1.5 trillion in cuts was to be identified by the special congressional committee.

The Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction - formed of an equal number of House and Senate Democrats and Republicans – had to agree on a way to cut spending or face the alternative of across-the-board spending cuts totaling \$1.2 trillion over ten years. While the deficit committee could come up with its own formula for cuts, failure to act would trigger automatic cuts – known as sequestration – beginning in 2013. Based on the agreement reached earlier this year, without an alternative plan Congress has no choice but to accept these indiscriminate cuts.

While some lawmakers are already crying foul, it is unacceptable for Congress to continue to borrow and spend. There may be attempts to shift the \$1.2 trillion in cuts to other areas of the budget before the automatic reductions are scheduled to begin next October. Whether this is possible or not, Congress agreed to at least \$1.2 trillion in cuts over ten years and Congress is therefore committed to ensuring that \$1.2 trillion spending cuts are made – one way or another.

Clearly, this difficult position could have been avoided had all the members of the deficit committee negotiated in good faith. The six Republican members of the deficit committee were fully committed to achieving \$1.2 trillion in cuts, making several offers which were all rejected by the Democrat members who refused to offer a realistic reduction plan that addresses Washington's chronic overspending. Instead, the Democrat members insisted on \$1 trillion in

tax increases. It is therefore not surprising that no agreement was reached.

President Obama has criticized Republican members of the deficit committee for supposedly blocking an agreement. In fact, the president not only refused to get involved in the negotiations, but actually placed obstacles to its passage. As Republican Rep. Jeb Hensarling, co-chair of the committee, recently observed in a Wall Street Journal op-ed: "Unfortunately, the committee's challenge was made more difficult by President Obama. Since the committee was formed, he has demanded more stimulus spending and issued a veto threat against any proposed committee solution to the spending problem that was not coupled with a massive tax increase."

Balanced Budget Amendment:

The Budget Control Act passed by Congress last August also required the House and Senate to hold a vote this year on a Balanced Budget Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. As I have noted in previous columns, a majority of the American people -- 74 percent according to polls -- support a Constitutional Balanced Budget Amendment and see it as an effective way to keep government spending in check. Forty nine states, including Alabama, operate under a balanced budget requirement.

On November 18, the House voted 261 to 165 for a Balanced Budget Amendment. In most cases this margin would be enough to pass a bill, but constitutional amendments require a 2/3 majority vote. Unfortunately, the vote fell 23 short of the super majority requirement. All but 25 Democrats voted against the Balanced Budget Amendment.

This setback does not end our efforts to restore common sense to government and halt reckless spending which jeopardizes our country's future. Conservatives will continue to press for spending cuts with the goal of balancing our budget and paying down the debt.

House Smartphone App:

Want to see what votes the House is holding? If you have a smartphone or tablet (iPad,

iPhone, Blackberry and Android platforms) there is an app for that. You can download the House Whipcast app by visiting your online app store and searching for "Whipcast." You can also read more about it on the House Republican Whip's web site:
<http://republicanwhip.house.gov/>.

My staff and I work for you. If we can ever be of service, do not hesitate to call my office toll free at 1-800-288-8721.

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