



## Cuts are more like scratches

*Obama administration fundamentally dishonest on sequestration*

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First things first: The Obama administration did not tell the truth when it claimed the automatic budget cuts known as “sequestration” came from somewhere else.

The president even baldly claimed not to be responsible for it in a debate last year.

The idea for sequestration – mandatory \$85 billion in blunt, across-the-board budget cuts – came from the White House, as journalist Bob Woodward has reported and administration officials now meekly admit.

Secondly, President Obama flat-out said in a presidential debate that sequestration wouldn’t happen. In fact, it is set to occur Friday.

Thirdly, there can be no doubt that the effects of the cuts have been ridiculously exaggerated, and that all the president’s men will blame Republicans if they happen. In truth, as Woodward also notes, it’s the president who has changed the rules of the game: Rather than simply work with Republicans to find more acceptable budget cuts, the president is now requiring new taxes as well – after already getting Republicans to agree to tax increases on the wealthy earlier this year.

“So when the president asks that a substitute for the sequester include not just spending cuts but also new revenue, he is moving the goal posts,” Woodward wrote last week.

Yet, you can bet he’ll blame the opposition when the sequestration hits.

Maybe that’s what he’s always wanted anyway. Who knows?

Our own feeling is that a budget-cutting deal would be best. It would enable Congress and the White House to cut the budget artfully. Even so, if sequestration hits on Friday, it’s quite likely not going to be the catastrophe the White House has made it out to be.

We’ve been around the block a few times, and can tell you that when a government or government agency is tasked with cutting anything, they immediately propose cutting only that which you don’t want cut. They skip the fat and stab at the muscle to make you flinch. They want you to believe babies and saints will be bloodied, and that there’s absolutely no fat in any of their budgets.

What a truckload of hokum.

Just in January, the Government Accountability Office estimated in a year-end report by the Department of the Treasury that \$108 billion was wasted in “improper payments” by the federal government in fiscal year 2012. Over the past couple of years, the GAO has also found over \$400 billion in waste, in “duplicative, fragmented, inefficient programs.”

“Federal spending will explode from \$3.6 trillion to \$6 trillion over the next 10 years,” notes the Heritage Foundation think tank, “but the much-maligned sequester will cut only 2.4 percent of this spending.”

Michael Tanner, senior fellow at the Cato Institute think tank, wrote at CNN.com recently that only \$44 billion of the \$85 billion would actually be cut this year; the rest would be trimmed in future years. A Cato bar graph shows the contrast between the \$3.6 trillion federal budget, the \$845 billion deficit (borrowed money), the \$224 billion we pay in interest, and the \$44 billion in sequestration cuts. Those first three bars in the graph resemble a utility pole, a fence post and a stump, while the sequestration cuts look more like a floor mat.

The kind of floor mat that taxpayers have become.

“Actually, the sequester doesn’t cut federal spending at all, or rather it cuts it only in the Washington sense of any reduction from projected baseline increases is a cut,” Tanner wrote. “In reality, even if the sequester goes through, the federal government will spend more every single year. In fact, in 2023 it will be spending \$2.39 trillion more than it does today (emphasis added).”

The Heritage Foundation chart below likewise illustrates what a pathetically thin stripe of austerity the dreaded sequester cuts are, compared to the mountain of spending they lay on.

And \$85 billion in cuts would trigger the end of the world?

That’s what the president seemed to say last week, and what administration officials are claiming this week. In contrast, Sen. Tom Coburn, R-Okla., suggested a hiring freeze and cutbacks in travel as a start.

And as far as we’re concerned, if budget officials can’t find the least painful cuts in federal agencies, they ought to be furloughed or fired themselves. We’re sick and tired of public officials protecting their turf – padded with our money – by trying to scare us off with draconian cuts that don’t have to be.

We’re not buying that \$85 billion in cuts in a \$3 trillion-plus budget will be a disaster. Except if the executive branch wants to make it one.

But let’s be clear about who’s doing it.