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To all those who complained of unfairness when Standard & Poor's downgraded the creditworthiness of these United States in mid-summer: The rest of us accept your apology. You were wrong, the ratings agency was spot-on. As S&P managing director **John Chambers** said Aug. 7 on **ABC's "This Week"**: "Our job is to hold the mirror up to nature, and what we are telling investors is that we have a spectrum that runs from AAA to D. And what we're seeing is a threat the United States government is slightly less creditworthy." Chambers warned that to reclaim the top rating they had squandered, fractious U.S. leaders needed to unite and deliver "stabilization and eventual decline" of U.S. debt.

Hold that thought as official Washington again evades its responsibility. The inability of the so-called congressional supercommittee to reach a deal on deficit reductions isn't a failure of those 12 lawmakers alone. It's the latest flop in a refusal to govern that embarrasses the president and every member of Congress. As a group they have fiddled as the U.S. declined from a deficit of \$161 billion in 2007 to a shortfall of \$1.3 trillion in the fiscal year that ended eight weeks ago. Their collective humiliation should have grown last week when the nation's debt topped *\$15 trillion*.

Make your own guess on whether all of this will encourage, or discourage, hiring by employers who see all that debt and fear for the nation's economic stability. Make your own guess, too, on whether, as markets and ratings agencies dismiss the U.S. as the dysfunctional Europe West, more of your tax dollars will go to interest payments on debt held by China and all our other lenders.

The supercommittee, like the Congress in toto, couldn't even pluck the lowest-hanging fruit, tax reform that would reduce deductions, lower rates and raise some more revenue. Why, then, did we think the Deficits Dozen would confront the real challenge — entitlement programs and other "payments to individuals" that in 2010 devoured 66 percent of the federal budget. We have 50 million Americans on Medicaid, 46 million on Medicare, 52 million on Social Security, with millions more drawing from disability, nutrition and other programs. All well and good. But with only a relative handful of baby boomers now turning 65, today's enormous entitlement costs will only explode.

Yet our leaders in Washington, facing these inevitabilities plus the visible plight of drowning-in-debt Europe, have served up ... next to nothing. And while the temptation to cast partisan blame is irresistible in Washington this week — have you glanced at a news channel? — we aren't buying the notion that heroes of either party walk among us.

The collapse here, the irresponsibility, is universal:

Recall how, earlier this year, the **White House** urged passage of a "clean" increase in the nation's debt limit, with no restrictions on spending's great leap forward. **President Obama**, having ignored the generally excellent suggestions of his own deficit reduction commission, delivered no serious plan to attack our rising deficits. The **Cato** Institute calculated that the actual cuts in the plan Obama offered to the supercommittee — excluding such gimmicks as "savings" from already scheduled defense wind-downs in Iraq and Afghanistan — amounted to a relatively piddling \$580 billion, or *less than 1.3 percent* of expected federal spending over the next decade.

Members of Congress, meanwhile, clustered in warring tribes, their focus on placating their respective political bases and angling for re-election. We're sticking with a verdict rendered here early this month: Some days it seems that either major party would gleefully let the United States implode if it could grab a moment's political advantage over the other.

As the summer deficits-and-debt debacle devolved into the supercommittee's gridlock, we've resisted two staples of punditry — quips about the committee not being so "super," and resignation that only the 2012 election will settle the future of this government, this nation. With Monday's surrender by the bipartisan, bicameral committee, we'll still leave the "super" jokes to others. But the election looms even larger today than it has. The White House is very much up for grabs. And in the **Senate**, where **Democrats** must defend 23 seats and **Republicans** only 10, a shift of four seats to the GOP would put the Congress fully in Republican control.

Is that what voters want? Right now, we'd bet many voters would opt for anybody but the incumbents ... of either party.

So we'll see if anybody gains advantage from this disastrous impasse. In the meantime, expect members of both parties to try to neuter the automatic budget cuts — the so-called "sequester" — that the supercommittee's failure supposedly triggers. The effective date of those cuts, though, doesn't arrive until January 2013. That gives Congress plenty of time to find ways to blunt reductions in dollars for defense and other programs — yes, to keep borrowing and spending.

The supercommittee has failed. Democrats and Republicans want to deflect blame, but they share this disaster.

The nation's debt, meanwhile, just grows, by \$3 million every minute.