

Thune wants details of budget cuts

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Sen. John Thune is sponsoring a bill to require more details about massive federal spending cuts scheduled for next year.

More than \$100 billion in cuts will take effect after Jan. 1, the first step in \$1.2 trillion in budget reductions during the next 10 years. The cuts will take place automatically because Congress's "supercommittee" failed to approve a budget reduction plan last year.

Many of the details about what will be cut are unknown, other than that defense spending will be reduced by about 10 percent and many nondefense discretionary programs by about 8 percent.

Thune, along with Sen. Jeff Sessions, R-Ala., wants a report from President Obama's administration by July 9 explaining "exactly how those cuts will play out."

That report would give Congress extra time to study and perhaps change the pending cuts, Thune said. He's particularly interested in revising the defense cuts.

"It's not a good legislating environment when you get to the end of the year and you're in a lame-duck session and try to do these things at the last minute," Thune said.

One expert said the bill probably would be a good idea but is unlikely to become law.

"It's a good bill, because it would be nice to have that information, but my guess is you would have great difficulty getting that through a divided Congress," said Bill Frenzel, a guest scholar with the Washington, D.C.-based Brookings Institute and a former Republican congressman from Minnesota.

Congress could have avoided these cuts by making an earlier budget deal, Frenzel said.

In a statement, Democratic Sen. Tim Johnson said his preferred budget solution involves "a balanced approach ... that would include asking millionaires, billionaires, and Big Oil to pay their fair share."

Thune said he wants to protect the Defense Department from many of the planned cuts, saying they could be dangerous to national security.

Tad DeHaven, a budget analyst for the Cato Institute who used to work for Sessions, said he couldn't say whether the bill would be good or bad but saw it "as a political move."

"It's gamesmanship," DeHaven said. "It reads to me as an attempt to try to put the ball back in the administration's court and have them take some heat for the poor special interests who might be out a little bit more if the current process holds."

So far, no Democrats are supporting Thune's bill.

Johnson's spokesman Perry Plumart said Johnson needs to see the details of Thune's bill before deciding his position.