



Sequester cuts 'savage'? No

February 27, 2013

For families who have had to make do in a difficult economy, the plaintive cry of liberal Democrats about the ill effects of "sequestration" must ring awfully hollow.

After all, with gas prices spiking 20 cents in the past month and the cost of food skyrocketing, family budgets already are stretched to the breaking point. And yet, families have had to adjust.

So when they hear that \$85 billion in cuts set to take effect from March to September amount to less than 4 percent of total 2013 discretionary spending, they rightly might wonder what all the fuss is about.

A 4 percent budget reduction in a notoriously bloated federal government? Piece of cake.

To hear President Obama and other liberals, however, the world as we know it will end when the sequester cuts kick in on Friday.

Obama warns of increased travel delays, laid-off firefighters and federally funded Head Start turning away pre-schoolers from low-income families.

At the same time, the president chastises Republicans for not acting to avert the "budget crisis."

"Here's the thing — these cuts do not have to happen," Obama told a gathering of governors the other day. "Congress can turn them off any time with just a little bit of compromise."

Meanwhile, a White House budget official says of the sequester's impact, "We have a very diverse parade of horrors. It's going to be all over the map ... and it's going to hit both Democratic and Republican constituencies in a significant way."

Conservatives don't dispute the fact that the cutbacks will have some effect, but they say the president and his advisers are exaggerating.

For Pennsylvania, the first round of cutbacks amounts to \$240 million, more than half of it from the military.

Next is education, with some \$40 million in cuts. Looked at another way, that is \$80,000 for each of the state's 500 school districts.

Other than the military and education, the impact on the Keystone State is minimal.

However, U.S. Sen. Bob Casey is among the doomsayers who claim such cuts will "wreak havoc" on Pennsylvania.

Casey projects a loss of millions "in federal aid" for the state, and therein lies the problem. The federal money isn't just lying around, waiting to be spent. It is borrowed money that will add to the nation's already enormous debt — currently \$16.5 trillion.

Of course, any cutback comes with consequences. Some government programs will take a hit; some people will lose their jobs.

But the consequences of doing little or nothing to rein in government spending in order to close our ever-growing deficit are far greater.

Many families understand this; Obama and other liberals do not — or they just don't care.

Daniel J. Mitchell, an expert on tax reform and supply-side tax policy at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, refuses to declare that the sky will fall as a result of sequestration.

Mitchell's bottom line: Sequestration isn't that big a deal.

Sequestration, he says, "merely means that spending climbs by \$2.4 trillion over the next 10 years rather than \$2.5 trillion.

The Obama administration would be hard-pressed to convince many American families that that kind of cut is "draconian" or "savage."

In fact, many of those families might think such a cut in government spending doesn't go deep enough.