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Who determines budget priorities in Washington?

Pat Perriello | Apr. 29, 2013 NCR Today

The latest response to the problems caused by budget cuts because of sequestration is very interesting. I don't often agree with Sen. John McCain of Arizona, but I believe he is correct in saying we have our priorities wrong [1] in the latest sequester debate.

So far, only two issues have created concern among the public regarding the cuts the sequester created. Earlier, there was outrage over the loss of tours [2] at the White House. Now airline delays have produced demands that furloughs for air traffic controllers be lifted.

Sen. McCain believes the problems over defense and national security far outweigh the inconvenience of airline delays. Although he agrees something should be done about air traffic controllers, he believes the need to address defense cuts is far greater. In fact, the Senate has now passed a bill to eliminate the air traffic controller furloughs, demonstrating how quickly it can act when pressure comes from the right sources.

I would submit that in addition to concerns about defense and delays in air traffic, there ought to be concern as well over the hardships created for ordinary and poor Americans. The fact that many are losing 20 percent of their annual income because of furloughs seems to bother no one who has a voice in Washington. The fact that programs for the poor and elderly, such as Head Start and Meals on Wheels, have been cut dramatically and are now receiving additional painful cuts because of the sequester does not matter. "It doesn't affect me, so why should I care?" Once again, the people with no voice in our government are being systematically ignored and left with additional hardships.

It is clear that the entire sequester was a bad idea, but only programs that impact people or organizations that matter are given consideration. Airlines concerned about their bottom line can project power in Washington. Ordinary people caught in the political crossfire of ill-conceived and unfair budget cuts simply do not matter.

Why not eliminate the sequester altogether and produce an appropriate budget with meaningful cuts that will not fall so heavily on those who can least afford them? In this land of the free, can we not go beyond addressing only those with power and treat all people fairly and equitably? Isn't that the American way?

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[1] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/25/john-mccain-flight-delays_n_3154012.html
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