

**Of Shutdowns and Budgets:** The press coverage of the potential "shutdown" and of the deal that averted it has been immense. So, I don't think I need to bore you with any more information on what happened around here last week. But, I will give you my thoughts. I won't actually see the final "deal" bill until sometime Monday night. Then, we will have 3 days to review it before we vote on it. This was one of the legislative process reforms put in by the new Republican majority to avoid the sort of things that Pelosi and Reid did, like putting up a health care bill that no one had read or had time to read.

Subject to my final review of the bill, I intend to support it. Not because I think it reduces enough spending. It does not. But, because I think it was probably as good a deal as John Boehner could get, given that Barack Obama is president and Harry Reid is Senate majority leader. I opposed the original \$61 billion in cuts because I thought we should have started higher. You cannot make your first offer also your last offer. Given that we started at \$61 billion, \$39 is probably as much as we could expect. And, the bigger battles over the 2012 budget and the debt limit are yet to come. We certainly showed that we are willing to go up to and over the brink, if necessary, to try and reduce spending to avoid a debt crisis. Also, because of this bill, we will borrow \$80 billion less in the next 5 months than we would have had Democrats retained control of the House in the last election and had supported the President's spending request. That's a start.

As I write this (Sunday afternoon), one of the President's advisors has just announced that the President will give a major address this week, "...laying out an aggressive path for debt reduction." Uh-huh. He just spent the last 3 months fighting and opposing every single proposal to reduce spending or reform entitlements. Now, he suddenly has had an epiphany?

We shall see. I will listen to the speech. But, I have learned in the past 2 years that the President's words don't mean much. However, his actions do. He seems to like to say what is popular and then do something else. Whether it's on spending or wars in Afghanistan and Libya or energy legislation, he will say one thing and then do nothing or something different. I will note what he says, but I will pay close attention to what he does. I truly hope he has changed. Our future as a nation depends upon fixing our biggest national threat, the looming debt debacle. Unfortunately, I see nothing in Obama's actions in the past that give me any real hope. I want to be wrong. I fear I am not.

We will also pass the Paul Ryan 2012 budget off the floor this week. I like it and already voted to support it in committee. I have told you before that Paul is amongst, if not the, brightest, most

articulate and most courageous members of Congress. He has proposed the unthinkable - to reform Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security so that they do not collapse and take the country down with them. He is providing leadership, which the President has not. As good as all this is, I worry that the Ryan budget does not reform the entitlement programs quickly enough. He "grandfathers" everyone 55 and older (which by the way includes me) in the existing structure. By definition, that means we can't save any money in entitlements until people currently age 54 reach 65. That's 11 years. We don't have that long. I think we will have to move much more quickly than that.

I have more to tell you about how the debt is negatively affecting existing seniors much more than any Social Security or Medicare changes would. And, about the fight over defense spending within the Republican Party. And, about my home state of California's ever deepening fiscal woes.

But, these will wait for missives to come in the next few weeks.