

The frustrating thing about the current "fiscal cliff" crisis is that it is entirely manufactured by Congress. It started with the debt ceiling debate, and after that debacle – resulting in a downgrade of the United States' Bond status – default was barely averted by the government, with the warning that if we did not produce further cuts on domestic and military fronts, sequestration would take place, assuming that cuts would happen automatically across the board on both domestic and defense spending. Of course, like the debt ceiling debate, it ended without a balanced approach, and compromise was postponed while the clock started ticking towards automatic cuts going into effect on January 1st, 2013. All of this is the outcome of a politically manufactured crisis, and yet there are pragmatic solutions where both sides, and most importantly, the American people, can win.

The budget reform act of 2012 has already made more than a trillion dollars in cuts. The president has a simple solution. You need more cuts, but they have to be balanced by a combination of cutting wasteful, ineffective spending and programs and receiving revenue in a fair and balanced way, including from those who have benefited enormously during this recessionary economy. We have to look no further than our own backyard to two outstanding CEOs who have spoken out clearly. David Hess of Pratt and Whitney has said, even when it wasn't popular, that there has to be a balance between cuts and revenue, but government needs to act and send a message of clarity and certainty, even if the news isn't entirely welcome. Mark Bertolini of the Aetna also warned about government indecision, and pointed to the long- and short-term security of reining in health care costs, where a questionable 750 billion dollars in fraud, waste, ineffective overlaps and abuse, if systemically tackled, would not only help with long-term debt, but also pay for the Affordable Health Care Act.

Most Americans see the need to work for solutions that are fair and balanced, and that provide a certain environment within which to make plans. At Augie and Ray's in East Hartford, they don't talk about sequestration, they talk about jobs – and they're right! The election is over; President Obama will have four more years. It's time to put the country back to work and invest in our infrastructure. The devastation wrought by Hurricane Sandy on the Eastern seaboard and across New York, New Jersey and Connecticut only underscores the need and urgency to invest in funds to restore and rebuild. Here's the good news: we all know that job creation equals deficit reduction, so if you care about deficit reduction, and you want to see a nation at work, it's time to act! Infrastructure is not a Democratic or Republican issue, and in times of crisis, leaders need to act as Chris Christie and Barack Obama have done. Congress should do the same.

Everyone wants to see tax cuts remain in place for the middle class. Everyone, including billionaires, would get a break on the first 250,000 dollars of income. Only after that would those

who have done well be asked to pay what they were paying under the Clinton Administration. So let's pass tax cuts now to provide the certainty needed by 98% of Americans, and let's come back in January to work on the further compromise.

Health care costs remain the largest cost in domestic spending. We currently spend 17 percent of our Gross Domestic Product on health care, while most industrial nations spend between eight and nine percent and offer universal coverage. Switzerland, who has a private sector system like ours, spends only ten percent. As the Exchange opens up and the law takes effect in 2014, let us work together. Two elections have transpired, and the Supreme Court has made its ruling. It's time to roll up our sleeves and use all the technology, innovation and know-how we have to create the best health care system anywhere in the world. We can do this, and as Mark Bertolini pointed out, reduce the deficit and improve the quality, accessibility and affordability of health care.

Government operates best as a collective endeavor between the private, academic, labor and public sectors. It's all within our reach, but it will require solutions that are neither ideological nor political, but American. I remain an optimist. Whether this Congress acts responsibly or not, it will be the politics of indecision that go over the cliff, along with those who perpetuated them. The nation will survive, the Republic will endure, and people will take note.