

LOOMING SEQUESTRATION CUTS COULD SPELL DISASTER FOR TEACHING JOBS



Ohio stands to lose more than 1,500 education related jobs and almost a \$100 million in federal funding if the Congress does not find ways to address the discretionary spending cuts. If no action is taken between now and then the discretionary spending cuts will automatically go into effect from January 2, 2013. The discretionary cuts, also called 'sequestration' are the consequence of Budget Control Act of 2011. To stop them from being applied, a bipartisan congressional panel must come up with a scheme to reduce the national debt by \$1.2 trillion in the next 10 years. In a report released Wednesday, Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, argued that more than 46,000 Americans in the field of education would lose their jobs, if the sequestration cuts were to go through in its entirety. Along with them 1.6 million teachers would lose job-training and employment services. Moreover, Healthcare screening for various ailments would spiral downwards, he warned. "A laid-off teacher is just as unemployed as a laid-off defense contractor," said Harkin, reacting to the strong emphasis that was being given to the effect the cuts would have on the defense and little being spoken about how it was likely to impact the education world. "States and local communities would lose \$2.7 billion in federal funding for just three critical education programs alone – Title I, special education state grants, and Head Start. Nationwide, these cuts would force 46,349 employees to either lose their jobs or rely on cash-strapped states and localities to pick up their salaries instead," he said. For fiscal year 2012, more than \$68.1 billion in discretionary funding was appropriated to the U.S. Department of Education. The cuts in January, if the spending cuts came into effect, would reduce it by more than half, lessening it by around \$35.9 billion. The Head Start funds come from of the Ohio Department of Health and Human Services and they too would be sheared drastically. They stand to lose \$22 million. For the fiscal year 2013, Title I, would be poorer by \$43 million, special education would receive less funding to the tune of \$36 million. The three collectively would be cropped by 7.5 percent. In the current fiscal year Ohio was apportioned \$588 million in Title I funds, \$463 million in special education grants and \$287 million for Head Start. Cuts to Head Start funding would mean that tens of thousands of young children, from low-income families, could put to a disadvantage even before they reach kindergarten. Sen. Tom Harkin as chairman of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services and Education, and Related Agencies has presented a report that advocated spending constraints and sources of new revenue, with an entreaty for a "better, fairer solution," to the deficit. He called the sequestration "tremendously destructive," whilst expressing faith, saying "I hope this report will motivate members of both parties to embrace a spirit of compromise," he said. "We all must come together with goodwill to hammer out a balanced agreement that will not only prevent sequestration, but reduce our deficit and protect America's families." Mark Caleb Smith, the director of the Center for Political Studies at Cedarville College, said it was highly unlikely that anything will be done in this regard before the Presidential elections, later this year. He said any decision on this prior to the elections could become a huge advantage or a disadvantage, for either party and neither Romney or Obama will want to risk that. "Neither party will want to hand the other a major victory before the campaign," Smith said. "The real time for compromise will be between the election and the January enactment of these cuts. There is a possibility that something will take place at that point." Mitch McConnell (R) of Kentucky on the Senate floor last week said that the President owes it to the people of America to spell out his plan and tell everyone what he has in mind and not wait till after the elections. He said that to keep these details secret is an irresponsible act. U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said that the cuts, which have a very realistic chance of becoming reality, should Congress fail to find another way to close the \$1.2 trillion deficit, would be shattering. "To me, this fight is about so much more than education," he said. "Essentially we're just playing chicken with the lives of the American people." Ann Bernardo, treasurer for Huber Heights City Schools, said that if the cuts go through families in her district would be acutely affected. "I know that spending needs to be decreased, but I would hope these cuts don't go through," she said. "We do need these funds." Huber Heights is due to get \$1.4 million in Title I funding for this school year. Ohio Sen. Peggy Lehner, R-Kettering, was skeptical about the huge numbers that were being bandied about and said that it was rather difficult to separate the truth from political hype and put an exact number on the figure. "But, \$1.2 trillion is a lot of money," Lehner said. "I wish Congress would get to work and figure this out." She said that it was a no brainer that spending had spiraled out of control. On the subject of education she said, that figures show that from a \$2.9 billion budget in 1975, it has grown to a staggering \$26.2 billion in the Fiscal year 2011. "It clearly demonstrates how government spending has exploded over the years, and I frankly don't know that we have that much to show for it," she said. "Budget corrections are definitely needed, but they must be done thoughtfully with an eye on the value we derive from the expenditures. Merely slashing \$1.2 trillion without being extremely deliberative about the process would be irresponsible at best." Harkin's report says that other departments, apart from education, to face the cuts guillotine, are the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; U.S. Department of Labor programs and Social Security Administration. The first stood to lose \$20.10 billion in spending, the second by \$5 billion and the Social Security Administration would be poorer by \$890 million.