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By Kansas Farm Bureau Columnist John Schlageck



Ah, for those good old days when Uncle Sam lived within his income – and without most of ours. If memory serves me, our country operated in the black in the '90s with a Democratic president, Bill Clinton. Although the Republicans continued to hold a majority in the House and Senate, the president and Congress were able to compromise on deficit-reduction legislation in 1997. Economic growth was so robust that the reduction targets were met much sooner than expected. The budget shortfall that stood at \$290 billion in 1992 turned into a surplus of almost \$80 billion in 1999. The stock market remained strong throughout the Clinton presidency, and the unemployment rate dropped to just above 4 percent, which many economists consider full employment. But that's ancient history. Today, our government is mired in gridlock. Politics is supposed to be the art of compromise. There is none today in Washington. Economic policies of the past including funding government, spending cuts and balancing the budget were all forged through compromise within the legislative and executive branches. This is sorely lacking today at either end of the political spectrum.

Government spending cuts, labeled sequestration, are ready to become the plan of action for 2013. With sequestration, an estimated \$85 billion will be cut from this year's budget and \$1.2 trillion is slated to be cut during the course of a decade.

For the sake of our republic, President Obama and Congress must work together and carry out their responsibility of running a government that lives within a budget while prioritizing programs that effectively and efficiently serve the American people.

There is no way money coming into the federal treasury can keep up with the money pouring out. We cannot expect the federal budget deficit to decrease until members of Congress and the President make up their minds to reduce spending.

Slowing the growth of government spending will begin to shift control of resources away from politicians and bureaucrats to the people who have earned and saved the money.

We've already passed \$16.4 trillion in debt at the end of 2012. We are mortgaging our children

and grandchildren's futures. This spending cannot go on.

Another segment of our economy that remains under the knife with sequestration is the agricultural community and farm programs that help feed us. Cuts in spending must be across the board. Every sector of our economy should shoulder this debt burden and receive less of the budget pie.

Unfortunately, sequestration would cut funding from farm programs called direct payments. The problem here is that Congress is still trying to write a new farm bill that would likely cut direct payments and use that money to pay for other safety-net and risk-management programs.

If those cuts are made to the farm bill now, Congress will be unable to write a farm bill with an adequate safety net. Farm country is in the throes of a three-year drought with the probability of a fourth year on the way. The crop protection plan has worked well to ensure farmers are protected against such natural disasters.

Take away this protection through cuts in crop insurance and agriculture will be back to asking Congress for disaster assistance each and every year.

In the past, increased government involvement was necessary to meet the needs of its people. Today, government needs to slow down, to be less involved in the lives of its citizens.

Living within our means while cutting back on spending is a step in the right direction; however, we will not see a turnaround overnight. Still, the sooner President Obama and Congress come up with a plan that will reduce federal spending and lower our national debt, the sooner we can move toward better times in this country.

John Schlageck is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. Born and raised on a diversified farm in northwestern Kansas, his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

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