

March 01, 2013

The Honorable Seth Harris
Acting Secretary of Labor
U.S. Department of Labor
200 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20210

Dear Acting Secretary Harris,

We write to request important information about the actions your Department has taken to address the President's sequester as it relates to your budget. We were disappointed by your February 1, 2013, letter to the Senate Appropriations Committee, which suggests you have decided to dramatically cut funding for programs that serve some of the most vulnerable populations. Indeed, we find it surprising that while quick to outline potential harm, other operational expenses that could be cut are not even mentioned in your letter.

As part of the Budget Control Act, the President proposed, and Congress passed, automatic spending reductions to reduce discretionary spending. This happened on August 2, 2011, as part of a comprehensive agreement to reduce spending and raise the debt ceiling. The debt ceiling was raised; it is time to reduce the spending. While we agree that the across-the-board automatic spending reductions are not an ideal way to reduce spending, the President has had almost 19 months to propose a comprehensive plan to address these cuts in a more targeted way. He has consistently failed to suggest a bipartisan proposal, and the automatic spending cuts will now go into effect because of this lack of leadership.

Despite the Budget Control Act being enacted on August 2, 2011, the Administration has only publicly provided piecemeal information to suit their political agenda. In fact, the Office of Management and Budget has not released the percentage of the across-the-board cuts required under sequestration or the methodology used by the White House to justify their "estimates" on the "impact of sequestration." Instead, the Administration continues to cherry-pick sequestration examples that best suit their political needs as the President campaigns around the country instead of offering a plan.

For example, in the letter you sent to the Committee on Appropriations on February 1, 2013, the Department points to the permanent closure of Job Corps centers as a potential result of sequestration. Unfortunately, you failed to acknowledge or take responsibility for the Department's role in the gross mismanagement of the Office of Job Corps over the past several years. The serious budget problems facing this program have led to two years of budget shortfalls, a FY2013 budget request that did not accurately reflect the true costs of the program, and a suspension of enrollment of Job Corps students nationwide. While you highlight the impacts to Job Corps, you ignore the fact that the Department got us here in the first place.

Therefore, we would like your Department to please provide the following information to clarify questions that still remain about how the Administration plans on implementing the sequestration reductions:

1. What sequestration percentage(s) was the Department requested to use when coming up with sequestration implementation plans?
2. Please provide the detailed plan(s) for all Department accounts, including the options transmitted to the Office of Management and Budget, for how the sequestration reductions will be met. Please include the cost savings generated for each measure outlined in the plan.
3. Please provide details about how travel and conference spending by the Department will be affected.

4. Do you intend to institute furloughs for career employees? If so, will political appointees – Schedule C and Non-Career Senior Executive Service – also be required to take unpaid time off? Further, have you frozen hiring of political appointees, and if not, why not?
5. Is the agency reducing official time allowed to employees to conduct union business at the cost of the taxpayers?
6. Please provide a list of positions filled by the Department since the passage of the Budget Control Act on August 2, 2011, including the pay rate, position, and agency account they are paid from as well as identifying if they are career staff or political appointees.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter. We would appreciate receiving your response to our concerns by March 8, 2013. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to have your staff contact [our staff].

Lamar Alexander,

Ranking Member, HELP Committee Ranking Member, Labor-HHS Appropriations Subcommittee