

NDD UNITED

WORKING TO
STRENGTHEN AMERICA



Strategic Communications Handbook, Updated September 2015 for "Raise the Caps"



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Introduction

Communications doesn't exist in a vacuum. NDD United is the only organization speaking out on behalf of *all* of the thousands of programs funded by discretionary funds that have been decimated by budget cuts over the past five years. It's critical that every NDD United member know where the organization stands. United, we can raise our voice on behalf of the public services Americans rely on.

But budget cuts and sequestration are difficult topics to message around: before you can even get to the meat of the problem – that public services Americans rely on are being decimated – you have to engage in a lot of preliminary explanation. And it's the problem, the solution, and how NDD United is working toward that solution that should form the building blocks of all of NDD United's messaging.

This handbook provides the tools to maximize your public presence and raise your voice on behalf of NDD programs. It offers sample documents for major communications pieces: an op-ed, blog post, press release, media advisory and pitch email. It also offers tips on spreading your message in a way that engages the press, the public and our leaders.

Need more help? New Heights Communications works with organizations inside the Beltway and out to provide tailored communications audits, support and services. Contact Christy Setzer, President, at 202/506-6421 or christy@nhc-dc.com to discuss how we can help your organization. For more great PR tips and tools of the trade, sign up for our newsletter by emailing info@newheightscommunications.com.



Telling Your Story

NDD United has a unique and potentially powerful voice. As the only organization fighting for all of the public services on which Americans truly do rely, we have a duty to make sure our voice is heard. Don't be intimidated by snooty reporters or big papers – be confident in who you are as an organization or representative of that organization and get out there.

That said, the key to getting your story out there: powerful storytelling. Humans love narrative. They love heroes and villains, and they love calls to action and solutions. So unless you're on the Hill, this is not about budget negotiations. It's not about "allocations," or "reprogramming," or "non-defense discretionary" anything. This is about the people who caused the sequester or the sequester versus the sequester's victims. It's about budget cuts hurting real people.

Here are some real examples of good, better and best messaging around sequestration and budget cuts. These quotes were all taken from a news article about the sequester.

- **Not great:** "The impacts of the sequester have been hard to document, but it really is a diminution of services."

This quote acknowledges that it's hard to paint this picture, and it notes that services are decreasing under sequestration. But more imagery, clearer consequences and more plot could help make it better.

- **Better:** "We're only adding new clients in the direst circumstances -- like they will die or be institutionalized if we don't get to them."

This quote elicits real emotion, and shows the true consequences of sequestration: only those in the most dire of circumstances will receive help now. Better.

- **Best:** "It flabbergasts me that our government can't get its crap together. With the air-traffic controllers, Congress fixed that right away because it affected the planes going in and out of Washington. But they're not doing anything that benefits the people."

This quote, by a "real person," is the best of the lot. It clearly outlines a hero and villain, and lays out in easy-to-understand terms the fact that real people are hurting under sequestration. It also sets up a contrast: Congress was willing to help people in Washington, but not "real people" throughout the rest of the country. Though NDD United advocates may wish to omit the saltier language, this quote is an excellent model for getting your point across.



Telling Your Story: The Elevator Pitch

With all the challenges facing NDD United - tough name, tough subject matter, changing landscape - it's critical to have a coherent introduction about your organization, why you exist and your relevance to the debate. Why, in other words, should the press, public and our lawmakers trust you as the voice on this issue?

- Your Elevator pitch should include
 - Who you are
 - What the problem is
 - Why you exist
 - How you solve the problem

Normally, Elevator pitches are broken into time segments – 30, 60 and 90 seconds (or floors, to follow the analogy.) In this case, use the time to build up background – to explain what the problem is from the get-go. Start with the problem, then talk about what NDD United is, and then your organization specifically. With that in mind, here is a suggested elevator pitch:

1. Right now, millions of Americans are suffering because of arbitrary and senseless cuts that Congress has made through sequestration to programs we rely on—like funding for cancer research, early education and job training. These cuts don't solve our budget crisis – but they do cause real harm to Americans every day. **Add Example of harmful cut/result in your specific area: If we don't end the harmful sequester cuts, in 2016, 60,000 kids stand to lose access to pre-school entirely.**
2. NDD United is more than 3,000 organizations standing together to demand an end to sequestration. United, we can make our voice heard in demanding a balanced, bipartisan solution to replace sequestration, once and for all.
3. **(If time, add)** Your org's elevator pitch, plus: We are a member of NDD United because we recognize that only united can we succeed in taking our message to Congress and to the people. Our message is simple: Congress must come up with a balanced solution to end sequestration and end cuts to the programs Americans rely on.

What's important isn't that you memorize any of these by rote. What's important is that you know the answers to the questions of who you are and why you're here. Also, if sequestration itself is too wonky a term, feel free to substitute in "budget cuts." For programs, try "public services." These are terms that most people intuitively understand and can help make the case even more clearly.



Telling Your Story: The North Star

The Elevator pitch is important – and you’ll have to use it, when you introduce yourself to reporters, etc. But you’ll more frequently be called upon to cogently talk about your work, the impact of budget cuts and more, in the context of what’s happening. That’s why you need a North Star – your guiding principle and the message you come back to. In NDD United’s case, that North Star is:

We must end harmful budget cuts to programs Americans rely on with a balanced, bipartisan deal to get rid of sequestration/end these cuts once and for all.

Come back to this North Star on any issue – this is the point from which the rest of your talking points derive. For example:

- On carve outs: Damage control is not a sound fiscal policy, and we all lose when Congress chooses playground favorites. We can’t fund scientists at the expense of teachers, or Head Start at the expense of public defenders. Congress must instead find a balanced and bipartisan solution to end cuts to programs Americans rely on.
- To add context to stories you provide: This example is just one that proves that sequestration is in fact hurting real Americans, and the impact will only worsen without a balanced, bipartisan deal to replace sequestration, once and for all.

Remember, your North Star is the reason NDD United is here – and it’s the point from which your other points flow. But it’s by no means the only thing you should ever say. Beware of “staying on message” to the point that you squander an opportunity to educate the press and the public about the true and lasting implications of sequestration.



Telling Your Story: “Raise the Caps” Elevator Pitch

In the last 5 years, America’s most critical services-- those that provide family planning services for low-income women, early education to our children, medical care and services for veterans, law enforcement in our communities, and much more—have been slashed. If Congress doesn’t act before October 1st, the full effects of sequestration will return, and America’s families will pay the price.

Congress must act now to end sequestration, and provide a balanced budget that invests in America’s most critical services. Doing so will create more than a million jobs, grow our economy, and keep us safe and secure as a nation. Failing to act will deeply hurt our communities—defunding preschool programs, eliminating family planning services for millions of women, eliminating more than a thousand law enforcement jobs, and leaving tens of thousands of veterans without care, to name just a few consequences.

Telling Your Story: “Raise the Caps” Talking Points

In many cases, your talking points are just an expanded version of your elevator pitch. See below:

In the last 5 years, America’s most critical services-- those that provide family planning services for low-income women, early education to our children, medical care and services for veterans, law enforcement in our communities, and much more—have been slashed.

(See slides)

(Share of economy lowest since Eisenhower Administration)

If Congress doesn’t act before October 1st, the full effects of sequestration will return, and America’s families will pay the price. Sequestration could:

- de-fund preschool programs in 18 states, causing 60,000 children to lose access to preschool entirely;
- shortchange VA medical care by \$690 million, meaning 70,000 fewer veterans receiving medical care, fewer staff critical to improving quality of care, and delays in medical research;
- eliminate the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) hiring program, resulting in 1,300 fewer law enforcement positions safeguarding communities;
- eliminate Positive Train Control (PTC) technology, which could have prevented tragic crashes in the Bronx and Philadelphia that caused a dozen deaths, hundreds of injuries, and millions of dollars in damage;
- eliminate funding for Title X Family Planning, denying 4 million women access to health services like contraception, sexually transmitted infection testing and treatment, and prenatal services;
- slashes by 32 percent federal efforts to remediate lead contamination in homes, leaving 4,200 fewer homes treated, and 7,600 children under age 6 unprotected from lead-based paint hazards, which can have lifelong effects on cognitive functioning, behavior, and physical health.

Congress must act now to end sequestration, and provide a balanced budget that invests in America's most critical services.

Doing so will create more than a million jobs, grow our economy, and keep us safe and secure as a nation.

- Reversing sequestration spending caps could create as many as 1.4 million jobs over the next two years, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO) reports. CBO projections show that scrapping the caps could mean as many as 800K jobs in 2016, and 600K jobs in 2017.
- Sequestration relief would also cause the gross domestic product to grow by as much as 0.6 percent in 2016 and as much as 0.4 percent in 2017. Easing those ceilings would lead to increased government spending, which in turn would lead to an increase in economic output and higher employment, according to CBO.
- It will also mean we can invest in important programs. Fully eliminating the reductions would allow for an increase in appropriations of \$90 billion in 2016 and \$91 billion in 2017, according to CBO director Keith Hall.

Plus, it's bipartisan.

- Lawmakers on both sides of the aisle have expressed support for relieving sequestration again. In June, Senator John McCain, Republican of Arizona, urged congressional leaders "to come together and repeal sequestration." Speaker Boehner once compared the sequester to "taking a meat ax to our government."

Failing to act will deeply hurt our communities—defunding preschool programs, eliminating family planning services for millions of women, eliminating more than a thousand law enforcement jobs, and leaving tens of thousands of veterans without care, to name just a few consequences.



Telling Your Story: Spreading the Word

Be a Valuable Source

To become a go-to source for press and other audiences, you don't just need to be expert – you need to be the first name that pops into people's minds when they think about your programs and issues – which for now is the impact of budget cuts on those programs and constituents. To this end, offer opinions and information frequently. Proactively seek media attention through pitching stories, writing Letters to the Editor (LTEs) and op-eds, and providing excellent and up-to-date information on your website.

Monitor the news for relevant external news hooks.

The first step to expanding your presence in the press is to determine when and whether you can offer a story that is newsworthy. This breaks down into making the news or reacting to the news: At times, your own work will merit media coverage, even without an additional news hook to entice reporters. But more frequently, you will need a good handle on current events to know when to insert its messaging into trending stories. Monitor local and national news about trends, statistics, and advocacy initiatives related to your issues. Trending stories and news will inform advocacy and help to identify potential stories about which you can make media pitches.

Monitor the advocacy and policy scenes for important events.

Along the same lines as monitoring the news, track news stories about advocacy campaigns and legislative progress (if any). Join email lists for an easy way to track progress. If other groups are working on the same issue or have made progress, you can identify both advocacy partners and possible pitches.

Monitor your own work for trends, events, and newsworthy product.

Make sure that staff are aware of trends to look for and potential constituent stories to flag. Review your calendar for upcoming newsworthy events: protests, citizen action campaigns, Hill advocacy days, impactful trainings, materials or educational drives, or possible legal or advocacy victories or losses.

Offer information that warrants media coverage.

Seek additional publicity by creating noteworthy materials. Because NDD United occupies a unique space in the budget debate, it has a strong role to play in offering information no one else is gathering or analyzing. Consider crafting or supporting interns or fellows in writing academic articles or submissions to issue-specific newsletters.

Package your information well.

Even simple organization of information can be a boon to busy reporters and open the door to your issue: Calculate how many children are impacted by a particular closure, compare costs with an untouched program, or highlight how current trends map onto historical timelines and you'll likely have reporters or blogs eager to spread the word for you.

In short, whenever you are able to add something new and important about your issue, do so. Even if your addition seems simple, it may well create the framing or offer the visual that the press and public are looking for. Some ideas:

- **Do a little math.** Information may be out there, but disconnected. For example, before the 2013 government shutdown, NDD United wrote a blog post on the \$208 million Congress “reprogrammed” to start combat missions again. We took that \$208 million and explained exactly what it could have bought in other areas, from keeping 32,000 kids in Head Start to funding research grants for NIH. Never underestimate the power of doing a little math. (That blog post is available as a sample in this packet).
- **Shot/Chaser.** These are typically used to show when someone is saying the opposite of what he’s said previously on an issue, or the opposite of what his policies demonstrate.
 - Shot: “I’m just trying to keep my head down and get my family back on track,” said Weiner.
 - Chaser: Weiner began sending X-rated photos of himself to women he met over the Internet just days after resigning from Congress. –New York Times, 7/23/13

They’re fun ways to make a point to the press and to reinforce your narrative.

- Try putting your information in different formats. The NDD United Sequester Video “No More Cuts” explained the sequester in simple terms, and did so against the backdrop of a user-friendly animated video. Similarly, infographics and Buzz Feed-type lists may capture a web editor’s attention in the way that a bulleted list can’t.
- If your information is commentary, you can be creative in packaging that as well. Try captioned photos – the more biting the better – or even sarcastic tweets and blog posts. These often capture attention in a way an earnest op-ed may not.





Tips & Templates: Blog Posts

Blog posts can and should be brief: Aim for 400-500 words, unless there is true value in making a post longer. Blogs can reflect your organization's "personality," and be relatively informal. A good rule of thumb is to stick to just one topic per blog post.

Suggested Blog Post Topics

Events (yours or allied groups')
Advocacy victories and setbacks
New partnerships, coalitions, or advocacy groups
Compelling "real people" stories
Commentary on relevant news stories
Campaigns, including petitions and protests
Infographics
Buzz Feed-type lists

Tips for Writing a Blog Post

1. **Title.** Keep your title short but informative. It does help to keep search engine optimization principles in mind when writing titles, which means you should use as many of the words you think people might search for in your title as possible. But don't make the title clunky.
2. **Intro Paragraph.** Your introductory paragraph should, as the name suggests, include an introduction to the post: a short summary of the background and the main idea. You should also include the news hook or hooks – and links thereto – in this paragraph.
3. **Second Section.** In the next section, include the body of your post, analysis, or whatever new or interesting idea you are adding. This is adaptable depending on the type of post – whether it's a worker's story, commentary on existing law, or something different – but put the meat of your post here.
4. **Third Section.** In this section, add an interesting nugget, such as a quote, statistic, or other fun fact that adds substance and interest.
5. **Conclusion.** Shoot for interesting takeaways from the discussion.

Sample Blog Post A

Prevention is Better than Cure: End Sequestration before Fiscal Disaster *NDD United- September 2015*

They say an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, but some in Congress haven't gotten the message. On October 1st, if Congress doesn't take action, the disastrous budget cuts to our nation's most critical programs—including early education, veterans' care, law enforcement, women's health, and more-- will go back into effect, causing pain to millions of Americans across the country.

How did we get here? In 2011, Congress passed a law that cut federal spending by nearly \$1 trillion and said that if lawmakers couldn't agree on a plan to reduce our deficit by \$4 trillion, another \$1 trillion in automatic, arbitrary and across the board budget cuts would start to take effect in 2013. Though the "Murray-Ryan" deal temporarily stopped these cuts from taking place, that deal expires in fiscal year 2016. That's why more than 2,500 national, state and local organizations are calling on Congress to avoid the impending fiscal disaster and end sequestration. These organizations have come together to say, Raise the Spending Caps. Enough is enough.

The impending cuts will be bad, really bad. If Congress does not work together to stop sequestration, the resulting budget could:

- De-fund preschool programs in 18 states, causing 60,000 children to lose access to preschool entirely;
- Shortchange Veterans' Administration medical care by \$690 million, meaning 70,000 fewer veterans receiving medical care, fewer staff critical to improving quality of care, and delays in medical research;
- Eliminate funding for Title X Family Planning, denying 4 million women access to health services like contraception, sexually transmitted infection testing and treatment, and prenatal services;
- Eliminate the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) hiring program, resulting in 1,300 fewer law enforcement positions safeguarding communities;
- Eliminate Positive Train Control (PTC) technology, which could have prevented tragic crashes in the Bronx and Philadelphia that caused a dozen deaths, hundreds of injuries, and millions of dollars in damage.

Experts across the political spectrum agree these programs aren't a driving factor behind our nation's mid- and long-term fiscal challenges. In fact, reversing sequestration could actually create as many as 1.4 million jobs over the next two years, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO) reports.

So Congress can act to end a failed policy now and prevent another fiscal crisis, or deal with finding a cure for its aftermath. There is bipartisan agreement that sequestration is bad policy and ultimately hurts our nation. Let's choose prevention over cure and Raise the Spending Caps.



Sample Blog Post B

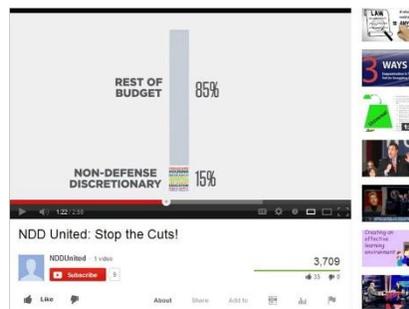
How to Solve the Budget Crisis (July 2013)

A 6-step primer for Congress and the Administration, with visual aids

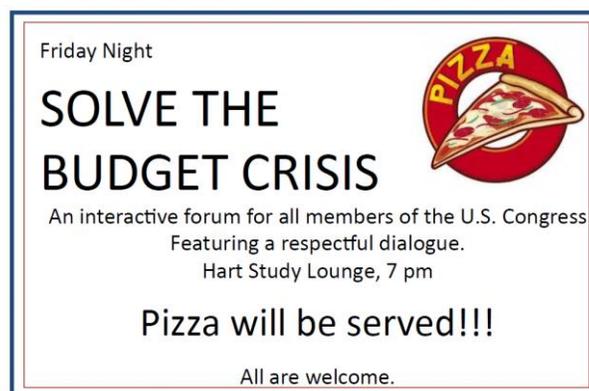
By NDD United – a coalition of 3,000 groups working to strengthen American and protect core government functions

1. Admit that you have a (really big) problem.

It's time to face facts: Budget cuts have already done immense damage to our country. And, if you don't act now, things will just get worse. The cuts known as sequestration will remain in place for the next decade. Sequestration, by the way, is that thing that made the [planes late that time](#). Would you believe it had other effects, too? Reading is a drag, so we made a video! Consider it the Cliff's Notes of the damage to our country if you don't act now to come to a responsible, balanced solution. Rewind and replay as necessary.



2. **Start a dialogue.** This means having people get together to actually have a discussion. [It's tough to get people to hang out](#), especially when you're so [very unpopular](#). But remember student association meetings? Those tricks to get people to come to your event are just as relevant here. Here's a sample flier to get people interested. If all else fails, offer a screening of *Arrested Development* (appropriate, we think).



3. **Consider all the options.** Your skills in this regard may be a bit rusty, since you've been categorically ignoring one another's ideas for years. But when there are a lot of decisions to be made, it helps to make a pros and cons list. Organize your thoughts with this template.

Cutting core government functions

Pros

Cons

- Budget *still* won't be balanced—even if we cut every dollar from these programs.
- Public safety and security will suffer, cancer research will be placed on the back burner, students trying to go to college will have less assistance, roads and bridges will be in disrepair and kids will have less access to programs like Head Start.
- Our country won't be able to compete in global marketplace.

4. **Make amend(ment)s.** It's tempting to throw up your hands and leave when people are beholden to tiny constituencies and/or outdated ideas of how our economy works, but do your best to cut through the baggage. Start by being a good listener, and paraphrasing back what you hear, to make sure you understood. Not sure how? Here's an example:

"I'm hearing you suggest cutting discretionary funding even beyond sequestration levels, which would not go very far in balancing the budget, but which would have dramatic consequences for Americans of all walks of life. Is that right?"



5. **Be the Communicator.** When it's your turn to talk, use "I statements." This keeps people from feeling alienated and can help you express exactly what you perceive the problem to be. For example:

"I feel as though you aren't considering the country's dependence on core government programs when you suggest decimating their budgets without considering other areas for cuts or revenues."

6. **Getting to Yes.** Nobody likes a critic – or someone who complains but offers no solutions. In order to come to a compromise that addresses our budget woes head-on, doesn't rely on short-term fixes, and reflects balanced approach, you'll have to consider *all* the options on the table. This sounds really hard – maybe impossible – right now. But by completing steps 1 – 4 you'll have come to a place where you can actually reach a compromise. You'll have carefully considered the magnitude of the problem and the best ways to move our country forward. You'll be able to craft a solution that doesn't rely solely on decimating the programs Americans from all walks of life rely on.





Tips & Templates: Press Releases & Media Advisories

As the media landscape changes, both press releases and media advisories are becoming less frequently used. However, both can still be handy to put in the body of a pitch email as background (reporters are unlikely to open attachments), and both make easily-distributable reports of your events.

Tips (Step-by-Step) for Writing a Press Release or Media Advisory

1. **Logo.** Put your logo or name at the top, along with those of any coalition member logos.
2. **Contact Info.** Put a name and number where you can be reached. If there is an event, include a cell phone number for the person who will be at the event.
3. **Headline.** It helps to think of this first. Create a catchy headline that gets your main idea across. Make sure it communicates the news of the event.
4. **Riders.** Write a secondary headline, called a sub-head or a rider, that adds another detail about the story but is separate from the story itself.
5. **Lede.** Write the lede – the first sentence or two, intended to entice the reader. Begin the release with the city and state where the event took place (or if there's no event, where your group is based), and date. These should be italicized.
6. **The 411.** Put the who/what/where/when in the first couple sentences. Note that in an advisory, this information should be highlighted in bullet or table form as well.
7. **Conclusion.** The remaining paragraphs (3-4 for a press release, 1-2 for an advisory, plus bullets) should have facts, background information and, ideally, quotes from event participants or spokespeople. Keep the content to no more than one page for an advisory and two for a release.
8. **Signal the end.** Put "###" at the end of the release, centered.



*****MEDIA ADVISORY*****

MORE THAN 2,500 ORGANIZATIONS TO CONGRESS: AVOID FISCAL MELTDOWN, END SEQUESTRATION BEFORE OCTOBER 1ST DEADLINE

NDD United To Urge Congress To Raise Spending Caps, Invest In Early Childhood Education, Law Enforcement, and Veterans

Press Conference THURSDAY, September 10th, XX AM

(WASHINGTON, DC) On Thursday, September 10th, at XX AM, MEMBER OF CONGRESS, MEMBER OF CONGRESS will join advocates representing more than 2,500 national, state and local organizations for veterans, teachers, scientists, law enforcement, women's rights, transportation safety, and more to call for Congress to avoid America's next great budget crisis.

With the bi-partisan Murray-Ryan deal set to expire on October 1st, nondefense discretionary (NDD) programs—ranging from education and job training, to housing and science, to natural resources and veterans services, to public health, safety and security—are once again on a crash course to disaster as the true impact of sequestration will be felt my by millions of Americans from all walks of life.

Leaders of NDD United will present a letter signed by more than 2,500 groups to Congressional leaders and Committee members demanding Congress raise the spending caps and end sequestration through a bipartisan budget deal. A deal would prevent drastic cuts to women's health, early education, transportation safety, law enforcement, veterans, and other important sectors. MEMBER OF CONGRESS, MEMBER OF CONGRESS, and NDD advocates will discuss some of the critical cuts our country will face if no deal is reached on the budget.

WHO:	MEMBER OF CONGRESS MEMBER OF CONGRESS Emily Holubowich, Co-Chair, NDD United Joel Packer, Co-Chair, NDD United Dustin Speakman, Director of Community Services, Ohio Association of Foodbanks **Name TK**
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WHAT:	Members of 2,500 groups to call on Congress to end sequestration, invest in critical programs
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WHERE:	**LOCATION TK**
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WHEN:	September 10th, 2015 **TIME TK**
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In 2013, NDD United released a comprehensive, sector-by-sector impact report, *Faces of Austerity*, which detailed how real Americans are feeling the negative effects of austerity. For a copy of the report, or to learn more about NDD United, please visit NDDUnited.org.

###

NDD United is a coalition of leaders joining forces in an effort to save nondefense discretionary (NDD) programs from more devastating cuts. NDD programs are core functions government provides for the benefit of all, including medical research, public health, and education, among others. Every day these programs support economic growth and strengthen the safety and security of every American in every state and community across the nation.

Sample Press Release

WORKING TO
STRENGTHEN AMERICA



MORE THAN 2,500 ORGANIZATIONS CALL ON CONGRESS TO AVOID FISCAL DISASTER, END SEQUESTRATION BEFORE OCTOBER 1ST DEADLINE

With Murray-Ryan Deal Set to Expire, Funding for Women’s Health, Law Enforcement, Veterans’ Care, Preschool And More at Risk

NDD United: Raise the Spending Caps To Keep America Safe and Secure

Washington, DC—Just weeks before federal funding runs out and draconian budget cuts stopped by a 2013 Congressional budget deal are scheduled to go back into effect, more than 2,500 national, state and local organizations are calling on Congress to avoid the impending fiscal crisis and end sequestration. NDD United, which represents organizations spanning interests as varied as education, public health, infrastructure, and law enforcement, released a letter demanding Congress raise the spending caps and end sequestration through a bipartisan budget deal before October 1, 2015. A deal would prevent drastic cuts to programs for women’s health, early education, transportation safety, law enforcement and veterans’ care, among others.

“We’re running out of time to prevent another fiscal crisis, and once again, real Americans will pay the price for Congress’ inaction,” said Emily Holubowich, Co-Chair of NDD United. “If Congress doesn’t raise the spending caps and end sequestration, veterans could lose medical care, preschools could close, women could be denied access to prenatal and family planning services, and so much more.”

“That’s why more than 2,500 organizations have come together to say, Raise the Caps,” added Joel Packer, Co-Chair of NDD United. “Enough is enough. We see the speeding train coming down the track, and we’re not doing nearly enough to stop it.”

More than 2,500 organizations represented by NDD United signed a letter ([LINK](#)) to Congress calling to avoid such budget tragedy. The letter reads in part:

“The undersigned XXXX national, state, and local organizations, representing the hundreds of millions of Americans who support and benefit from NDD programs, urge you to replace sequestration with a balanced approach to deficit reduction that takes into account the deep cuts NDD has already incurred since 2010. We also urge you to ensure such sequestration relief is equally balanced between NDD and defense programs; a parity precedent set in the 2013 Bipartisan Budget Act (BBA) negotiated by Senator Patty Murray and Congressman Paul Ryan... There is bipartisan agreement that sequestration is bad policy and ultimately hurts our nation. It’s time to end the era of austerity.”

In 2013, Congress approved a bipartisan budget deal that relieved the impacts of sequestration for 2014 and 2015. This “Murray-Ryan” deal temporarily masked sequestration’s true impact. With sequestration relief expiring October 1 and appropriations bills now being written to the sequestered spending caps, we are seeing the difficult tradeoffs necessitated by woefully inadequate and historically low levels of spending after years of deficit reduction. In fact, current NDD funding is the lowest level on record dating back to the Eisenhower administration, relative to the size of the economy.

Discretionary programs, including nondefense discretionary (NDD) programs—ranging from education and job training, to housing and science, to natural resources and veterans services, to public health, safety and security—have been cut dramatically and disproportionately in recent years as lawmakers work to reduce the deficit, even though experts across the political spectrum agree these programs aren’t a driving factor behind our nation’s mid- and long-term fiscal challenges.

If Congress does not work together to stop sequestration, the resulting budget could:

- De-fund preschool programs in 18 states, causing 60,000 children to lose access to preschool entirely;
 - Shortchange Veterans’ Administration medical care by \$690 million, meaning 70,000 fewer veterans receiving medical care, fewer staff critical to improving quality of care, and delays in medical research;
 - Eliminate funding for Title X Family Planning, denying 4 million women access to health services like contraception, sexually transmitted infection testing and treatment, and prenatal services;
 - Eliminate the Community Oriented Policing Services or “COPS” hiring program, resulting in 1,300 fewer law enforcement positions safeguarding communities;
- 1.
- Eliminate Positive Train Control (PTC) technology, which could have prevented tragic crashes in the Bronx and Philadelphia that caused a dozen deaths, hundreds of injuries, and millions of dollars in damage.

Dustin Speakman, *Director of Community Services, Ohio Association of Foodbanks in Columbus, Ohio*, said, “Raising the caps literally means the difference between putting food on the table for a needy family, and having them go hungry. Congress has the ability right now to decide whether Ohio families fill their bellies or starve. It’s stunning to me that this could somehow be a difficult decision.”

In 2013, NDD United released a comprehensive, sector-by-sector impact report, [Faces of Austerity](#), which detailed how real Americans are feeling the negative effects of austerity. For a copy of the report or to learn more about NDD United, please visit nndunited.org.

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NDD United is a coalition of leaders joining forces in an effort to save nondefense discretionary (NDD) programs from more devastating cuts. NDD programs are core functions government provides for the benefit of all, including medical research, public health, and education, among others. Every day these programs support economic growth and strengthen the safety and security of every American in every state and community across the nation.



Tips & Templates: Op-eds

Op-eds are an opportunity to comment on local trends or news events, such as an upcoming vote on a piece of legislation. You can also use Op-eds to comment on opinions or happenings in the area or nationally. Op-eds are fairly formal, but should be gripping. They can call the reader to action or present readers with a reason to support your opinion on an issue. Op-eds are difficult to place in larger papers, but in more local readerships, you may be able to place them fairly easily. To place an Op-ed, email the opinion editor with your piece. Typically, Op-eds are 500-600 words. Check the word limits for your outlet of choice here.

Sample Op-ed

Stop America's Economic Pain: Tell Congress to End Sequestration

By Emily Holubowich, Co-Chair, NDD United

More than 60,000 children without preschool. Veterans without critical healthcare. Four million women without access to prenatal and family planning services. More than a thousand fewer police on the streets. These are just a handful of the devastating consequences if Congress doesn't come to a budget agreement before sequestration returns October 1.

How did we get here...again? Let's back up.

In 2011, Congress passed a law that cut federal spending by nearly \$1 trillion dollars and said that if lawmakers couldn't agree on a "grand bargain" to reduce our deficit by a total of \$4 trillion, another \$1 trillion in automatic, arbitrary and across the board budget cuts would take effect in 2013. Up first on the chopping block? Nondefense discretionary programs—those programs ranging from education and job training, to housing and science, to natural resources and veterans services, to public health, safety and security. Essentially, everything that's not defense-related. Despite the fact that experts across the political spectrum agree these programs aren't a driving factor behind our nation's mid- and long-term fiscal challenges, they've been cut dramatically and disproportionately in recent years.

In fact, current non-defense discretionary funding is the lowest level on record dating back to the Eisenhower administration, relative to the size of the economy.

And not shockingly, Congress couldn't agree—and still, apparently, can't. Though the "Murray-Ryan" deal provided two years of partial sequestration relief, that deal expires in fiscal year 2016. In appropriations bills now being written to the sequestered spending caps, we are seeing the difficult tradeoffs necessitated by woefully inadequate and historically low levels of spending after years of deficit reduction.

That's why more than 2,500 national, state and local organizations are calling on Congress to avoid the impending fiscal crisis and end sequestration. These organizations have come together to say, Raise the Spending Caps. Enough is enough. We see the speeding train coming down the track and we're not doing nearly enough to stop it.

Lawmakers on both sides of the aisle have expressed support for relieving sequestration, which Speaker John Boehner once compared to “taking a meat ax to our government.” In June, Senator John McCain, Republican of Arizona, urged congressional leaders “to come together and repeal sequestration.”

Why should we Raise the Caps? Reversing sequestration spending caps could create as many as 1.4 million jobs over the next two years, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO) reports. According to CBO projections, raising the caps could mean as many as 800,000 jobs in 2016, and 600,000 jobs in 2017.

Relief from these cuts would also cause the gross domestic product to grow by as much as 0.6 percent in 2016 and as much as 0.4 percent in 2017. According to CBO, those ceilings would lead to increased government spending, which in turn would lead to an increase in economic output and higher employment.

But just as important as job creation or growing the economy, we need to stop the pain being felt by Americans across the country due to austerity. Elementary and secondary education, housing, and workforce training programs are unable to meet needs. Scientific discovery has been hindered and public health preparedness and response has been weakened. Maintenance of air traffic control, weather systems, and National Parks has been deferred. Federal justice programs haven’t adequately supported states and localities in meeting needs of law enforcement and crime victims. Programs designed to aid foreign victims of war and hunger are falling short, compromising our ability to address emergencies around the world.

There is bipartisan agreement that sequestration is bad policy and ultimately hurts our nation. It’s time to end the era of austerity.

Emily Holubowich is executive director of the Coalition for Health Funding and a co-chair of NDD United, a coalition of more than 3,200 organizations standing together to demand a balanced approach to deficit reduction.

A Word about Letters to the Editor

Letters to the Editor are useful because they allow NDD United or your organization to respond to a news story or offer commentary on an event even if you cannot get a story pitched or Op-ed placed. In larger outlets, it can be quite difficult to place an Op-ed, so an LTE is a good option there. LTEs are usually a bit formal. They include a clear reference to the article they are in response to, and they are short – about 150-200 words.

Sample Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

After reading your most recent article highlighting sequestration and the cuts that could go into effect on October 1st should no budget deal occur (ARTICLE TITLE, DATE), I felt it was incumbent upon me to write.

Nondefense discretionary funds (NDD) have seen a massive dip in funding, with levels currently at their lowest since the Eisenhower administration, relative to the size of the economy. Come October 1st, these programs-- which fund public health, job training, education and other critical services-- will sustain a tragic slashing should no compromise is reached by our leaders in Washington, DC. It seems we are all marching on a crash course to disaster.

A bipartisan deal would prevent drastic cuts to women’s health, early education, transportation safety, law enforcement, veterans, and other important sectors.

It's time for Congress to end the political games, and stand up for what's right for Americans from all walks of life by ending sequestration and raising the spending cap.

Sincerely,

[Name, Title, Organization, City, State]