

By Aaron Keck

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WASHINGTON, D.C. - Chapel Hill's representative in the U.S. House, Democrat David Price, says looming across-the-board budget cuts could devastate the national economy.

In Washington, the ongoing budget battle is taking another turn—as the bipartisan "super committee" charged with reaching an agreement has come up short, potentially triggering a sweeping eight-percent cut in federal spending.

"The "super committee" failed," Congressman Price says. "And now the spending cuts loom ahead."

The move is known as "sequestration"—and it applies not only to domestic programs popular with liberals, but also to conservative favorites like defense. As a result, legislators on both sides of the aisle are beginning to sound the alarm that "sequestration," if it comes, will do more harm than good.

"Sequestration is designed to be unacceptable," Price says.

He says the average American will be directly affected by the cuts in their day to day lives. He says, for example, the Federal Aviation Administration would lose flexibility to make large cuts in places that will least affect travelers and safety. Instead, sequestration requires an 8 percent cut from everything, including air traffic control and security. Price says that could mean few flights and shutting down smaller airports. He says that type of dramatic impact would be the same for meat inspection, social security administration and any other government agency. He says there would be equally indiscriminate cuts in defense as well.

"You don't govern that way," he says. "That's the worst possible way to govern. We should never have set up this mechanism in the first place."

Price says this is happening in part because Republican's refuse to raise taxes. Instead, he says, the Republicans are imposing what amounts to European-style austerity measures, which have been widely unpopular among Europeans and arguably unsuccessful.

He suggests budget plans like those in 1990 and 1993. He says those budget agreements produced four years of balanced budgets as well as a healthy surplus. Price says it was truly a comprehensive budget plan that wasn't based on party talking points.

"No category of spending was off the table, and certainly revenues weren't off the table," he says. "This republican dogmatism that you can never close a loop hole, you can never ask wealthier people to even pay the rates they were paying back in the 90s, this sort of thing stands in the way of a solution."

However he says the upcoming election and the fiercely divided partisan government could keep the necessary collaboration from happening.

"This isn't something that can be done by one party alone," he says. "But it's virtually impossible on the eve of an election."