It will be up to Congress to make the most compassionate and judicious decisions in caring for its elderly and poor.

Today is crunch time for Congress, the mini-Congress-style super committee that is.

The 12-member group has until midnight to strike a deal on cutting $1.2-trillion from the federal budget over the next 10 years.

And while such draconian cuts in spending are necessary to keep this nation afloat, this newspaper would hope that congressional leaders would spare domestic programs that are aimed at this country’s elderly.

Both Medicaid and Social Security are spared from reductions and Medicare cuts are limited to 2 percent of the entitlement program’s budget.

We worry, however, that other domestic programs that the elderly depend on for their very survival may be cut drastically. This would include the food stamp program.

And while Medicare cuts will be limited to 2 percent, that amount could mean the difference between senior citizens finding doctors who will care for them.

About 12 percent of physicians already will not accept Medicare patients and a larger number are not accepting new patients.

We find this unacceptable as Americans are living longer and require medical and hospital services.

To be sure, any cuts made to reduce federal spending will have an impact on everything from the Pentagon to road construction.

America finds itself caught between a rock and hard place.

It will be up to Congress to make the most compassionate and judicious decisions in caring for its elderly and poor.

After all, the hallmark of any great nation is how it protects its vulnerable.