I will continue to champion the cause of the more than two million U.S. troops and reservists, their families, and 23 million veterans.

In the coming weeks, Congress will confront the task of making tax reforms and addressing the federal budget deficit. The outcome of this debate may have a profound impact on your lives. You may have heard or read about “the fiscal cliff” and “sequestration.”

Sequestration refers to a series of automatic cuts that will take effect under the Budget Control Act of 2011. The fiscal cliff refers to both the automatic cuts and various pending changes in tax rates.

Beginning in January of next year, a minimum of $1.2 trillion in deficit reduction will take place in both national security and domestic federal spending. Certain things such as Social Security benefits, SNAP (food stamps) and the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) are not subject to automatic cuts. However, I want you to know nothing is truly off the table. Any program, agency or initiative that receives federal funding could face drastic cuts.

- Discretionary Programs such as disaster relief will face mandatory reductions. The costs of direct student loans will rise.
- As many as 700,000 children and mothers could lose nutritional assistance. An additional

100,000 kids would be kicked out of Head Start, one of our most successful early education programs.

- More than 25,000 teachers and school aides would lose their jobs as a direct result of those cuts.
- Medicare providers (NOT beneficiaries) will face mandatory cuts of 2 percent each year
- Defense programs will automatically face cuts, beginning with a 10 percent reduction in 2013

Other changes are also set to take place in January of next year:

- The Bush tax cuts will expire for all citizens from the very wealthy to low income wage earners
- The payroll tax deduction will expire
- Many households that make over $46,000 a year will be subject to what's known as the AMT, alternative minimum tax, (what they owe in income tax will increase)
- Emergency federal unemployment benefits will end

For two years, Republicans in the House have taken the position that they want defense budget cuts completely taken off the chopping block. That approach puts the full brunt of cuts on programs for the middle class and poor which I absolutely will not support. But something important happened last week.Americavoted. The people have spoken. I remain hopeful we will see renewed efforts to reach across the aisle and find solutions on common ground. That is my goal and what I will work hard to achieve. We can get this done - reform the tax code so the wealthy pay a little more, reduce defense spending that not even the military wants to keep while investing in the American people through education and innovation to put our nation on a prosperous path.

SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS GO UP, OFFICE HOURS AT FIELD OFFICES ARE REDUCED

Benefits will increase 1.7 percent for 2013 through the cost of living adjustment. That’s good news for our seniors and the disabled. However, the Social Security Administration - the division of government that runs the program, is not immune from cuts. Faced with a smaller budget, they’ve announced a reduction in hours to serve the public

- Beginning November 19th (next week) Social Security field offices will close a half hour

earlier. They will be open 9 – 3 p.m. And beginning January 2nd, 2013, field offices will be open on Wednesdays only from 9 a.m. until noon.

MEETING THE NEEDS OF OUR VETERANS

After meeting with and listening to our veterans, I am pleased to introduce legislation to address an important health care need that current benefit plans have long excluded - access to affordable dental and vision coverage. The Veterans Dental and Vision Benefits Act of 2012 will:

- Allow veterans to access supplemental dental insurance through the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program
- Allow veterans to access supplemental vision insurance through the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program
- Allow veterans with financial hardships to access supplemental dental and vision insurance without having to pay premiums

I will continue to champion the cause of the more than two million U.S.troops and reservists, their families, and 23 million veterans. The veterans of this nation have given selflessly of themselves to defend our freedom. It is the duty of a grateful nation to recognize their sacrifice, understand their needs and provide them with the resources they deserve.