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The debate in Congress to fund government for the remainder of the 2011 fiscal year has reached a new decision point.

Congress can either pass another short-term funding measure, sustaining government for a week at a cost-savings of \$12 billion, or shutdown the federal government in the hope that one side eventually gives in. The choice could not be more distinct.

What might be gained politically with a shutdown by either Republicans or Democrats is not worth the potential disruption it could cause. Some think Republicans stand to gain most. Others say Democrats. The reality is that nobody knows what the future holds with a shutdown. We should not be so eager to find out.

Billions in budget savings have been achieved already. With the one-week extension, a total of \$22 billion in cost-savings will be reached. Against the backdrop of a national debt of \$14 trillion, this might be seen as small-change, but it's a major step in the right direction.

Over the past two years, the national debate was raging in response to trillions of dollars in new stimulus and health care spending. Now, the process of cutting back has begun and the discussion is rightly focused on how much to cut instead of how much to spend.

It's also clear that no area of the budget is off-limits, as demonstrated by proposed efficiencies in national defense. For better or worse, House Republicans agreed to \$16 billion in defense savings as part of more than \$100 billion in reductions under H.R. 1 – the plan under negotiation to fund government for the rest of the fiscal year.

What defense budget reductions mean for national security must always be a point of consideration. Particularly during two wars and a constant threat of global terrorism, the U.S. national security budget must reflect existing priorities and the need for quality investment in future technology. With so much at stake, it's important to get this balance right.

The latest short-term extension identifies the importance of sustainable funding in national defense. That's why the House is planning to take up this budget component separately and work to pass a measure that funds the U.S. military and defense manufacturing base for the rest of the year.

Passed alone, without the politics pervading the rest of the budget, our servicemen and -women, as well as their families, will have the certainty they need and deserve. Any talk about our military not getting paid during a government shutdown is a disservice to those who wear a uniform — as well as to those at home who make sacrifices on their behalf.

There is a jobs element too. It's estimated that every billion dollars in defense spending supports nearly 8,000 jobs — underscoring the point that investing in U.S. national security means investing in the U.S. workforce. This must be factored into any decision about whether to exclude national defense from the current budget debate and talk of a government shutdown.

Inaction by the Senate on the defense portion of this budget, otherwise funding all areas of government at previous levels, including the military, could cost defense manufacturing industries more than 100,000 jobs over the next few months. These jobs are a linchpin for many regional economies.

Doing nothing, in the case of a government shutdown or the Senate leadership's refusal to consider defense spending separately, would most likely slow, if not stall, the current tenuous economic recovery.

These aren't run-of-the-mill jobs either. For example, jobs in STEM — the political buzzword that stands for science, technology, engineering and math — would be directly affected. Jobs in aerospace and electrical engineering, physics and computer science, to name a few, could be lost.

There are also the pipefitters, welders and other technical experts who contribute to the defense industrial base. These happen to be the same jobs that politicians complain about losing — for both economic and national security reasons.

There are implications for the entire U.S. economy if Congress cannot settle its budget differences and begin substantial cost-savings that reduce our national debt.

But as budget negotiations continue, another \$12 billion in cuts and the certainty that comes with knowing U.S. national defense is funded for the remainder of the year translates into real progress for both sides in the budget debate.

If the Senate ignores whatever comes out of the House, it will cost our country more than a hundred thousand of our most sophisticated, stable, sought after jobs. Not to mention multiple levels of subcontractors, who are directly connected to these workers. All this is far too high of a cost to pay.

Neither a government shutdown nor a continuation of previous funding levels for defense is constructive to the overall budget process — or consistent with our commitment to those who are carrying America's security burden.