

Op-Ed by Congressman Gus M. Bilirakis (R-FL)

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Earlier this week, we learned that the Obama Administration encouraged various defense contractors and manufacturers, many of which have a large presence in the Tampa Bay area, to ignore requirements of federal law and not notify employees who may lose their jobs as a result of across-the-board cuts, known as "sequestration."

These cuts, scheduled to go into effect January 2013, could cancel scores of contracts between the Defense Department and various defense contractors and manufacturers. As a result of sequestration, the National Association of Manufacturers estimates that more than 1 million private sector jobs, including 130,000 manufacturing jobs, could be lost by 2014. Florida, in particular, stands to lose nearly 57,000 jobs. While there is no doubt that we can find savings in the Defense Department through modernization and streamlining of programs, sequestration would have a devastating impact on our Nation's economy.

Under the Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification (WARN) Act, certain employers who intend to carry out plant closings or mass layoffs due to circumstances like these are required to provide 60 days notice to affected employees, states and localities. The purpose of this notice is to allow workers and impacted communities to prepare for and seek alternative employment, arrange for retraining and make other necessary adjustments due to lost wages.

Because sequestration would go into effect at the beginning of the year, employers would likely have to begin mailing notices to comply with the WARN Act by the end of October and early November - something that could greatly hinder the President's chances for re-election, especially when the unemployment rate has hovered at 8 percent for 43 of the last 44 months.

While cloaked as a waste of State resources and something that will only create anxiety and uncertainty for workers, this is nothing more than a political ploy and another example of how this Administration is unwilling to come to the table and address the real issues facing our Nation.

Sequestration poses a direct threat to our economy and our national security. The House of Representatives has voted to repeal the sequester and replace it with commonsense reforms to federal spending, but the President threatened to veto the bill without offering his own plan. Similarly, the Senate has refused to bring up the House-passed bill or debate one of its own. The intent of the WARN Act is to provide preemptive notice to impacted workers, and disallowing such notice only binds American workers' hands at a time of economic need.

It is clear that the Obama Administration is more focused on its political fortunes than addressing the economic security and military readiness of the Nation. Furthermore, this disregard for the laws upon which this country is governed is extremely disconcerting. I will continue to work with my colleagues in Congress to advocate for sensible solutions to these pending defense cuts in order to maintain the appropriate levels of national defense. It is past time for the President to demonstrate leadership. The White House and the Senate should come to the negotiation table so real action can be taken.