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Is the Obama charm offensive with Congress working?

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NCR Today

President Barack Obama has wined and dined Republicans at the White House and has gone to Capitol Hill to meet with them as well. It seems to have had some positive effect. We are beginning to see some movement in Washington. It is not always the kind of movement we may want to see, but it is called governing. This is important because it has been sadly lacking from the Washington scene for some time now.

The imposition of the sequester has been deeply unfortunate. It has already hurt many people, and in the coming weeks and months we are going to see an even greater impact on individuals, groups and probably the economy. Yet Republicans have won on this issue, at least for the time being. The sequester seems to have been accepted as reality by both parties. A continuing resolution has been adopted by both houses of Congress that incorporates the \$85 billion figure of the sequester through the end of September.

Congress has included some amendments to alleviate the worst effects of the sequester in defense and other programs, but they have not changed the dollar figure that must be cut.

Why is this situation a positive development? It represents forward movement. The fact that both parties and the president have signed off on the continuing resolution represents progress. By accepting for now the reality of the sequester, I believe both parties will be able to obtain some limited positive results together. The alternative would be to bring government and the country to a standstill and ensure we will continue to lurch from one crisis to another for the foreseeable future. Washington may have broken the logjam. The results will not be pretty and will almost certainly satisfy no one, but it is necessary to end the continuing governing by crisis. The manufactured crises and doomsday scenarios we have been seeing simply cannot continue.

Two budget plans have now emerged from the two houses of Congress. The House budget is far to the

right of Obama, and the Senate budget is to his left. But they are budgets that can provide a framework for genuine negotiations. One can even envision the possibility of a "mini grand bargain" coming to fruition. Such a bargain could actually take the budget issues off the table and enable progress to take place on immigration, gun legislation and other important issues

I believe the conversations Obama had with Republicans have set the stage for this kind of progress. It has enabled a modicum of trust to emerge between Republicans and the White House. It has opened channels of communication that can be helpful as thorny issues arise that could sidetrack important legislation.

The results of compromise are often less than desirable. The current compromise will hurt many in our land. The failure to compromise, however, is even worse. First of all, it fails to recognize the reality of divided government and a divided populace. We don't all agree on many issues, but we cannot remain stuck in gridlock. Hopefully both parties now understand that we can tone down the partisanship and get on with the business of the country. I, for one, already detect a slight change in tone that is certainly welcome.

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