

No one likes hearing that they must make tough choices. Whether it's on the dinner menu at a favorite restaurant or picking one person to hire from two well-qualified candidates, tough choices are, well, tough.

Our great country is founded on a history of tough choices: the brave decision of the American colonies to break from the British government, the difficult point where the Greatest Generation entered World War II knowing full well the sacrifice they would bear for the future freedom of our Allies, even the courageous breakwater for our country which occurred when we cast aside political differences to unite in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. All these historical moments, and many more, were defining for our nation's future.

We are again at a transformational moment in our national history. This time, however, the pressure to make a tough decision isn't the result of an external force on our nation, it is internal and it has been building for a long time.

The crisis of spending and debt in America has reached a point where it affects generations of us. It has the potential to cost opportunities not just for us today, but even more dramatically for our children and their children. As this problem has grown over the last two decades, our national debt has doubled roughly every ten years. If we do nothing, our national debt will double again by 2021. Imagine any debt in your life doubling – at the gas pump, for your rent or mortgage, in grocery bills. Now double it again, and again, and again. No household could ever keep up with that kind of escalating expense, and neither can our nation.

So, we go back to tough choices. Here is the good news (and it really is good news): Working together, we can bring our national debt back down to earth. We can do it without raising taxes. We can do it without costing jobs and opportunities, and we can set an example for younger and future generations without hurting senior citizens who have paid their whole lives for dependable programs to keep them safe and healthy in retirement.

The question is: will we?

I voted a week ago for a funding measure to cover the rest of 2011 that cuts \$38.5 billion from

the federal government before the end of the current fiscal year. These cuts aren't as deep as the ones I proposed to the bill in the first place, but they are a significant start in an ongoing process of finding savings in the federal budget. To those who say these cuts don't go deep enough, I say I agree. To those who want us to chart a responsible path forward, I agree with that, too, because these goals are not mutually exclusive. But by starting with the easy budget cuts, we guarantee ourselves a situation every American should anticipate: The next cut will always be tougher than the last one.

If we are successful in this process, we will do what Americans have always done at great moments in our history, we will have secured the blessings of liberty and the promise of opportunity for the future. Today, we are standing on the shoulders of giants, and we have the chance to do something pretty big, too.

This spirit is what separates us from every other nation in the world. Our national identity is based on the idea that our individual rights depend on the ability of our freedoms to endure. We cannot be free if we are buried beneath an avalanche of debt, indebted to foreign powers, unable to keep our economy and our democracy unfettered by economic forces that have destroyed empires.

Some say that can't happen to us. I think we must say we will not allow it to happen, because we will act."