

The sequester and other ridiculous things

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So it's looking unlikely that Washington will do anything to prevent the sequester, the automatic spending cuts put in place to try to force Washington to find a way forward on spending, from starting to take effect tomorrow. The president and congressional leaders [will meet tomorrow](#) to discuss next steps.

Hardly anyone likes the sequester—it was *designed* to be disliked—but no one has the right combination of power and incentives to simply repeal it, either. House Republicans have passed a bill before that would replace the sequester's defense cuts with even bigger cuts to domestic spending, but it's not clear that it could pass now even in the House. The Senate hasn't passed anything, though Democrats have proposed a plan that would channel domestic cuts primarily toward farm bill reforms that Congress couldn't get done last year.

If you think the sequester standoff sounds like a ridiculous way to make farm policy, [agribusiness lobbyists](#) and their congressional allies agree. But the whole thing's ridiculous: the general obsession with budget deficits, the pattern of governing from one fabricated showdown to the next, the political disincentives for meaningful compromise.

For that matter, the farm bill's ostensibly normal process is absurd as well. The conversation's about farm policy, but most of the dollars go to food stamps, a successful and crucial anti-poverty program that is (for no good reason) part of the farm bill. And the food stamps compel a lot of legislators to vote for the omnibus bill, corporate welfare for agribusiness and all. Is this a more sensible way to set farm policy than what the Senate Democrats are proposing?

In fact it's never an inspiring thing to see how the sausages get made, even if the sausages themselves [sometimes are](#). So I for one would be thrilled to see some pro-sustainability farm reforms; I don't care if they're attached by mistake to a bill renaming a post office or whatever.

At any rate, the Senate proposal isn't going anywhere. Looks like the sequester will take effect, and leaders of both parties will deal with it after the fact. That's a real shame, because the sequester's [going to hurt](#).

In better news, the House is poised to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act, complete with the Senate's expanded protections for gays and lesbians, undocumented immigrants and ([as Debra highlighted yesterday](#)) Native American women. House Republicans can't pass the narrower version they prefer, so rather than blow the whole thing up they're going to live with the Senate's version. Good for them—that's how governing is supposed to work.

But by and large it doesn't happen. The sequester debacle has made it clearer than ever that when it comes to the great big, overarching decisions, our system of governance is pretty much broken.