

## Cliff

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was taped Saturday and aired Sunday on NBC's "Meet the Press." "They have had trouble saying yes to a number of repeated offers." "The mood is discouraged," said Sen. Joe Lieberman, a Connecticut independent who caucuses with Democrats. "The parties are much further apart than I hoped they'd be by now." The pessimistic turn came as the House and Senate returned to the Capitol for a rare Sunday session. Reid and McConnell had hoped to have a blueprint to present to their rank and file by mid-afternoon.

"I'm concerned with the lack of urgency here. There's far too much at stake," McConnell said. "There is no single issue that remains an impossible sticking point — the sticking point appears to be a willingness, an interest or courage to close the deal."

McConnell and Reid were hoping for a deal that would prevent higher taxes for most Americans while letting rates rise at higher income levels, although the precise point at which that would occur was a sticking point.

Obama had wanted to raise the top tax rate on individuals making more than \$200,000 a year and families making more than \$250,000 from 35 percent to 39.6 percent. In talks with Republican House Speaker John Boehner, he offered to raise that threshold to \$400,000.

The estate tax issue was particularly tricky since several Democrats, including veterans like Max Baucus of Montana, disagree with Obama's proposal to increase the

top estate tax rate from 35 percent to 45 percent.

Republicans said Democrats pressed to turn off more than \$200 billion in the across-the-board spending cuts over the coming two years. This so-called sequester is the punishment for last year's deficit "supercommittee" failure to strike a deal.

Hopes for blocking across-the-board spending cuts were fading and Obama's proposal to renew the 2-percentage-point payroll tax cut wasn't even part of the discussion.

Obama pressed lawmakers to start where both sides say they agree — sparing middle-class families from looming tax hikes.

"If we can get that done, that takes a big bite out of the fiscal cliff. It avoids the worst outcomes.

And we're then going to have some tough negotiations in terms of how we continue to reduce the deficit, grow the economy, create jobs," Obama said in the NBC interview.

Gone is the talk of a grand deal that would tackle broad spending and revenue demands and set the nation on a course to lower deficits. Obama and Boehner were once a couple hundred billion dollars apart on a deal that would have reduced the deficit by more than \$2 trillion over 10 years.

Republicans have complained that Obama has demanded too much in tax revenue and hasn't proposed sufficient cuts or savings in the nation's massive health care programs.

Obama upped the pressure on Republicans to negotiate a fiscal deal, arguing that GOP leaders

have rejected his past attempts to strike a bigger and more comprehensive bargain.

"The offers that I've made to them have been so fair that a lot of Democrats get mad at me," Obama said.

Boehner disagreed, saying Sunday that the president had been unwilling to agree to anything "that would require him to stand up to his own party."

The trimmed ambitions of today are a far cry from the upbeat bipartisan rhetoric of just six weeks ago, when the leadership of Congress went to the White House to set the stage for negotiations to come.

But the deal under discussion Sunday appeared unlikely to settle other outstanding issues, including the sequester, which would total

more than \$1 trillion in cuts over 10 years, divided equally between the Pentagon and other government agencies. And off the table completely is an extension of the nation's borrowing limit, which the government is on track to reach any day but which the Treasury can put off through accounting measures for about two months.

That means Obama and the Congress are already on a new collision path. Republicans say they intend to use the debt ceiling as leverage to extract more spending cuts from the president. Obama has been adamant that unlike 2011, when the country came close to defaulting on its debts, he will not yield to those Republican demands.

Meanwhile, a senior defense official said if the sequester were

triggered, the Pentagon would soon begin notifying its 800,000 civilian employees that they should expect some furloughs — mandatory unpaid leave, not layoffs. It would then take some time for the furloughs to begin being implemented, said the official, who requested anonymity because the official was not authorized to discuss the internal preparations.

Lawmakers have until the new Congress convenes to pass any compromise, and even the calendar matters. Democrats said they had been told House Republicans might reject a deal until after Jan. 1, to avoid a vote to raise taxes before they had technically gone up, and then vote to cut taxes after they had risen.

## Library

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touching taxpayer funds.

"That's a lot of local support," Anderson said. "That just shows you how much they love and appreciate our small town library."

She said the Journal looks at books in circulation, program attendance, computer usage, library visits and per capita use.

The Hartington Public Library is centrally located in Cedar County and considers the northern half of Cedar County as the main area it serves. Currently there are 1,500 patron cards but most of the cards are for families. Anderson estimates there are 6,000 patrons who use library services, whether it be books, large print, interlibrary loans, copy and scanner service, audio and DVD rentals, eBook rentals through the Nebraska Overdrive program, children's programs, wireless Internet service, seasonal computer classes, a monthly book discussion group and a public meeting area.

The library can trace its roots back to 1914 when it was called a reading room. In 1915, the Carnegie Library was built. A new \$300,000 addition was completed in 1997 through grants and local contributions. The project included the addition of the Arlo and Ann Wirth Art Gallery, which adds a bit of uniqueness to the Hartington facility.

The Art Gallery plans six art shows a year, hoping to raise local awareness for visual arts. The board often reaches out to the Norfolk and Yankton arts associations to find local and regional artists to be in a featured showing. The board also offers presentations from the Humanities Council every year, along with groups and activities.

Working with UNL Extension is also a vital part of library services. Local UNL Extension Educator Jackie Steffen teaches Ag Literacy classes in the library once a month. The summer reading program attracts 175 students and some of the summer activities for older students are planned with the Extension office's help also.

Recently, the library won a new book drop container by entering a Facebook contest. Anderson said only seven libraries entered the contest and the only requirement was to get a lot of people to "like" a photo of the current book drop box. The staff entered a photo of the old book drop, which had a broken lock and was duct-taped together.

In the past 10 years, Anderson has been involved in writing grant awards amounting to almost \$70,000. The board realizes that keeping up with the latest in library trends will continue to meet the needs of its patrons.

The library likes to form partnership opportunities with outside resources to expand services. A recent local donation from the Dwight Burney Jr. family allowed the library to erect a gazebo on the grounds outside the facility, add eBooks to its growing collection and upgrade to a new automated card catalog system this past year. Three iPods have been added to the library's computer lab and, when school lets out for the day, all 19 computers in the lab are filled and extra laptops are handed out. There's also a movie night, a game night and Music Monday story hour, all of which bring children of all ages in the doors.

"Getting the kids in here when they are young so they grow to love books is what it is all about," Anderson said.

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