

# The 12 most - and least - popular people in Washington

## Panel will hunt for spending cuts

Aug. 7, 2011  
By **James Carroll**

In No Deal versus New Deal, Round Two, keep an eye on The Twelve.

Those are the lawmakers who will be on the “supercommittee” created under the deal last week that raised the nation's debt ceiling and made some initial spending cuts.

The committee's job will be to find \$1.2 trillion in additional federal spending cuts by Nov. 23. The House and Senate will have to vote on the panel's recommendations — up or down, with no amendments allowed — by Dec. 23. A final bill must be enacted by Jan. 15.

If the committee, officially to be called the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction, proves less than super and can't assemble a package of cuts, automatic reductions will kick in. Not incidentally, this would happen as the 2012 presidential campaign is in full-throated roar in Iowa and New Hampshire.

So take a deep breath, enjoy what is left of the summer, and prepare for the approaching mesocyclone, which has a very high probability of producing hail, heavy rain and tornadoes in the debate over the debt, the deficit, spending and taxes that is to come.

The supercommittee members have not been named yet. But congressional leaders — Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky.; Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev.; House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio; and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif. — have only until Aug. 16 to each pick three of their colleagues to serve.

I asked McConnell during an interview in his Capitol office last week who he had in mind for the committee.

“I'll let you know,” he said.

Speculation, of course, is all over the lot about the likely — and unlikely — six Republicans and six Democrats who will be charged with being the budgetary storm chasers. (That's the last weather metaphor.)

And there already is controversy — surprise! — because some congressional leaders are putting down markers on what will or will not be on the table. House Majority Leader Eric Cantor, R-Va., for example, told The Wall Street Journal that “the House won't support increasing taxes.”

On the other hand, Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., told the centrist group No Labels that the panel should put “everything on the table.”

More consternation comes from government watchdog groups that are seeing Washington lobbyists girding for the battle and telling reporters, anonymously, that they are readying a dozen campaign contribution checks to protect their clients.

McConnell, who played a key role in securing the debt ceiling deal, is putting a lot of faith in The Twelve.

The committee will be able to look at pretty much anything related to federal spending, from discretionary programs such as defense to entitlement programs like Medicare and Social Security and on to the tax code itself.

“This is not kicking the can down the road — this is this calendar year,” he said.

“I intend to appoint serious people who want an outcome,” McConnell insisted, adding that he believes Reid, Boehner and Pelosi share that intention. “We’re not going to put people on there to blow it up.”

The question, of course, is how Congress will deal with the people not on the committee.

## Whittling down the pile

It has been quite a while since we checked in on the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Program, the effort to reduce the nuclear, chemical and biological weapons in the former Soviet Union and its former satellites.

The program was created in 1991 by Sen. Richard Lugar, R-Ind., and former Sen. Sam Nunn, D-Ga. They have frequently been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, but that honor has eluded them so far.

Anyway, in May and June, the Nunn-Lugar program neutralized 68.4 metric tons of chemical weapons agent, built and equipped two biological monitoring stations and carried out five train shipments of nuclear weapons.

To date, the program has deactivated 7,599 strategic nuclear warheads; destroyed 791 intercontinental ballistic missiles, 498 ICBM silos and 180 ICBM mobile launchers; eliminated 155 bombers; destroyed 906 nuclear air-to-surface missiles; disposed of 670 submarine-launched ballistic missiles and 492 of their launchers; and gotten rid of 33 nuclear submarines capable of launching ballistic missiles.

Also gone: 194 nuclear test tunnels and 1,990.9 metric tons of Russian and Albanian chemical weapons agent. The program has secured 529 train shipments of nuclear weapons, improved security at 24 nuclear weapons storage facilities and set up 34 biological threat monitoring stations.

As we have mentioned previously, the Nunn-Lugar program removed all nuclear weapons from Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Belarus, once the third-, fourth- and eighth-largest nuclear powers.

## Taking the 'fifth'

Reps. Geoff Davis, R-4th District, and Ben Chandler, D-6th District, would like to tweak the tax code to help Kentucky's bourbon industry.

They have introduced legislation that would change how inventory costs are treated under federal tax laws. Because bourbon is aged and inventory costs must be carried for many years, Kentucky's famous product is at a competitive disadvantage tax-wise compared with distilled spirits that are not aged, the lawmakers contend.

“Bourbon is a signature Kentucky product throughout the nation and around the world. The bourbon industry supports thousands of Kentucky jobs, and this bill is an important step in leveling the playing field in the growing distilled spirits industry,” Davis said in a statement.

“We need to nurture the golden goose, not kill it,” Chandler said in a statement.

Also co-sponsoring the bill are Reps. Ed Whitfield, R-1st District; Brett Guthrie, R-2nd District; John Yarmuth, D-3rd District; Hal Rogers, R-5th District; Charles Boustany Jr., R-La.; Steve Scalise, R-La.; and Robert Wittman, R-Va.

The bill has been referred to the House Ways and Means Committee.

Reporter James R. Carroll can be reached at (202) 906-8141.