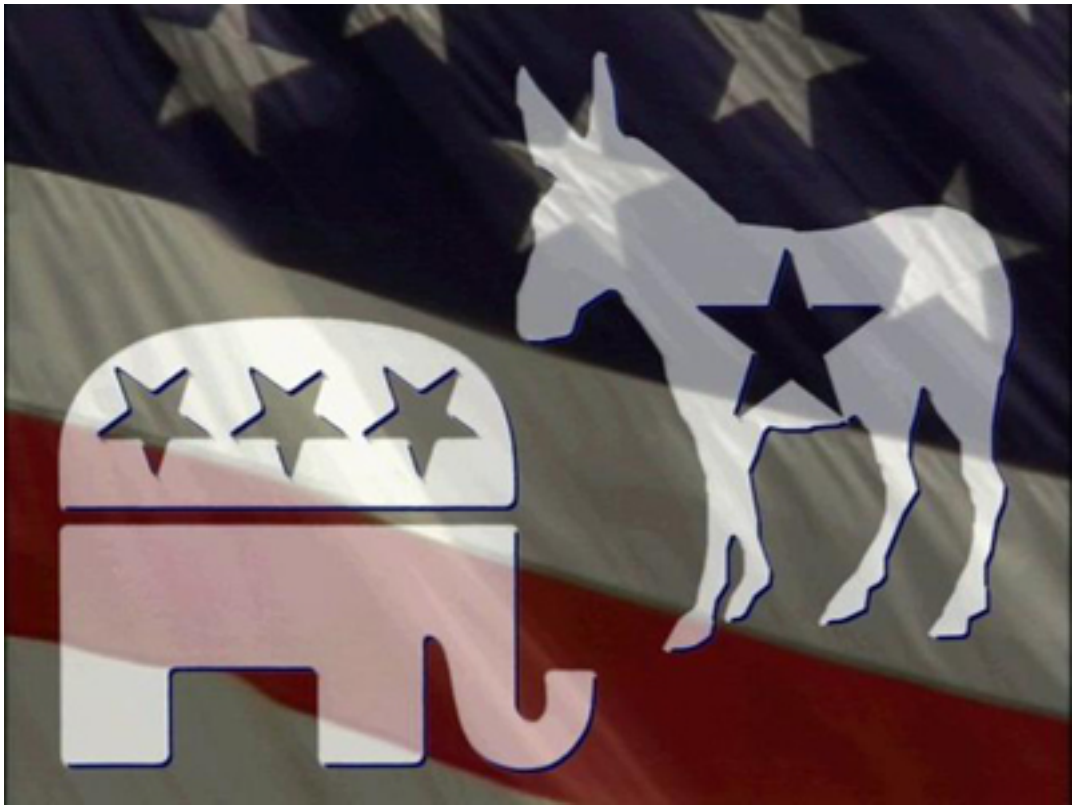

"It's not going to be simple to come to a deal," said Maya MacGuineas, president of the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget.

By IKE MGBATOGU

Contributing Writer

COLUMBUS – Barely weeks after President Barack Obama and congressional Republicans agreed on the much-debated debt ceiling issue, an important component of that agreement has already been implemented.

That cliffhanger agreement, which was reached just hours before the loomed deadline, raised the $14.3 trillion debt ceiling immediately by $900 billion, with future increases that could total up to $2.4 trillion. In sort of a trade-off, that money is to come from at least a $2.1 trillion reduction in the deficit over 10 years, which means cuts in spending.

The agreement came after a fierce and reproachful partisan brawl, and epic uncertainty that had the entire world on the edge. The Democratic led Senate approved the agreement by 74 to 26 votes and the Republican controlled House gave its imprimatur by 269 to 161 votes.

Part of the compromise agreement required the formation of a joint congressional committee within 14 days of the deal. That’s done. Appointments to the 12-member panel, which now goes by the moniker ‘the Super Committee,’ were completed last week. Its “super” assignment is to winnow through the landscape of government and one way or another identify more cuts to bring the deficit down by an additional $1.5 trillion.

And it comes with a tight deadline, too. The super panel is required to report back to Congress with its recommendations by Nov. 23. But most importantly, the agreement included specific guidelines to discourage the usual partisan roadblocks and congressional procedural lollygagging that often gets in the way of swift action.

For example, the group’s recommendations must be acted on by Congress by Dec. 23, just one month after they were submitted. Failure to act, by that deadline, would activate a trigger that would impose automatic spending cuts equally split between defense and non-defense programs. However, social security and Medicaid, noted areas of fierce partisan tinderbox in terms of funding cuts, would not be part of the automatic trigger cuts. Medicare will, though.

The 12 members of the ‘Super Committee,’ picked evenly from the GOP and the Democratic parties, were selected from the U.S. Senate and the U.S. House of Representatives by top leaders of each party.

Representing the Republican side on the panel are: U.S. Senators Rob Portman; Jon Kyle, Patrick Toomey, and U.S. House Representatives Dave Camp; Jeb Hensarling; and Fred Upton.

On the Democratic side, from the U.S. Senate are Senators Max Baucus; John Kerry; Patty Murray, and U.S. House Representatives Xavier Becerra; Chris Van Hollen; and James Clyburn.

"Because the work of this committee will affect all Americans, I called last week for its deliberations to be transparent; the committee should conduct its proceedings in the open," House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi said in an August 11 press release.

"It's not going to be simple to come to a deal," said Maya MacGuineas, president of the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget.

The Super Committee is set. Now comes the hard part: figuring out just what to cut to save $1.5 trillion.

As the group gears up to start the difficult parleys that lie ahead, one thing is iron-clad certain: the same compromise that produced the agreement that gave birth to the “Super Panel,” even as testy and messy as the process was, would be needed, if the group is to be successful in accomplishing its onerous task.

And members of the panel will go into these discussions knowing that the alternative to not coming up with recommendations would come in form of that dreaded “trigger.”