

# Optical Engineering

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## **Compromise**

Ronald G. Driggers



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Janis Joplin once said, "Don't compromise yourself; you are all you've got." I like her quote and I agree with it when it comes to how we treat ourselves, how we treat others, and how we see ourselves. Everything else in this world is negotiable and it should be. I like another quote by Winston Churchill, "The English never draw a line without blurring it." In this case, I would like to thank the English for making the world a better place.

I work for the U.S. Government where all of my subordinates and colleagues are hoping for compromise in our legislative branch. They, along with me, have been in a period of uncertainty with a third year of pay freezes and the pending furlough. I worry about our younger scientists and engineers who have moved to Washington, an expensive place to live, and have bought houses and automobiles and have young children who rely on their current income level. There is certainty this year that they will lose some significant portion of the income that was promised to them.

Our legislators have our best long-term interests in mind with one side wanting to increase taxes to reduce our massive debt and our yearly deficit and the other side wanting to cut spending to balance the budget. The overall views from both sides are important as the future of our children depends on their collective path forward. However, they have not been able to compromise over the past four years as we have not had a government budget over that period. Their beliefs are so different and so strong that there has been "gridlock" and no

progress on how the government should operate. The sequestration cuts this year were never supposed to happen since all government officials and even legislators expected that a compromise would occur. Now, there is acceptance of sequestration and the rest of this year will include abrupt layoffs, furloughs, and elimination of jobs and services, without a smooth transition into a strategy that is good for the country and the world. I hope I don't sound too negative here, as I still feel that I live in a great nation with lots of opportunity and freedoms.

So, why do I write about this in an *Optical Engineering* editorial? First, the near term is going to see many of my colleagues in the area of optics and optical engineering taking mandatory furloughs. Second, there will be cuts in many science and technology programs across government, industry, and academics as a result of the sequestration. Third, the current situation has already impacted not only SPIE, but also many science and engineering professional societies as travel and conference attendance by U.S. Government employees and contractors is extremely limited, and in some cases, nonexistent. This means that many of our bright, gifted scientists and engineers will not hear the latest progress or be able to discuss new breakthroughs and approaches with their colleagues this year.

To me, one of the signs of a great leader is being able to forge a good compromise. I have known people who have not been able to compromise and it has not only hurt them but it also hurt the people around them. The 2013 continuing resolution is complete and our legislators are working on a budget for 2014, but already there looks to be very little prospect for compromise. It is my greatest hope and wish that we and all of our leaders learn to compromise a little more as it will make our future more promising. I also hope that our leaders understand the importance of science and engineering in our society, and that it provides national security, spawns new industries and jobs, improves our health, and impacts our everyday lives.

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