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LAWMAKERS 'A DISGRACE'

From residents, growing feelings of fear, frustration, and disgust

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By Peter Schworm and Vivian Yee
Globe Staff / July 30, 2011

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From her front porch in Dorchester, Donna Meyers let loose a weary sigh meant for politicians in Washington, like a mother who's frustrated with her kids. Meyers, 60, doesn't usually follow politics closely. But during the protracted deadlock over raising the ceiling on the government's massive debt, she has followed every twist and turn.

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She hasn't liked what she's seen.

"It's unbelievable they can't figure this out," Meyers said. "The deadline is just a few days away, and it seems like they're getting further apart."

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With the crisis showing little sign of resolution and the threat of default looming, frustration welled to a bursting point yesterday across the region. Many of dozens interviewed said they had never been so disillusioned with the political process, and most bitterly derided elected leaders for bringing the country to the brink of economic calamity.

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"I think the lawmakers should be fired," said Peter Shea, 56, a Braintree resident who works in Boston. "They're a disgrace."

Shea said he supports substantial spending cuts to rein in the deficit and that the wealthy should also pay more in taxes. Like most observers interviewed, he said the solution seemed self-evident, if only both sides would meet each other halfway.

"This should've been resolved a month ago," he said. "There were more complex issues in the NFL strike."

Opinion on who deserved the brunt of the blame for the high-stakes standoff varied by party affiliation, with most people holding the Republican Party, particularly its Tea Party wing, chiefly responsible.

But across the political spectrum, people were alarmed that lawmakers had let the problem reach this point and that a situation that had been handled routinely in the past was now causing such turmoil, they said.

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"I have a hard time believing that they could let it reach this level and not take appropriate action," said Sally Ward, 57, of the South End.

Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner has said the government will reach its \$14.3 trillion borrowing limit Tuesday and will no longer have enough money to pay all its obligations, including Social Security and other entitlements.

That prospect had many older residents on edge, though most believed Congress and President Obama would ultimately reach a stopgap deal to keep the government running.

"Something will be worked out," said Roger Cox, a 79-year-old walking through Union Square in Allston. "But I'm extremely disgusted with all members of the House and Senate. They have a job to do, and they're not doing it."

Many castigated politicians for failing to find common ground on an issue so crucial to the country's economic well-being and urged them to set aside political considerations.

"Nobody wants to compromise," said Peter Obour-Mensah, 44, of West Roxbury. "But there comes a time when you have to compromise for the sake of the whole country."

Obour-Mensah said he has followed the developments almost hourly and worries the uncertainty is hurting the economy.

With the government's debt skyrocketing, the two parties have clashed over how to rein in the deficit. Many interviewed yesterday said they supported a combination of spending cuts and tax hikes and chided tax-averse Republicans for refusing to cede ground.

"I think it's a damn shame that 100 [Tea Partiers] are going to affect the fate of this country," said Brian Skinner, a 55-year-old Democrat from Allston. "All they care about is starving the beast - the government."

Yet many also noted that the government had to learn to live within its means.

Jason Gell, a 33-year-old real estate broker, said that means both sides have to give and take.

"The Republicans have a point that there are way too many entitlement programs," he said. "The Democrats have a point that we need to raise taxes and cut the loopholes for upper-class people."

But with both parties already jockeying for advantage in next year's election, many feared politics as usual would prevail.

"They're worried about their own political agendas without taking the rest of the country into consideration," said Larry Toney, 55, of Boston. "I feel like it's a game that's being played out."

With the country deep in debt and plagued by an often poisonous political debate, some said they had lost faith in the country's future.

"Right now I really think about going back to Europe," said Tom Danicki, a 37-year-old Polish immigrant who moved to Boston five years ago. "This is



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not the America I was dreaming about.”

For many, the debt negotiations were as abstract and confusing as they were troubling.

Kurtis Kurpeski, 24, of Dorchester, said he tried to keep informed but found it frustrating to follow all the maneuvering.

“It changes all the time,” Kurpeski said. “I don’t even know what to believe anymore.”

Gertrude Filon, 73, of Roslindale, had hoped the House plan would resolve the crisis but was disappointed when the vote was tabled Thursday night. Enough was enough, she said.

“It’s only talk, talk, talk,” Filon said, shaking her fist in the air. “We want to see action!”

Globe correspondents Sara Brown, Daniel Adams, and Matt Rocheleau contributed to this report. Peter Schworm can be reached at @globe.com. ■

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