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By Karen Langley

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As a special congressional committee approaches a deadline to propose deficit reductions, U.S. Rep. Charlie Bass has joined 39 fellow Republicans who say they are open to revenue increases as well as spending cuts.

The Republican House members joined 60 Democratic colleagues Wednesday in a letter encouraging the committee to seek about \$4 trillion in deficit reduction, far more than the \$1.5 trillion required by the deal that raised the U.S. debt ceiling this summer. Before pledging to support the committee, the members wrote that it needs to consider changes to both sides of the government balance sheet.

"To succeed, all options for mandatory and discretionary spending and revenues must be on the table," the letter says.

While Bass believes it would be bad policy to raise tax rates right now, he said in an interview yesterday, he said thinks the committee should consider all options, like eliminating tax deductions. "I don't want the committee to rule out revenues if they have a plan that brings this nation's debt under control," he said.

Bass declined to say how much he would like to see in revenue or cuts, but he said recommending only the required level of deficit reduction "will not satisfy the outside world's expectation for success in honestly addressing the disparity between revenues and expenditure."

The letter was not signed by the state's other congressman, U.S. Rep. Frank Guinta, also a Republican, who said in a statement that the country's finances have been wrecked by too much spending, not too little taxation.

"Our country's finances are a mess because we spend too much, not because we're not taxed enough," he said. "Runaway spending got us into this situation, and stopping it is the first step in getting out of it."

But he said Congress could raise revenue by lowering rates, broadening the tax base and repatriating U.S. money from overseas.

The agreement this summer to raise the debt ceiling, allowing the government, to borrow more money, also created the 12-member committee charged with finding \$1.5 trillion in deficit reductions over 10 years. The bipartisan committee is supposed to produce a deficit-reduction package by Nov. 23 for lawmakers to approve by Dec. 23. If lawmakers do not agree to \$1.2 trillion in deficit reduction, the government would automatically make up the difference with cuts to spending on the military and other programs.

Both New Hampshire senators have already joined colleagues in encouraging the committee to target at least \$4 trillion in debt reduction. In September, Sen. Kelly Ayotte, a Republican, and Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, a Democrat, joined 32 other senators in encouraging the committee to seek a broad bipartisan agreement that puts the debt on a downward path and focuses on major parts of the budget, including long-term entitlement reform and tax reform. The participants included 17 Republicans, 16 Democrats and an independent.

During the debt ceiling negotiations this summer, Shaheen advocated an approach that would cut spending, including defense and mandatory spending, as well as increase revenue. She said in a statement yesterday that Democrats and Republicans from both houses need to find a compromise to reduce the deficit and restore fiscal order.

"We need a comprehensive, balanced plan that looks at reforms to domestic, defense and mandatory spending, as well as comprehensive tax reform," Shaheen said.

This week, Ayotte signed a letter with 32 other Republican senators asking the committee to produce legislation that balances the budget within 10 years and reforms the tax code, in part by lowering rates. The letter also asks that entitlement programs are put on a path to fiscal solvency and that the nation avoids any further downgrade in its credit rating.

Ayotte said in a statement that she hopes the committee proposes reforms to entitlement programs. She said she opposes raising taxes but supports reforming the tax code to eliminate certain deductions and subsidies.

"Congress does need to overhaul our complex tax code to expand the base and lower individual tax rates, generating increased revenue through economic growth," she said. "I also support eliminating corporate tax loopholes and subsidies for special interests that do nothing to improve economic growth."

Bass said he hasn't considered the political implications of signaling an openness to revenue increases.

"I really ran to make big decisions, not to win elections," Bass said. He said if the committee produced a package that put the country "on a sustained path back to fiscal responsibility and it costs me the election next year, I'll die a happy man."

And state Republican Chairman Wayne MacDonald said he's confident Bass will listen to his constituents while assessing the final product.

"The fact that he's saying they should look at all options doesn't mean he's personally supporting a tax increase," MacDonald said. "I think he just realizes how important the whole deficit reduction effort is."