



Beltway Blog — Gardner, Coffman search for perfect debt ceiling porridge

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WASHINGTON — Republican Rep. Mike Coffman of Aurora would not vote to raise the debt ceiling if more revenues were coming in through tax reform — even if the overall tax rate was lower for virtually all Americans.

The pedantic “who’s on first” debate among the GOP here has been defining the exact meaning of a tax increase. If the overall tax code was lowered for everyone, but more taxes were coming in because, as part of tax code simplification, there were fewer tax write-offs, is that a net tax increase?

Anti-tax crusader Grover Norquist says it didn’t violate his “anti-tax” pledge. Coffman, when pressed, says yes.

“What I would vote for is tax reform,” he said Friday, before getting on a plane to go back to Colorado. “If the intent of it is a net increase in revenues, then I would vote no.”

Though most people — including Coffman — feel the consequences would be dire in failing to raise the nation’s borrowing limit next week, he doesn’t believe in any new revenues at all. Coffman chairs the Balanced Budget Amendment caucus in the House of Representatives and says he believes that route is the only way to fiscal sanity around here.

“We wouldn’t be in this position if it would have passed in 1995,” he said, referring to one-vote shy failure of the passage of a Balanced Budget Amendment.

In the meantime, since Coffman’s version of the Balanced Budget Amendment would still have to be ratified by more than 35 state legislatures, he would vote no on a debt ceiling increase if there was a dollar of revenue tied to it.

“It would likely pass. The Democrats would vote for it and some Republicans would vote for it, but I wouldn’t,” he said.

Rep. Cory Gardner, a Republican who dined with a group of GOP freshmen and House Speaker John Boehner a couple nights ago, was less hard and fast.

He declined to say exactly what it would take for him to vote yes on a debt ceiling increase next week — if there is indeed a vote next week.

Gardner said he wants spending cuts equal to the increase, but wouldn’t say over what period of time. He said he believes in tax reform, but stopped short of saying he abhors any revenue.

“I don’t have a number in my head,” he said. “I can’t say anything without seeing something in front of me.”

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