

Coburn supports plan that includes federal tax hikes

Sen. Tom Coburn has verbally supported a plan that cuts federal spending while raising some taxes because he is concerned about the fragility of the nation's finances.

Coburn, a fiscal conservative who supports smaller, more efficient government, seems willing to agree to tax hikes to avoid a crisis.

“Our debt crisis is a threat to not just our way of life, but our national survival,” Coburn said. “History has not been kind to great nations who borrowed and spent beyond their means. Doing nothing will, sooner rather than later, guarantee that this nation becomes a second-rate power with less opportunity and less freedom. The plan developed by the debt commission, while flawed and incomplete, will help America avoid this fate and secure freedom for future generations.”

Coburn and Sen. Mike Crapo, a fiscally conservative Republican from Idaho, will support the package proposed by the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility. Both serve on the 18-member commission.

“The time for action is now,” Coburn said. “We can't afford to wait until the next election to begin this process. Long before the skyrocketing cost of entitlements cause our national debt to triple and tax rates to double, our economy may collapse under the weight of this burden. We are already near a precipice. In the near future, we could experience a collapse in the value of the dollar, hyperinflation or other consequences that would force Congress to face a set of choices far more painful than those proposed in this plan.”

As of last week, the plan included an additional 15-cent-per-gallon federal tax increase on gasoline, reduction of the child tax credit (which means higher taxes for families) and a reduction in the deduction for mortgage interest (another tax hike for families).

“This plan will not just avert a disaster, but help drive the kind of economic recovery we need to create jobs and spur growth,” Coburn said. “The plan's provisions to lower tax rates while creating fairness in the tax code are similar to pro-growth policies supported by President Reagan. The plan also reduces discretionary spending and takes meaningful steps to preserve Social Security. Taking steps now to reduce our debt burden and slow unsustainable entitlement spending can help prevent massive and debilitating tax increases in the future. Finally, all of these steps will send a clear signal to investors that America is serious about getting its fiscal house in order.”

Coburn admits the plan is flawed.

“The plan does not do nearly enough to address the crisis in health care spending,” Coburn said. “Eighty percent of our debt problem comes from Medicare. This proposal takes some helpful

steps in the area of health reform, such as repealing the CLASS Act and reforming the Sustainable Growth Rate (the doc-fix), but Congress has to address Medicare's unfunded liabilities more aggressively. We also have to repeal the misguided health care law we passed last year, which will make our debt crisis even more severe."

Coburn insisted that limited government is still the answer.

"The real choice facing Congress and the American people, however, is not whether to support the commission's recommendations, but whether we will rediscover the wisdom of our founders and apply the principles of limited government written into our Constitution," Coburn said. "The debt problem is almost entirely the consequence of growing government far beyond our founders' intent. This plan is merely a down payment that will begin the process of reforming government at all levels."

Coburn said success will depend on Americans making sacrifices.

"As we begin this process with this plan, or a better plan, everyone in America should be prepared to sacrifice, beginning with politicians in Washington. Everything has to be on the table," Coburn said. "There can be no sacred cows. Our oath to the Constitution must trump our oaths to parties, interest groups and ideology. This challenge is a matter of national survival but we know America has faced great challenges before and emerged stronger and more prosperous. The good news is all of these problems can be solved. If we act now in the spirit of service and sacrifice that built this country, we can create a future that honors the tremendous sacrifice that came before us."

In the 1988 president campaign, former President George H.W. Bush said at the GOP National Convention, "Read my lips – no new taxes." After becoming president, Bush agreed to tax increases in the 1990 budget agreement with the Democrat-controlled Congress. When Bush lost to Bill Clinton in 1992, many blamed his reversal on the tax issue as the reason for his demise. A proposal within the plan to eliminate all itemized deductions is raising concerns in Oklahoma. Dr. Everett Piper, the president of Oklahoma Wesleyan University in Bartlesville (with a campus in Tulsa), sent a message to Coburn outlining his concerns.

"This is a major deal," wrote Piper. "If we eliminate 'all itemized deductions,' we are essentially turning over the privately funded social services of our country over to the government."

Piper said that would damage religious freedom and lead to the eventual closure of "Catholic, evangelical and other likeminded service organizations."

"Who is going to serve all the needy that will be abandoned if the Church is not there?" Piper said. "The government obviously."

Piper said he considers Coburn a "voice in the wilderness" and "a trusted leader."

But he said the elimination of itemized deductions would damage 90 churches, hospitals, the Salvation Army, OKWU, Wesleyan Christian School, American Christian School, Saint Johns Catholic School, United Way agencies such as Big Brothers and Big Sisters and the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts; and the homeless shelters and food pantries like The LightHouse Mission and Mary Martha Ministries in Bartlesville.

“It seems clear that if these above organizations cease to exist we would have a local crisis of unmitigated proportions with thousands of personal and community needs left unattended and unmet,” Piper said.

Also last week, the U.S. Senate by a 39-56 vote turned down an earmark ban proposed by Coburn.

“I’ll continue to offer this amendment until Congress ends this egregious practice once and for all,” Coburn said.

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