

Local legislators weigh in on debt-ceiling deal

Compiled by Emily Ann Holman

City Editor

emilyh@baledger.com | Posted: Wednesday, August 3, 2011 4:30 am

Broken Arrow's state senators and representatives shared their views on the debt-ceiling bill that would increase the nation's \$14.3 trillion borrowing cap while cutting spending over the next 10 years.

State Senators

Bill Brown, R, District 36

"I'm real frustrated with what's taking place as every American ought to be. Unfortunately, it is about compromise - there are times when you can hold to your principles but have to make a decision that's best for everybody involved. I have voted a way I didn't want to vote. There are times when you just have to make decisions and do the best you can with that. We don't have anybody doing that right now (in Washington). Our leadership needs to be more firm in how they handle the situation and what's going on.

It has serious consequences to Oklahoma. Our budget is between \$6 and \$7 billion on appropriations but \$24-\$25 billion a year for total income that comes in from the federal government in Medicaid money. So, it stands to hurt Oklahoma a lot if this isn't taken care of in an orderly manner. I think Oklahoma needs to pay close attention on what's taking place. Fortunately, we don't have some of the problems other states have. We had a good year this year on a very tight budget and I'm looking forward to this next year much more so than this past year because of the fact that our state is doing better.

But I don't understand when 70 to 80 percent of nation says they would like to see balanced budget amendment to the constitution why would they (Congress) be fearful of voting for it? The main reason is they want the control. They want to be able to control the budget and be able to spend whether they have the money or not."

Mike Mazzei, R, District 25

"As a conservative state senator, the current deficit-reduction deal is not the program I would favor. But since conservative Republicans only control 1/3 of the federal branches of government, it looks like a compromise deal we need to support. From there, we need to really focus on the 2012 elections as Republicans to get a president and a Senate that will focus on fiscal responsibility and getting our House in order after this public binge of spending that we just can't afford. Federal politicians should take a look at Oklahoma, where we not only balanced the budget this past year, but we made some very important financial reforms to reduce some of our long-term debts by over \$6 billion.

We had seven pension reduction bills reduce \$16 billion to \$10 billion (in pensions). We just wish the federal folks would do what we've been doing in Oklahoma. I personally believe there is a responsible way to engineer the federal budget while also protecting Social Security and the Medicare system so that the states aren't burdened with more costs than they already have. For example, if you look at what we did in Oklahoma for new people coming into the (pension) system - we raised the retirement age. It's not complicated, but politicians in Washington can't even bring in a deal with simple solutions to preserve Social Security and Medicare by making some very reasonable adjustments to the system."

State Representatives

David Brumbaugh, R, District 76

"It's not satisfactory for me. We're \$14 trillion in debt, and I was really looking for reform to our fiscal policy. I was more a cut, cap and balance guy, and this proposal doesn't have not enough spending cuts for me. The real problem is spending is out of control. We've set about \$2.4 trillion here and that's only 1/6 of the problem as far as the amount is concerned. When you look at the balancing of revenues and expenses by 2013, half of the money of this \$2.4 trillion will come out of security funding. That concerns me - taking money out of defense threatens our national security when there are entitlement programs and places we need to cap.

State side, I can see problems down the road because we're recovering from a recession and that affects bonds and the rate we pay as state. On the higher education side, when financial aid amounts are decreased, schools still need to operate and will charge increased tuition.

So at the end of the day, because our federal government hasn't been responsible, they always inevitably shift responsibility to the state. We've (the state) has closed one year of budget gaps, but we don't know what's coming down the pipe.

Mike Ritze, R, District 80

I'm cautiously optimistic. I think definitely the deal at hand they really should have, from a conservative perspective, gotten more up front. To me, they're putting a lot of faith in the bipartisan committee that's going to meet - more of the same postponing than what's going on in stalling. They're postponing the inevitable - we're going to have another crisis coming up here at the end of the year. That's just my humble observations, but they're kicking the can down the road. We're spending way too much federally than we take in.

(In Oklahoma), what really bothers me is we have a balanced budget amendment, but we didn't balance it. We just borrowed from future generations from bonds and emptied the rainy day fund - what's that's going to do? Highways now are going to be thrown off and completions (of construction) are another two years away. We're heavily reliant on federal funds for all the primary areas of government - education, health care, Department of Transportation roads and bridges, and Corrections. We only appropriate \$6.7 billion. There's probably at least 3 or 4 times that we don't even know where it comes from. Granted, it comes from the federal government through stimulus funds and loans, but we don't have our hand in anything to do with that.

I think we could have, as a state government, done a lot better. We had a golden opportunity and could have really looked at some serious cuts, but we ended up increasing bond and indebtedness and robbing the rainy day fund and reserve. For a \$500-million deficit. We borrowed \$250 through bonds. When you drain the goose that laid the golden egg, you'll see the economy slipping back further.