

[By Nicole Gaudiano](#)

As the country moves closer to its default deadline, Rep. Peter Welch of Vermont is leading Democrats in revisiting a “clean” increase in the borrowing limit.

His proposal would raise the debt ceiling by \$2.4 trillion — and do nothing else — before the government is expected to run out of money to pay all its bills Tuesday.

Republicans oppose the plan, saying any increase in the debt limit must be coupled with spending cuts of at least the same amount.

Welch said his bill, with more than 100 co-sponsors, would serve as a backup plan to avoid a default if Democrats and Republicans don't reach agreement on other options before Aug 2. House Democratic leaders, including Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi of California, signed a letter to their colleagues urging them to cosponsor Welch's bill.

"All of us who sponsored this bill are going to demand the opportunity to go on record in favor of a clean debt ceiling so that people can hold accountable those members who are willing to default versus those who are willing to pay the bills," Welch said during an interview Thursday.

Bills whose only purpose is to raise the debt limit have been routine in Congress.

In their letter to fellow Democrats, Welch and 13 other Democrats say they support continued efforts to reach a bipartisan agreement on reducing deficits.

But Republicans say Welch's plan avoids the problem.

"After all the negotiations and proposed bills, (Democrats) ... will want NO CUTS," Paul Lindsay, spokesman for the National Republican Congressional Committee, said in a release Thursday. "Think about that today as you hear Democrats attempt to say that they are serious about addressing our nation's debt crisis."

The House was set to vote Thursday evening on a proposal by House Speaker John Boehner of Ohio that would cut spending by \$917 billion over the next decade, but Boehner postponed the vote, presumably to ensure his proposal had enough support to pass.

At 10:30 p.m., CNN reported that House Majority Whip Kevin McCarthy of California announced there would be no vote Thursday night.

Welch said he will oppose the bill because it would raise the debt ceiling only through the beginning of next year instead of sometime after the 2012 election, forcing another debt-ceiling vote soon.

Welch also said Boehner's plan likely would trigger a downgrade of America's credit rating, which could cost the country an extra \$100 billion annually in interest payments.

"It maintains the instability," he said.

Even if Boehner's bill passes the House, it has no chance of passing the Senate. All Democratic senators and two independents — Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont and Joe Lieberman of Connecticut — have said they will oppose it.

Similarly, a plan by Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid of Nevada that would cut \$2.2 trillion over the next decade is unlikely to pass in the House.

Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt. said he supports Reid's plan, though he would like it more if it included new revenue.

Sanders has not said how he would vote, although he said on the Ed Schultz radio show that the Reid proposal is a "very bad plan" that would cut \$900 billion in discretionary spending and cause "a lot of pain for people."

Sanders said during an interview Tuesday with Gannett that, "the Republicans have been absolutely obstinate in saying the wealthiest people in this country and large corporations should not contribute one nickel to deficit reduction while there should be massive cuts in Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, education and programs of great importance to working families. I would hope that at this late moment they will understand that that is not what the American people want and that they are prepared to compromise."

Welch said Democrats need to accept some cuts to favored programs, and Republicans need to agree to increase tax revenues. That's what Vermonters are telling him, he said.

Vermonters were among the many who bombarded congressional offices with phone calls Tuesday in response to President Barack Obama's suggestion that Americans lobby their lawmakers to compromise on a deficit reduction deal.

"Our switchboard was overloaded," Welch said. "The common refrain was compromise."