

The House's rabble-rousing Republican freshmen and tea partyers have loudly refused to cut a deal as the GOP battles President Barack Obama over the government's debt. Yet when it's time for John Boehner to hunt votes for whatever accord he reaches with the White House, the House speaker will have a large pool of veteran GOP lawmakers to target.

**"Some of us have seen this movie,"** said **Rep. John Campbell, R-Calif.**, a four-term member who said he wants to remain flexible.

**"We know where it could go and all the things that could happen. I'd expect some of the freshmen don't, and I don't blame them. When I was new at this, I didn't know, either."**

Rep. Doc Hastings, R-Wash., chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee, said he believes whatever deal Boehner reaches seems likely to include two GOP achievements: significant spending cuts and no tax increases.

"That's good," he said. "But it's not over yet, and we need to let the negotiation process play out."

**Campbell's** and Hastings' attitudes contrast with many of the newer, younger members, who express little willingness to bend. Many campaigned on the theme of slashing the size and reach of government and say the debt-limit showdown provides rare leverage because of the pressure on Obama to avoid presiding over an unprecedented federal default after Aug. 2.

"Those who haven't passionately pushed these issues are the ones who've been around here a long time," said freshman Rep. Jeff Landry, R-La. "They are the ones that have a tendency to want to stay here. I'm not interested in my next election."

The distinct views underscore a generational divide among Republicans when it comes to the debt-limit fight. Though it won't be easy, it is congressional veterans and committee chairmen, whose loyalty House leaders rely on, who seem likeliest to supply Boehner with the bulk of the votes he will need for whatever compromise he can broker.

That was illustrated Thursday by a letter sent to House GOP leaders by 86 Republicans. It called on Boehner to refuse to even allow a vote on a fallback proposal by Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., that would make it easier for Obama to extend the debt limit. The letter was signed by more than half of the 87 GOP freshmen and just one committee chairman \_ Rep. Jeff Miller, R-Fla., who heads the House Veterans' Affairs Committee.

The letter's chief author, freshman Rep. Joe Walsh, R-Ill., said he considers its signers the minimum number of opponents to McConnell's plan. Even so, it highlighted the number of potential votes Boehner may be able to find among Republicans, since more than 150 of them did not sign it \_ a group top-heavy with veterans and chairmen.

"Probably experience," House Appropriations Committee Chairman Hal Rogers, R-Ky., in Congress for 16 terms, said when asked why so many seasoned lawmakers are remaining open to a deal. "It is wise at this stage of the game to have every option on the table."

Boehner, R-Ohio, said Thursday that while he expects some Republicans to reject any compromise to avoid a default, "I do not believe that would be anywhere close to the majority."

On Friday, he said no deal is near but that any agreement will emphasize the GOP aim of serious spending cuts \_ a goal that has party-wide appeal.

"I'll just assure you that whatever comes to the floor will meet that test," Boehner told reporters.

The math he faces is simple. A bill to extend the government's authority to borrow money, perhaps loaded with trillions in spending cuts, will need 217 votes to clear the House, which has two vacancies. Boehner has 240 Republicans.

Getting to 217, though, won't be simple. An unknown number of Republicans \_ estimated by lawmakers and lobbyists to be at least 40 and potentially dozens more \_ are considered certain to oppose any deal because they want more deficit reduction than seems politically achievable. Boehner is likely to need support from scores of Democrats, but he will need to supply the bulk of votes himself.

Defectors are considered likeliest to come from among the 87 GOP freshmen and from those who owe their elections to tea party voters. There are 60 Republicans listed as members of the House's tea party caucus, including 14 freshmen.

Yet, eager to avoid primary challenges from conservatives next year, even some veteran Republicans may be reluctant to support a deal.

"If the word on the street is that Boehner cut a horrible deal and taxes are being raised, and conservative bloggers and talk shows begin hammering people, you could have a run on the bank" and large numbers of Republicans may defect, said Rep. Steven LaTourette, R-Ohio.

LaTourette, elected in the Newt Gingrich-led GOP class of 1995, the rebels of their day, said new Republicans don't realize that by denying support to Boehner, they force him to bargain with Democrats, thus producing a less favorable deal from the GOP's perspective.

"Going back to '95, I probably signed a lot of stuff I shouldn't have signed," LaTourette said. "There's a learning curve."