

Oklahoma Rep. Tom Cole made news by breaking ranks with fellow Congressional Republicans this week by saying he supported President Barack Obama's proposal to extend middle-class tax cuts before addressing other "fiscal cliff" issues.

But Orange County's GOP congressmen are waiting to see how negotiations develop before taking positions, not ruling out additional tax revenues and holding off on specific ultimatums of what they would want in return from Democrats.

"This is complex and there are so many moving parts," said **Rep. John Campbell**, R-Irvine. "

I don't want to put myself in a box and later regret it. House members are reluctant to get out in front of this. They don't want to necessarily preclude anything."

Lawmakers have until Jan. 1 to come up with a plan to address the national debt, or Bush-era tax cuts will expire and automatic spending reductions will take effect.

Obama has called on Congress to extend middle-class tax cuts now and then move to the issues of program cuts and tax breaks for the wealthy — tax breaks Obama wants to allow expire. But most Republicans aren't ready to approve only the middle-class tax cuts as it could limit their bargaining leverage for other aspects of the year-end budget adjustments.

Beyond that, House members sound open minded. Rep. Ken Calvert, R-Corona, whose district includes Coto de Caza, San Clemente and San Juan Capistrano, shares House Speaker John Boehner's view that closing tax loopholes is preferable to ending tax cuts for the wealthy. But like other county House members, he hasn't ruled out an end to such cuts.

"I am not going to speculate or delve into hypothetical situations about particular aspects of the ongoing discussions between our leadership and the White House," Calvert said.

"I have faith that the House Republican leadership, especially Speaker Boehner, will negotiate a

deal that will be in the best interests of the American people – one that curtails spending, especially on entitlements to ensure their solvency for future generations.”

Those entitlement cuts are key to a deal, said Rep. Ed Royce, R-Fullerton.

“A compromise will rest on ironclad verification that the spending cuts are real,” Royce said.

Campbell said Medicare is at the top of his list for reform, followed by Medicaid and Social Security — although he said that list is not set in stone. Unlike many Republicans, he also supports significant cuts to defense spending.

“There’s as much waste in defense as there is in some of the welfare programs,” he said.

All five of the county’s Republican House members have signed Grover Norquist’s pledge not to support tax increases. But none said they felt constrained by that pledge.

“I think that tax hikes are absolutely the wrong thing to do,” Campbell said. **“But you have to look at the entirety of what you’re voting on and decide whether it is the best way to move the country forward given the circumstances. My ideology guides my thinking, but it does not replace my thinking.”**

Rep. Dana Rohrabacher, R-Costa Mesa, pointed out that the Bush-era tax cuts are set to expire without action from Congress — that even if Republicans go along with such a plan, it would not require them to vote for a tax hike.

“If taxes go up in the country, it’s not because Congress votes to raise taxes,” he said.

The county’s sole Democratic Congress member – until the end of the year, when redrawn

district lines will add two more – was firm in her support for Obama’s approach to the fiscal cliff. But like the Republicans, she noted many details need to be worked out.

“I strongly support raising tax revenues for the top two percent of income earners, while reducing taxes for middle-class families,” said Rep. Loretta Sanchez, D-Santa Ana. “I am willing to consider additional methods of generating necessary revenue, but I will need to see a final proposal before making any decisions.”