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Ribble shows leadership on debt

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U.S. Rep. Reid Ribble, R-Appleton, distinguished himself twice last week.

First he joined 99 other House members — including Reps. Ron Kind, D-La Crosse, and Tom Petri, R-Fond du Lac — in calling for a responsible agreement to ease America's borrowing binge.

"All options for mandatory and discretionary spending and revenue must be on the table," the bipartisan group wrote last week in a letter to Congress' "supercommittee," which is struggling to find at least \$1.2 trillion in savings by Thanksgiving.

Then Ribble snubbed Grover Norquist, whose Americans for Tax Reform has pressured most Republicans in Congress to sign pledges rejecting any and all tax increases.

Ribble had signed the pledge while campaigning for the Fox Valley seat in Congress he won last year. Ribble now says he won't sign the pledge again, letting his constituents know his new position before his re-election bid next year.

"I want to be intellectually honest with the folks back home," Ribble told the Los Angeles Times on Friday. "I'm no longer signing any pledges to anybody. I'm not going to sign it next year."

Good.

Norquist has taken his anti-tax pledge to a ridiculous extreme, insisting that ending seemingly any tax loophole or deduction — no matter how excessive or outdated — represents a tax hike.

Ribble said he's still opposed to raising tax rates. But that shouldn't stop Congress from rolling back tax breaks that no longer make sense. For example, Ribble said, a tax loophole for ethanol producers should be closed, which would increase revenue to help pay down debt. Ribble also has called for ending subsidies to oil and gas companies.

And just as more Republicans need to drop their purist attitude against any and all moves to boost revenue, so should more Democrats stop scaring the public about reasonable ways to slow the soaring cost of entitlement programs.

Ribble is showing a lot of leadership for a freshman House member.

His congressional colleagues from Wisconsin should show more, too.