

The Washington Post

[Back to previous page](#)

rtis-e

Nancy Pelosi names her picks to 'supercommittee,' completing 12-member debt panel

By [Paul Kane](#) and [Felicia Sonmez](#), Updated: Thursday, August 11, 11:03 AM

House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi on Thursday filled out the final three slots on the joint deficit committee by selecting three members of her leadership team to the panel.

Pelosi (D-Calif.) chose Reps. James E. Clyburn (D-S.C.), Xavier Becerra (D-Calif.) and Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.), giving the panel the highest-ranking African-American and Latino lawmakers in Congress with Clyburn and Becerra, respectively. Pelosi reiterated her call for Congress to consider "the grand bargain" of major entitlement cuts matched with increased taxes.

"We must achieve a 'grand bargain' that reduces the deficit by addressing our entire budget, while strengthening Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security. Our entire Caucus will work closely with these three appointees toward this goal, which is the goal of the American people," Pelosi said. "Because the work of this committee will affect all Americans, I called last week for its deliberations to be transparent; the committee should conduct its proceedings in the open."

Clyburn is the No. 3 Democratic leader and Becerra is the No. 5 member of her leadership team. As the top Democrat on the House Budget Committee, Van Hollen is an adjunct member of leadership and previously spent four years as the party's campaign strategist as the head of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee.

The three House Democrats complete the 12-member panel, which must turn in its recommendations for \$1.2 trillion in additional spending cuts by Thanksgiving or risk pulling an automatic trigger for deep cuts to federal agencies and defense programs.

Of the 12, ten voted for the [debt-ceiling deal](#) that rescued the country from the brink of default, which suggests at least the possibility that the 12-member panel will be able to reach a bipartisan agreement on future spending cuts. The two panel members to oppose the debt compromise are Becerra and [Sen. Patrick J. Toomey](#) (R-Pa.).

The other eight members of the panel are Republican Sens. Jon Kyl (Ariz.) and Rob Portman (Ohio), Republican Reps. Jeb Hensarling (Tex.), Dave Camp (Mich.) and Fred Upton (Mich.), and Democratic Sens. Patty Murray (Wash.), Max Baucus (Mont.) and John F. Kerry (Mass.). Murray and Hensarling are co-chairs.

On Wednesday, following the lead of Senate Majority Leader Harry M. Reid (D-Nev.), House Speaker John A. Boehner (R-Ohio) and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) [announced their picks](#) for the new panel.

"The lawmakers I have appointed to serve on this joint committee are proven leaders who have earned the trust and confidence of their colleagues and constituents," Boehner said in a statement.

On Tuesday, Reid praised his picks for their "expertise in budget matters, a commitment to a balanced approach and a track record of forging bipartisan consensus."

The question now is whether this group can draw on its combined 180-plus years of congressional experience to forge an agreement or whether it will end up gridlocked in a manner similar to other special fiscal panels established to solve the nation's economic woes. Budget experts rendered a split verdict about the group's chances, with no one doubting the panel's credentials.

Even the "supercommittee's" most junior members, the freshman senators Toomey and [Portman](#), have 18 years of combined experience in the House before joining the Senate in January. Portman has also done two stints in Republican White Houses, including as President George W. Bush's director of the Office of Management and Budget.

"The truth is, you've got a lot of IQ points," Steve Bell, senior policy analyst at the [Bipartisan Policy Center](#), said of the selections. Bell said that he was "pleasantly surprised" by most of the panel picks and that there was a "50-50 chance" the emerging group could craft a sweeping bipartisan pact similar to the "grand bargain" that President Obama sought to close the budget deficit.

Other budget experts were more pessimistic about the panel's chances of finding steep spending cuts.

James Horney, a fiscal policy specialist at the left-leaning [Center on Budget and Policy Priorities](#), placed the odds of the committee's producing a big agreement at less than 25 percent. He said the appointees were the sort of dealmakers who could foster a broad pact only if party leaders loosened the reins, particularly if the Republicans are to accept increased tax revenue as part of the discussion.

"If there's a desire to take a different approach, these are people who could try to work together and get things done," Horney said.

The committee is the by-product of the bipartisan deal approved last week that allowed Obama to increase the nation's debt ceiling by \$900 billion this year. The deal made next year's increase contingent upon the special committee finding at least \$1.5 trillion in savings over the next decade.

There are six members from each party, and a minimum of seven votes are needed to approve a final report, which would be issued before Thanksgiving. The panel would send the plan to the House and Senate floors for fast-track votes by Dec. 23.

Failure to approve a report would result in an automatic reduction of \$1.2 trillion in federal agency spending, equally drawn from security programs and those that benefit the middle class.

After Boehner and McConnell released their picks Wednesday, Republicans slammed Reid's selection of Murray as the panel's co-chairman. As chairman of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, Murray is the chief fundraiser and campaigner for Senate Democrats in the 2012 campaign cycle. Her counterpart, Sen. John Cornyn (Tex.), chairman of the National Republican Senatorial Committee, said her position would give outside interest groups the feeling that "the pathway of influence on the deficit reduction committee runs through the coffers of a campaign committee."

Democrats rejected that argument and pointed to Murray's nearly 19 years of Senate service, including senior positions on the Appropriations and Budget committees.

Liberal environmental groups criticized the appointment of Upton, chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, slamming his close ties to the oil industry, whose tax breaks have been marked for possible elimination in recent debt talks.

Overall, the lawmakers selected have a mixed record of forging compromise.

None were part of the bipartisan ["Gang of Six" in the Senate](#) that proposed nearly \$4 trillion in federal savings through a mix of cuts to federal agencies, entitlement reforms and increased tax revenue. Three of the supercommittee appointees — Senate Finance Committee Chairman

Baucus; Hensarling, the co-chairman of the panel; and House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Camp — have opposed a similar bipartisan plan that was prepared last year by [a fiscal commission](#) appointed by Obama.

In 2005, Baucus led the Democratic opposition to GOP efforts at reforming Social Security, an issue that Republicans want to revisit. In 2008, Hensarling played a lead role in opposing the Wall Street bailout, helping to bring down the first vote on that legislation.

Baucus and Camp have already been at work, along with Treasury officials, on bipartisan tax-reform issues. Upton is a [bona fide moderate](#) who had to beat back a “down with Upton” campaign from a tea-party-affiliated group to claim the committee chairmanship last winter.

Portman, as a House member a decade ago, forged alliances with some Democrats on the Ways and Means Committee to approve pension-reform plans.

© The Washington Post Company