

## Raleigh, NC -

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### Business Section

Suppose you were reminded every month that it would take 54 years to pay off your \$8,000 credit-card balance at 18 percent interest if you only paid the monthly minimum.

Then suppose you also were told that such a payment plan would end up costing you \$22,931.52. Would that change the way you think about debt?

U.S. Rep. David Price, a Democrat from Chapel Hill, hopes it will. That's partly why he introduced a bill last month to make credit-card companies disclose more about the costs associated with making only the minimum monthly payment. "I think there is a lot of evidence that too many Americans are getting in over their heads in credit-card debt," he said.

"In the end, it's the people's responsibility to avoid that. But there is also the question that they are being lured into this by some over-aggressive marketing and lack of good information about what is required to keep themselves out of too much debt."

High energy and borrowing costs have made it harder for people to pay monthly credit-card bills on time, the American Bankers Association said. The group said recently that an all-time high of 4.81 percent of accounts were 30 or more days past due in the April-to-June period.

What's next? Price plans to write letters to colleagues to solicit co-sponsorship and help. The bill mirrors a version in the Senate that was introduced by Sen. Daniel Akaka, a Democrat from Hawaii.

What are the bill's chances? Price declined to make any predictions but said there is plenty of time to get the bill approved before Congress adjourns next year.

What does the credit-card industry think about the legislation? The industry doesn't like it. Tracey Mills, a bankers association spokeswoman, said it would be too difficult to calculate the information each month because interest rates and other fees vary over time. She also said that it would be an expensive process.

Price begs to differ: "I think it could be easily computerized. They would be adding to information already printed."

The bankers association also calls the law unnecessary. Mills said the aim of Price's bill -- to decrease debt -- is already being addressed by a recent law requiring companies to increase the amount of minimum monthly payments.

How big a problem is debt? About 35 million households are behind or over the limit on one of their credit-card accounts, said Chris Viale, president and chief executive of Cambridge Credit Counseling Corp., a nonprofit in Agawam, Mass. "That's equivalent to one out of every five households," he said. The average monthly balance for those who carry credit-card debt from month to month is about \$15,000, he said.

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