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NEW TAMPA -- U.S. Rep. Gus Bilirakis returns this week to Capitol Hill with a clear message from area constituents. Stop the bickering and start finding ways to create jobs.

The sentiment was shared by members of the New Tampa Chamber of Commerce who sat down with the congressman last week for a discussion on ways to improve conditions for small business owners.

"We should get the ball rolling to stimulate the economy then (focus on) other big decisions," said Gary Gunter, co-owner of Gunter and Gunter Insurance of New Tampa and Wesley Chapel. "If we don't get the economy going, everything else is going to be worst."

Gunter was among a handful of New Tampa chamber members invited to attend a small business roundtable with Bilirakis, a Palm Harbor Republican whose U.S. congressional district includes New Tampa.

Karen Frashier, the chamber's executive director, said she extended the invitation to chamber members who own or serve as the corporate executive officer of a business staffing five to 50 people. Five members attended, including Tampa City Councilwoman Lisa Montelione.

The chamber hosted the gathering Aug. 30 at the Tampa Palms Golf and Country Club as part of the congressman's listening tour throughout Florida's 9th District in August. The U.S. Congress is back in session on Capitol Hill today.

"I think the bottom line is jobs," Bilirakis told the chamber group. "I have been visiting small businesses and individuals everywhere, and they have all been saying jobs, jobs, jobs."

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