

# Republicans bail on budget talks, blame Democrats

By David Espo  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON—Republicans pulled out of debt-reduction talks led by Vice President Joe Biden with a flourish on Thursday, blaming Democrats for demanding tax increases as part of a deal rather than accepting more than \$1 trillion in cuts to Medicare and other government programs.

“Let me be clear: Tax hikes are off the table,” said House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio.

Boehner spoke shortly after the House GOP second-in-command, Majority Leader Eric Cantor, announced he would not attend a planned negotiating session and said it is “time for President Obama to speak clearly and resolve the tax issue.”

White House spokesman Jay Carney quickly obliged, while announcing that the talks were “in abeyance.” He said Obama supports a “balanced approach” to debt reduction.

“I would point out that the president supports a balanced approach,” Carney said. “He does not support an approach that provides for a \$200,000 tax cut for millionaires and billionaires paid for by a \$6,000 a year hike in expenses and costs for seniors.”

Numerous officials have said in recent days that Obama and Boehner would soon take a more public role in the negotiations, as time grows short for confronting politically vexing questions over taxes and Medicare and other benefit programs.

## Talks not jeopardized

As a result, it appeared that the day’s events marked an eruption of political maneuvering rather than a blow-up that would jeopardize the success of negotiations.

In general, the negotiations are aimed at producing legislation to cut future deficits while simultaneously lifting the \$14.3 trillion limit on Treasury borrowing.

Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner has said that without an increase in the debt limit by Aug. 2, the United States faces a first-ever default, with potentially catastrophic consequences for the economy.

Carney told reporters that Boehner had met unannounced with Obama on Wednesday evening at the White House. It was the first known encounter between the two men since their widely publicized round of golf last weekend.

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— Jay Carney, White House spokesman



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House Majority Leader Eric Cantor, R-Va., meets with reporters in his office June 13 on Capitol Hill in Washington. Cantor said Thursday that Democratic demands for tax increases have brought budget negotiations led by Vice President Joe Biden to an impasse and that he’s pulling out of the talks.

Nor was it likely Democrats were taken by surprise by the day’s events, since Cantor informed Biden of his plans before making any public announcement.

## Boehner not informed

Adding to the intrigue, one GOP leadership aide said Cantor did not inform Boehner of his plan to withdraw from the talks until shortly before he did so. Nor was Cantor aware that Boehner’s trip to the White House the evening before, this aide said.

For his part, Cantor said the secretive Biden-led talks had “established a blueprint” for agreement on significant cuts in spending, but had reached an impasse because of the Democratic demand for taxes.

Sen. Jon Kyl of Arizona, the other Republican participant, also said he would not attend the scheduled session, and Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell spoke in unusually biting terms of Democratic demands for new government spending as part of a debt-reduction deal.

“What planet are they on?” McConnell wondered aloud.

While accepting a need to raise the debt limit, Boehner has said that deficit cuts must exceed the size of any increase in borrowing authority — a position that neither Obama nor any other Democrat has challenged.

The president and Biden were meeting with House Democratic leaders at the White House when Cantor made his announcement.

One of the Democratic negotiators, Rep. Chris Van Hollen of Maryland, said at a news conference that Republicans “are playing with fire and really putting the very fragile economy at greater threat by playing the games that we’ve been seeing.”

# Poll: Bachmann, Pawlenty gain momentum in GOP field

By Nancy Benac and Jennifer Agiesta  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON—Republicans are starting to pay more attention to the candidates who hope to take on President Barack Obama next year, and so far that’s been a good thing for Michele Bachmann and Tim Pawlenty.

For Newt Gingrich, not so much.

Overall, a new Associated Press-GfK poll shows, Republicans are giving the field of challengers a so-so assessment as interest in the race increases. And, with growing doubts among Americans that Obama deserves re-election, Democratic interest in the GOP field is significant, too.

Bachmann, a three-term congresswoman supported by many tea party members, enjoyed a big boost in her favorability rating among Republicans after she turned in a smooth debate performance this month and joined the presidential race.

Former Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty also made progress with Republicans, particularly among tea party supporters. GOP field leader Mitt Romney, the former governor of Massachusetts, held steady in the eyes of Republicans — but gained no ground — with the formal launch of his campaign. Former House Speaker Gingrich, who announced his campaign five weeks ago, wasn’t feeling the love.

The Georgian’s favorability rating among Republicans plunged in one month from 61 percent to 43 percent as his campaign was plagued by massive staff defections, abysmal fundraising and reports that he and his wife had racked up huge bills at luxury jeweler Tiffany’s.

Gingrich did the logical thing in response: dismiss the importance of early political handicapping.

In an appearance this week, he noted that if early conventional wisdom had been accurate, Hillary Clinton would have won the Democratic nomination for president in 2008, not Barack Obama, and Rudy Giuliani would have been the GOP nominee, not John McCain. There was plenty for political spectators to watch in the past month as GOP candidates moved themselves in — and out — of contention, and more Republicans tuned in: 71 percent of Republicans surveyed said they had a great deal or quite a bit of interest in the contest, compared with 65 percent in May and March.

That isn’t necessarily translating into enthusiasm, however.

“There’s no dynamite person,” said 66-year-old Rich McGough, of Mount Gretna, Pa. But McGough allowed that Bachmann offers some “pizazz,” and Romney and Texas Gov. Rick Perry, who’s considering joining the race, also would be solid choices.

Republicans can take comfort that satisfaction with the GOP field rose. Fifty-two percent said they were satis-

## Other poll details

**Romney still in control:** Republicans still give Mitt Romney the highest favorability rating among announced candidates, at 61 percent. Sarah Palin, who’s keeping everyone guessing about her intentions, is holding steady, too, with a 63 percent favorability rating.

**Big increase:** Michele Bachmann’s favorability rating jumped from 41 percent to 54 percent among Republicans. A third still have no opinion about her, and it’s too soon to tell if her boost will endure or was a June phenomenon.

**Improved visibility:** Jon Huntsman, who announced his candidacy this week but still is relatively unknown nationally, had a 23 percent favorability rating among Republicans. He’s gotten better known — 59 percent had no opinion about him in the latest poll, down slightly from 66 percent a month earlier. But the result was an increase in those with an unfavorable opinion, from 11 percent to 17 percent, with a greater uptick among tea party supporters.

**Gaining strength:** Tim Pawlenty, one of the first to get into the race, saw his favorable ratings rise 10 percentage points to 43 percent. His support among tea party backers was up 11 points.

**Note:** The poll was conducted June 16-20 by GfK Roper Public Affairs and Corporate Communications. It involved landline and cellphone interviews with 1,001 adults nationwide and had a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 4.1 percentage points. The survey included 429 Republicans, and that subset had a larger, 6.2 percentage point margin of error.

fied with the slate this month, up from 41 percent a month earlier. And satisfaction was highest among those who were paying the closest attention.

Overall, Americans are about evenly divided on whether Obama deserves re-election — 48 percent say yes, 47 percent no — and that could be driving broader interest in the GOP nomination race.

Among all those surveyed, 59 percent said they were interested in the GOP contest. But just 39 percent were satisfied with the Republican field of candidates. Among independents, 57 percent were dissatisfied.

The expected GOP field has done considerable shifting this spring, gaining Bachmann and former Utah Gov. Jon Huntsman while losing Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour, former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels, and businessman Donald Trump.



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