

## Boehner Halts Talks on Cuts, and House G.O.P. Cheers

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WASHINGTON — Speaker [John A. Boehner](#), the man who spent significant portions of the last Congress shuttling to and from the White House for fiscal talks with [President Obama](#) that ultimately failed twice to produce a grand bargain, has come around to the idea that the best negotiations are no negotiations.

As the president and Congressional Democrats have tried to force Mr. Boehner back to the table for talks to head off the automatic budget cuts set to take effect on Friday, Mr. Boehner has instead dug in deeper, refusing to even discuss an increase in revenue and insisting in his typical colorful language that it was time for the Senate to produce a measure aimed at the cuts.

“The revenue issue is now closed,” Mr. Boehner said Thursday, before the House left town for the weekend without acting on the cuts and a Senate attempt to avert them died. Mr. Boehner said the dispute with Democrats amounted to a question of “how much more money do we want to steal from the American people to fund more government.”

“I’m for no more,” he said.

While the frustrations of Congressional Democrats and Mr. Obama with Mr. Boehner are reaching a fever pitch, House Republicans could not be more pleased with their leader.

“We asked him to commit to us that when the cuts actually came on March 1, that he would stand firm and not give in, and he’s holding to that,” said Representative Steve Scalise, Republican of Louisiana and chairman of the conservative Republican Study Committee. “I think Friday will be an important day that shows we’re finally willing to stand and fight for conservative principles and force Washington to start living within its means. And that will be a big victory.”

Representative Mick Mulvaney, a South Carolina Republican who was elected on the 2010 [Tea Party](#) wave and has had his differences with the speaker, was similarly complimentary toward Mr. Boehner.

“He’s doing exactly what he said he was going to do, and I think it’s working to our favor and to his,” Mr. Mulvaney said. “I get the feeling that our party is probably more unified right now than it has been at any time in the last several months.”

Mr. Boehner, in some ways, finds himself the leader of the House Republicans with nowhere to actually lead.

Among those who placed him in his post and could conceivably remove him, the test of his leadership seems to be how little action he takes. In a closed-door meeting and subsequent news conference this week, Mr. Boehner said the House was done negotiating over spending cuts until the Senate “begins to do something.”

Mr. Boehner began the new Congress on shaky footing, a seemingly chastened man. Speculation swirled that he might not be able to hold on to his speakership (he did), and he was forced to pass two major pieces of legislation — a last-minute New Year’s Eve deal to avert automatic tax increases, and a [Hurricane Sandy](#) relief bill — without the support of the majority of his conference through the help of Democratic votes. On Thursday, Mr. Boehner again moved a piece of legislation through the House without majority support from his rank and file — the Violence Against Women Act.

The result showed that conservatives seem willing to give him some running room on social issues as long as he holds firm on the fiscal front.

Amid clamoring from his more conservative members, Mr. Boehner eventually reaffirmed his own conservative principles, abandoning even the pretense of reaching a bipartisan solution on the spending cuts. He argued that the president had gotten his desired tax increases in the earlier showdown. And he promised no more one-on-one negotiating sessions meetings with Mr. Obama, whose political fortitude he questioned publicly and privately.

Mr. Boehner was set to meet Friday at the White House with the president and bipartisan Congressional leadership but made clear Thursday that the ball for now was solely in the Senate’s court.

The stalemate was foreshadowed at the Republican retreat in Williamsburg, Va., in January, where Mr. Boehner and his leadership team promised that in

exchange for passing a short-term [debt ceiling](#) extension, they would force the Senate to pass a budget, as well as allow the spending cuts to go into effect.

“I think he realized the president of the United States was using him as a tool for his own benefit and was not actually in a partnership with him, and he also realized that we in the House were not happy with what was coming out of those negotiations,” said Representative Raúl R. Labrador, Republican of Idaho. “We were pretty blunt with him and the entire leadership team that we have to feel like we have a plan and a vision, and we’re following up on that plan and that vision.”

Representative Jim Jordan, Republican of Ohio, said that on the whole, he thought the spending cuts were a welcome development for which Mr. Boehner deserves credit.

“If, in fact, we’re going to scale back discretionary spending by \$85 billion, tell me when that’s ever happened before,” Mr. Jordan said. “Certainly not in the time I’ve been in Congress. So even though we’d have preferred it be done a little different and we’re open to flexibility, we want that savings, and we’re going to achieve it.”

Republican aides say privately that Mr. Boehner sees no need to negotiate; Republicans are in a good place, they argue, because they want spending cuts and those cuts are happening. But Mr. Boehner’s tough-guy stance has also opened him to criticism that he has negotiated himself into a position from which he can no longer effectively negotiate.

“John Boehner consistently paints himself into a corner and traps himself on cliffs, and that’s been the story of the speakership,” said Representative Steve Israel, Democrat of New York and chairman of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee.

Though Mr. Obama’s public events in recent days have seemed intended to highlight what he says will be the impact of the spending cuts and to shame Republicans into negotiating a deal, House Republicans have stood their ground, saying they are done negotiating until the Senate passes its own spending cut legislation. (House Republicans have passed two alternative spending cut bills, though both were in the last Congress).

For Mr. Boehner, the consequences of allowing the sequester to take effect could be less damaging than the consequences of going back on his promise not to allow any new tax revenues.

“I don’t quite honestly think that Speaker Boehner would be speaker if that happens,” Senator Ron Johnson, Republican of Wisconsin, told Fox News recently.

But for now Mr. Boehner seems not only to have engendered the good will of his conference but also to have locked in place the spending cuts Republicans have been fighting for.

“That’s a big win, to finally stand firm on cutting spending,” Mr. Scalise said.