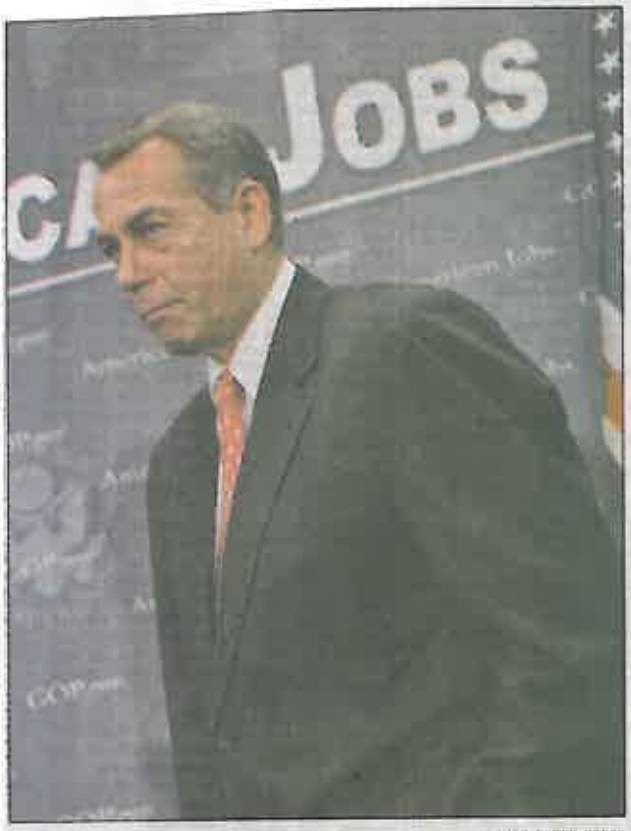
Fiscal cliff efforts ongoing, Boehner offers plan



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Speaker of the House John Boehner, R-Ohio, joined by the Republican leadership, speaks to reporters about the fiscal cliff negotiations with President Obama following a closed-door strategy session Tuesday at the Capitol in Washington.

BY JIM KUHNHENN AND JULIE PACE
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama and House Speaker John Boehner pushed ahead on negotiating a broad deal to avert the "fiscal cliff," even as the GOP leader readied a backup plan Tuesday to pressure the White House with little time left to avoid a double hit on the economy.

With exactly two weeks to automatic tax hikes and spending cuts, Boehner offered a measure, dubbed "plan B," that would cancel tax increases due to take effect Jan. 1 on everyone earning $1 million or less, while allowing tax increases on those earning more than that amount.

Boehner insisted that his plan would address the burgeoning deficits and that the president has failed to produce a balance plan in weeks of post-election negotiations.

But the speaker's alternative was a non-starter with the White House and Democrats, and perhaps more damaging to its prospects, got a frosty reception from rank-and-file House Republicans in a morning closed-door meeting.

"The president is willing to continue to work with Republicans to reach a bipartisan solution that averts the fiscal cliff, protects the middle class, helps the economy, and puts our nation on a fiscally sustainable path," White House spokesman Jay Carney said. "But he is not willing to accept a deal that doesn't ask enough of the very wealthiest in taxes and instead shifts the burden to the middle class and seniors."

GOP aides said the leadership strategy is to pass the alternative plan in the House and send it to the Senate. There, Republicans would use their clout to block Democratic alternatives.

Even as he offered his alternative plan, Boehner indicated that negotiations with Obama continue on avoiding the fiscal cliff. Economists inside and outside the government have warned that the combination of spending cuts and tax hikes could stall a weak recovery and threaten a new recession.