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Vote on Boehner Plan Delayed Amid Opposition

By JENNIFER STEINHAUER and CARL HULSE

WASHINGTON — House Republican leaders were forced on Tuesday night to delay a vote scheduled on their plan to raise the nation's **debt ceiling**, as conservative lawmakers expressed skepticism and Congressional budget officials said the plan did not deliver the promised savings.

The pushback on the bill was the latest chaotic twist in the fiscal fracas on Capitol Hill, as the clock ticked closer to Aug. 2, when the Obama administration has warned that the nation risks defaulting on its bills. The scramble to come up with a plan that could be put to a vote, now moved from Wednesday to Thursday, represents a test of Speaker **John A. Boehner's** ability to lead his restive caucus. The expected showdown over the legislation is the culmination of months of efforts by **Tea Party**-allied freshmen and fellow conservatives to demand a fundamentally smaller government in exchange for raising the federal borrowing limit.

Mr. Boehner rolled out a two-stage plan on Monday that would allow the \$14.3 trillion federal debt limit to rise immediately by about \$1 trillion in exchange for \$1.2 trillion in spending cuts. The plan tied a second increase early next year to the ability of a new bipartisan Congressional committee to produce more reductions.

The plan was met with skepticism — and in many cases outright rejection — by several conservative House members who said its savings did not go far enough. [President Obama](#) and most Congressional Democrats also have rejected the proposal, saying it is only a short-term solution and could lead to market uncertainty and instability.

Mr. Boehner's troubles piled up late Tuesday afternoon when the nonpartisan [Congressional Budget Office](#) said his plan would cut spending by \$850 billion during the next decade — about \$150 billion less than the \$1 trillion increase proposed for the debt ceiling.

Mr. Boehner was forced to quickly retreat from the bill. Republican leaders said they would probably rework it in a way that would reflect the decreased savings by raising the debt limit by less than \$850 billion. Such a change would mean that the Obama administration would need to make another request for an increase in a matter of months, making the deal even less palatable to Democrats.

“As we speak, Congressional staff are looking at options to adjust the legislation to meet our pledge,” Mr. Boehner said late Tuesday night in a prepared statement. “This is what can happen when you have an actual plan and submit it for independent review — which the Democrats who run Washington have refused to do.”

Almost as soon as Mr. Boehner introduced his plan, Republican party leaders faced a barrage of criticism that the cuts were not nearly deep enough.

Representative [Eric Cantor](#), Republican of Virginia and the House majority leader, tried to spur his members to support their leaders. Mr. Cantor told Republicans in a Tuesday morning meeting to “stop grumbling and whining and to come together as conservatives and rally behind” Mr. Boehner's plan.

But others argued the opposite case. Four Republican senators with Tea Party links wrote a letter to their House colleagues on Tuesday urging them to vote against the measure. The [Club for Growth](#), which scores members on their fiscally conservative votes, came out against the plan, as did other conservative groups including the [Heritage Foundation](#) and a coalition of Tea Party groups around the

country.

Some House members said they had already concluded that the bill was flawed.

“The burden of persuasion is pretty high,” said Representative Trey Gowdy of South Carolina, a Republican who does not support the bill.

The scramble for votes came on a day when the phone lines of lawmakers jammed with calls and lawmakers’ Web sites frequently shut down after President Obama’s plea on Monday night for Americans to call members of Congress and push for a compromise.

Dan Weiser, a spokesman for the House’s chief administrative officer, said the calls spiked at midday when members’ offices received about 40,000 phone calls — roughly double a normal hour’s call volume.

“I have had phone calls from constituents all across the Third District suggesting we raise taxes,” said Representative Steve Womack, Republican of Arkansas. “But this economy is too fragile.”

Senator Harry Reid, the majority leader, waiting to see how Mr. Boehner’s measure fares, has not brought his own debt legislation to the floor.

Mr. Reid’s proposal would raise the debt ceiling through 2012 and cut \$1.2 trillion from federal agency budgets and recurring programs like agriculture subsidies. Like some earlier Republican plans, the plan also counts about \$1 trillion in savings from winding down combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

“Speaker Boehner’s plan is not a compromise,” Mr. Reid said, after meeting with Senate Democrats, referring to the earlier version of the bill. “It was written for the Tea Party and not the American people. Democrats will not vote for it. Democrats will not vote for it. It’s dead on arrival in the Senate, if they get it out of the House.”

Before Mr. Boehner postponed the vote on his measure, the White House had sent a two-sentence

message to Congress, saying that if the Boehner bill landed on Mr. Obama's desk, "the president's senior advisors would recommend that he veto this bill."

Although Wall Street analysts and some Republicans expressed doubt that time would really run out on Aug. 2, leading to a possible default, the White House said that Treasury's estimate of the deadline was not a charade.

Treasury Secretary Timothy F. Geithner "has exercised all the wiggle room available to him," said Jay Carney, the White House spokesman.

Moody's Investor Service warned **mutual fund** clients that the impasse was threatening money market mutual funds. "Direct risks include the potential for a missed interest or principal payment on government bonds for a short period of time, as well as incremental weakening of the overall credit quality of money-market fund portfolios that have U.S. government exposure," the ratings company, based in New York, said in a statement.

Sarah Wheaton, Jada F. Smith and Jackie Calmes contributed reporting.



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