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Fiscal cliff and Republican recovery: Has Boehner got it wrong?

By: Allen McDuffee - November 14, 2012

With an impending fiscal cliff on the heels of a solid Republican defeat in last week's election, one may have reasonably expected the compromising language House Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) offered over the last week.

"Rethinking and repositioning may well be necessary," according to Cato Institute's Michael Tanner, but he finds what House Speaker John Boehner has done nearly unforgivable.

The day after the election, Boehner said, referring to the election results, "That is the will of the people. And we answer to them."

"For purposes of forging a bipartisan agreement that begins to solve the problem, we're willing to accept new revenue, under the right conditions," he said.

But Tanner thinks Boehner's willingness to work with President Obama and Democrats has weakened his bargaining power. "[W]hat else does he have left to trade?" asks Tanner.

Boehner's willingness to give in so easily on revenues makes it less likely that there will be real spending cuts as part of any deal. We're likely to get more of the sort of smoke-and-mirrors measures that the president has already proposed, such as reliance on phantom savings from ending the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, double-counting cuts that were already included in last year's budget agreement, and the perennial promises to eliminate "fraud, waste, and abuse." Just look at how illusory the alleged spending cuts in last year's debt-ceiling deal turned out to be: In the twelve months following that deal, federal

spending actually increased by 3.6 percent, an average of \$11 billion more every month.

At a minimum, Speaker Boehner seems to have given up any leverage that he might have had to demand the entitlement reforms necessary for any long-term spending restraint. Having conceded on taxes, what does he have left to trade?

But it's not just the economy.

Following the election, in an ABC interview with Diane Sawyer, Boehner said, "It's pretty clear that the president was reelected," adding "Obamacare is the law of the land."

He has since taken to Twitter to harden his stance on the health-care law.