***Everybody Wants to be a Millionaire***

***By Mel Lavine***

*Special to the Times*

The G.O.P. leader in the House, John Boehner, seemed to open the door to a compromise on President Obama's tax-cut plan.  Boehner (no pun intended although his name is pronounced Bay-nar) has been the bane of Obama's existence, a Captain No of the party of no. But when asked Sunday by Bob Schieffer of CBS News if Republicans would hold the tax breaks for most Americans "hostage" to keep the lower rates for the wealthy, Boehner said:

"If the only option I have is to vote for some of those tax reductions, I'd vote for them."

In other words, he would let the Bush gift that keeps giving to the rich expire at the end of the year but keep the middle class tax cut.

Maybe, I thought, Obama's recent speeches to represent Boehner and Mitch McConnell, the Senate Republican leader, as the guard dogs of the wealthy at the expense of the rest of us were paying off.

But not so fast. Boehner's sidekick in the House, Eric Cantor, wasted no time calling for a bill that would not exempt anyone, rich or middle class, from a tax cut. On the same day McConnell introduced legislation in the Senate that would safeguard the tax cuts for the rich.

Did Boehner misspeak or was he telling us that he could vote for something that even Barack Obama supported? Was he feeling the heat from the president's efforts to say, in so many words, that Boehner and McConnell were out to rob the middle class to pay the rich? After all, a figure on the order of $700 billion in revenue "would be lost to the top 2 percent of earners in the next 10 years if their taxes do not rise," according to the New York Times.

Obama wants to keep the Bush-era tax for 98 percent of families who earn less that $250,000 but leave the top 2 percent to pay what they did before the Bush tax breaks took effect.

I'm writing this on Tuesday, but so far as I can tell no other prominent Republican in Congress has yielded an inch in the resolve to reject a compromise.

It doesn't make sense. The country is in desperate economic straits. People want jobs, homes, income and they are scared. And yet the Republicans reject compromise on legislation that represents a small step to spread the tax burden equitably. In an election year this would seem suicidal. But it's working. The political winds are at their back. The polls are predicting a G.O.P. sweep in November.

When I'm in search of logic, I sometimes turn to the Lady Friend. I don't know if her analysis makes sense, but she said, "People in this country think that if they work hard, keep their mouths shut, and play by the rules, they'll be rich. Everybody wants to be a millionaire and think they have a chance to be one."

*This column originally appeared on Sept. 16, 2010.*

*Mel Lavine was a television producer for many years with NBC News and CBS News in New York. Contact him at his e-mail address: mellavine@aol.com.*