

Seven of the eight Maryland representatives in Congress voted Thursday to make the tax cuts to the middle class permanent, with Republican Rep. Roscoe G. Bartlett voting against the bill, which passed 234 to 188.

The bill, the Middle Class Tax Relief Act of 2010, would make the tax cuts permanent for individuals who make up to \$200,000 and couples who earn up to \$250,000. The tax cuts were passed in 2002 and set to expire Jan. 1.

The House vote would give 98 percent of American taxpayers a cut, but would allow taxes to return to previous levels for the top 2 percent of wealthiest Americans.

Republican leaders in Congress described the House vote as having little chance of passing in the Senate, where Republicans have vowed to filibuster unless the measure also includes tax cuts for the wealthiest 2 percent. The Republicans accused the Democrats of underhandedness in bringing up the House vote under suspension rules that require a two-thirds majority for passage and forbid amendments.

A bipartisan commission has been negotiating with the White House on the tax cut issue.

Three Republicans joined with Democrats in support of the Middle Class Tax Relief Act, while 20 Democrats from the conservative Blue Dog caucus joined with the Republicans in voting against it.

Bartlett (Dist. 6) of Buckeystown, the lone Republican in the current Maryland congressional delegation, said in an e-mailed statement that he voted against the bill because "it is just plain wrong" to allow taxes to rise for more than 750,000 small business owners, while unemployment remains high.

U.S. Rep. Christopher Van Hollen Jr. (D-Dist. 8) of Kensington said the Republicans were using "small businesses as a smokescreen for their plan to protect this bonus break for the folks at

the top." Only 3 percent of small businesses in the nation would be impacted by the bill, Van Hollen said.

The bill also would permanently eliminate the marriage penalty tax and would extend child tax credits.

"The permanent extension of the middle-class tax cuts is an important victory in our fight for real, working families," said U.S. Rep. Donna F. Edwards (D-Dist. 4) of Fort Washington. "At a time when our economy is steadily recovering from deep recession, families in Maryland and around the country need reassurance that they will not have less money to spend on making ends meet.

"It is unfortunate that my colleagues on the other side of the aisle do not share this view. Instead, they are fighting to put \$700 billion worth of tax cuts for millionaires on the backs of our children and grandchildren."

Edwards said the fight highlights that Democrats are fighting for working families, and Republicans are doing battle for the wealthiest 2 percent.

The tax rate for the top 2 percent of earners will return to the rate under President Bill Clinton when the economy was doing well, Van Hollen said.

"Americans are also rightly concerned about the mounting debt facing our nation," said Majority Leader Steny H. Hoyer (D-Dist. 5) of Mechanicsville. "However, Republicans appear to be ignoring that concern, and instead are fighting to hold the middle class hostage so they can add \$700 billion to the deficit in tax cuts for the wealthy."

The bill now goes to the Senate, where Sen. Barbara A. Mikulski (D) of Baltimore and Sen. Benjamin L. Cardin (D) of Pikesville have said they support the middle-class tax cuts.

Cardin thinks tax cuts for the middle class would help get the economy moving, but that extending them to the wealthiest 2 percent would significantly add to the \$1.4 trillion federal deficit, said his spokeswoman Susan Sullam.

In an e-mailed statement, Mikulski said: "Families and small businesses are stretched and strained. They're facing uncertainty and a sluggish economy. That's why I support maintaining tax cuts for middle-class families and small businesses up to \$1 million."

New York Sen. Charles Schumer (D) has offered a compromise of extending the tax cuts for those earning up to \$1 million.

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