

As the House raced toward a vote to raise the debt ceiling, Speaker John Boehner told lawmakers Thursday that Republicans don't yet have the votes to pass the package, but predicted his leadership team would get the legislation across the finish line this evening.

"We do not have the votes yet," Boehner told a closed meeting of House Republicans Thursday morning in the Capitol, according to sources in the room. "But today is the day. We're going to get it passed."

And they're on their way.

Georgia Rep. Lynn Westmoreland, who met with House Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-Va.) Wednesday, told lawmakers the bill didn't have as much savings as he would like, but he will vote for the bill.

Rep. Mike Kelly (R-Pa.), a bulky former Notre Dame football player, gave a rousing football-themed speech and said he would vote for the bill. He told colleagues they needed to do three things: Put on your helmet, put in your mouth piece and tighten your chinstrap. He gave out signs with the Notre Dame football saying, "Play like a champion today."

"Let's kick the s--- out of them," Kelly said in the meeting, according to several sources.

GOP leaders also are showing more public confidence. In an interview with POLITICO Thursday, Cantor predicted a "strong vote in the House" and said Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) hasn't passed a bill yet.

"After today, Harry Reid is going to have two bills," Cantor said. "He's going to have the bill that we moved out, which is our optimum Cut, Cap and Balance, and now he'll have another bill, which is a compromise bill. There are things in it that he likes and the ball will be in his court at that point."

Cantor added: "I think we'll get the votes."

House Republican Conference Chairman Jeb Hensarling of Texas started the meeting on an angry note. He held up a copy of POLITICO and told his colleagues that "leaks" from conference meetings "are despicable."

The House will vote on the bill at about 5:45 p.m., well after markets close Thursday. GOP leaders and aides are predicting that they'll get it across the finish line.

Republican leaders also announced they would vote on two balanced budget amendments: one with a super majority requirement for raising taxes, and a separate vote on a so-called "clean" amendment without any tax requirements, similar to one that passed the House in 1995. That proposal failed by one vote in the Senate.

Reps. Mike Pence of Indiana and **John Campbell of California** announced their support for Boehner's plan in the morning meeting, two conservative votes that the speaker had to have in order to pass his proposal.

"My ideology drives me, but it doesn't overrule my ability to think," Campbell told his colleagues.

Pence, a former member of leadership, met with House Majority Whip Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.) Wednesday and pushed for the clean balanced budget vote.

"I'll gladly support the Boehner plan," Pence said in an interview. He told colleagues in the closed meeting that they have an "opportunity to make progress on fiscal discipline today, and we have an opportunity [to] make history tomorrow."

Rep. Steve Chabot (R-Ohio) also said Boehner admitted not being at 217 votes yet — the minimum number of votes needed to pass the House.

“I don’t think we’re there yet, but I think we will be,” said Chabot, who is backing the Boehner plan.

GOP leaders feel momentum has turned in their direction after the Congressional Budget Office released new estimates showing the Boehner plan reduces the deficit by more than the bill raises the debt limit. Republican leaders also spent much of Wednesday twisting arms and lobbying lawmakers to commit to a “yes” vote.

North Carolina Rep. Walter Jones, who voted against the GOP’s more sweeping Cut, Cap and Balance bill, said passing the Boehner bill keeps the speaker’s hand strong in the final negotiations.

“We want to make sure that our leader, Mr. Boehner, has a seat at the table,” Jones said. “I don’t know what would happen if we don’t pass the Boehner bill.”

Chabot also said it is important for the House to pass the bill and resist Senate attempts to modify or substitute a proposal by Reid instead.

“If the Senate doesn’t go along with this, I think the Senate is making a very big mistake for the country,” Chabot added.

While Boehner is still counting votes leading up to a vote, the Republican Conference seemed to be in a calmer place than it was Wednesday, when Republicans complained about being targeted by the conservative Republican Study Committee for supporting the Boehner plan.

A GOP aide said the mood in the room was far better than Wednesday’s confrontational session.

Indeed, some conservatives who don't love every part of the Boehner bill seem to be coming around.

Despite the momentum building on the Republican side, the conservative Club for Growth issued another warning Thursday morning that it still opposes the Boehner bill and would score the vote as a "key vote" in its ratings for lawmakers up for election.