He said "small business is the backbone" of the nation, and policies that bolster small business should be pursued more aggressively.

WASHINGTON (AP) -- Vice President Joe Biden said Wednesday the protracted policy fight between Democrats and Republicans in Washington is "not about bad guys and good guys," but centers on how best to keep the middle class growing in America.

Biden said the Obama administration has worked hard to strike deals with congressional Republicans on a wide array of issues, including steps to rein in the mounting federal deficit. But he added that time after time in talks he held with congressional figures in both parties, he was told little could be accomplished because of the wall of opposition from 86 conservative House Republicans.

The vice president said it seemed "like the tail is wagging the dog."

"This president came in with open arms" and said he was ready to sit down and talk, Biden said, only to be repudiated by conservative Republicans.

He denied that the White House renounced the recommendations of the Simpson-Bowles deficit-reduction commission, saying that while President Barack Obama didn't endorse the panel's findings "per se," he embraced many of the ideas contained in the report.

Biden said he wanted to take issue with "this idea that Simpson-Bowles is some kind of Holy Grail."

House Majority Leader Eric Cantor said the differences between the GOP and Obama are "stark" and said there will have to be significant work to overcome them.

"I don't think anyone wants to pay higher taxes," he said. The Virginia Republican said that Washington needs to "get out of the mindset" that the country's problems can be solved with new programs and expensive new initiatives.

He said "small business is the backbone" of the nation, and policies that bolster small business should be pursued more aggressively.