



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on February 11, 2011

Freshmen Force House Leadership to Cut More Spending

It is becoming increasingly obvious that the Republican leaders in the House of Representatives never really had their hearts in all their pre-election talk about shrinking government. Having vowed to cut \$100 billion from the Obama administration's proposed budget for fiscal year 2011, they were prepared instead to trim a paltry \$35 billion, arguing that on a prorated basis it works out to about \$74 billion for the year, still 26 percent less than their modest stated goal.



Fortunately, the election that vaulted John Boehner and company into power also sent a sizable contingent of more principled representatives, including those backed by the Tea Party, to Congress. Those congressmen proved unwilling to accept the leadership's clear abrogation of a campaign pledge, forcing them to come up with a new plan that achieves the promised \$100 billion in savings immediately.

House Majority Leader Eric Cantor of Virginia explained what happened thus: "The freshmen, who obviously are just in their first month of serving, want to make sure that this is a Congress that can earn the respect of the people that sent them here. And first things first and that is to earn the trust. And that means to deliver on your promises and that's what we do by this bill."

"In short," [writes Politico](#), "the plan for \$100 billion in savings includes \$84 billion in domestic discretionary savings and \$16 billion in defense cuts, which GOP leaders say would not have an impact on the troops." The report notes that those defense cuts "could still cause anger from outside Republican groups, in addition to the conservative Republican Study Committee," whose chairman "has insisted that cuts don't touch defense spending." Apparently a defense budget equivalent to the defense budgets of every other country in the world combined has no room for even the most minor reductions in the minds of some self-proclaimed conservatives.

[The New York Times explained](#) that "Republicans may still fall short of the \$100 billion target" because some of their proposed cuts were to come from administration requests for "significant increases that were never enacted." Still, if the House cuts even \$60 billion (out of a \$3.8 trillion budget), "some Republicans" say it "would be disruptive to government services," the paper reports. Horrors! We might have to shut down the New Deal-era [Rural Utilities Service](#)!

This episode "was the most concrete demonstration yet that the wave of fiscal conservatives who catapulted Republicans into the House majority is reshaping the political and policy calculations being made by the party leadership," according to the *Times*. Indeed, as the Gray Lady points out, it "was a



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significant complication for the new House leadership, which had hoped that their original proposal would mollify their membership while setting the stage for a compromise with the Senate and President Obama.” That is, the leadership wanted to give the *appearance* of cutting spending without actually doing so, preferring to have so little difference between the House and administration versions of the budget that little compromise would be necessary.

Instead, because of the new congressmen’s insistence on actual cuts, the House leadership now has a genuine battle on its hands with the Senate and the White House. However, the increased spending reductions should put the leadership in a better position to win concessions. A seller always opens with his asking price and then works downward to reach an acceptable bargain with a buyer, who at the same time is working upward. If the seller starts near the price the buyer already has in mind, there is little reason to expect the buyer to raise his offer. Of course, this assumes what is not in evidence, namely that the House leadership has any real intention of cutting spending in the first place.

While the GOP leadership is worried about haggling with the party to its left, some of the House’s more rightward members remain dissatisfied with the proposal. The *Times* writes: “Some want even deeper reductions, and others are insisting that any budget bill bar the government from spending money to carry out the new health care law — a provision certain to be summarily rejected by Senate Democrats and the White House.”

One of those demanding the defunding of ObamaCare is Iowa Rep. Steve King, who, reports the *Times*, “said he was inclined to oppose any measure if the health care law was spared,” proclaiming, “If we don’t fight on this ground, there will not be ground this good to fight on again.” King was one of the first congressmen to introduce legislation to repeal ObamaCare last spring.

Kudos to those congressmen who stood their ground and forced the timid Republican leaders to live up to their rhetoric. Expect many more such battles in the days to come: There are trillions more to be cut and hundreds of programs, agencies, and departments to be shuttered if you are to remain true to your word on the campaign trail and your oath of office. Just remember that you won this one, and you can win again.

Photo: Then-House Minority Leader John Boehner of Ohio unveiled the House Republican’s budget solution, back on March 26, 2009: AP Images



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