

Political success depends on the maintenance of at least the appearance of integrity. Voters will rightly punish any elected official they conclude has deceived them. So members of the new GOP House majority must take especially great care to live up to the Pledge to America that they revealed with such great fanfare in the fall campaign. Already the deals struck with the president at the end of last year put enormous strain on the idea that the Pledge really did constitute a promise -- the keeping of which could provide a measure of member integrity.

Many voices claimed the Pledge applied to the incoming Congress, not the one headed to the exits in disgrace. Perhaps, but the Pledge is now certainly fully in force. Here is what it said a GOP majority would do about spending, not just once, but twice, on Page 6 and again on Page 21:

"With common-sense exceptions for seniors, veterans and our troops, we will roll back government spending to pre-stimulus, pre-bailout levels, saving us at least \$100 billion in the first year alone."

So what was the total of "non-security" spending in 2008? The GOP leadership says \$387 billion. Fine. The budget being brought to the floor by House appropriators does not reduce "non-security" spending to \$387 billion, so House appropriators have broken their Pledge.

Even if the House reduces the non-security spending to \$387 billion, even then the Pledge's promise of at least \$100 billion in savings from 2010 spending won't be reached. That's strike two.

Strike three is the repeated attempts by various spokesmen for the GOP appropriators claiming that they are keeping the Pledge. This is actually the very worst thing about a deeply disappointing start to the new Congress. Candor is required. Lack of candor loses voters' trust, and that trust won't be easily recovered.

This is the situation the GOP House members, especially the freshmen, find themselves in this week. If they pass a budget that results in more than \$387 billion in non-security spending in fiscal 2011, and if they fail to cut at least \$100 billion from last year's spending levels, they will

have broken their Pledge.

Everyone knows the talk about cutting back from the president's 2011 request is a ruse, and an offensive, condescending one at that, a transparent dodge that says to Republican regulars, conservative activists and Tea Party volunteers alike that they are all easily tricked, too stupid to read and understand the contract they were presented, which said zero about the president's 2011 budget request as a standard.

The Republican members of the Appropriations Committee are begging for a primary challenge by employing this rhetoric. Now the question becomes which freshmen will join in the rush over the credibility- and career-damaging cliff.

There is a choice. Budget hawk **Rep. John Campbell, R-Calif.**, will offer two amendments this week that should be called "Pledge-keepers." The first mandates that no more than \$387 billion be spent on non-security appropriations. This is a must-vote for those concerned with keeping their promise to voters.

The second **Campbell** amendment offers one path to the Pledge's promised \$100 billion in savings -- via reductions in "security" spending (which does not necessarily mean Defense Department cuts). Some members might prefer to get to \$100 billion via deeper cuts in "non-security" areas, but getting there somehow is key.

This is the week the freshmen especially have to check their guts and their past promises. Many people are watching closely and won't forget. It wasn't the House appropriators who sent these new representatives to Congress, and the appropriators won't be able to explain away any credibility gap that opens this week to voters.

Voting for the **Campbell** amendments isn't just the smart political move, it is also the vote the country desperately needs as a signal of an opening of a new era, one not even the most disconnected Beltway incumbent can miss.