

Newt Gingrich's scathing criticism of Rep. Paul Ryan's (R-Wis.) budget has House Republicans peeved, with several lawmakers saying Gingrich is taking cheap shots at his fellow Republicans without putting out a Medicare plan himself.

A chorus of boos, critical emails and outright dismissals came Monday after Gingrich claimed that the Republican plan to reform Medicare was "right-wing social engineering."

"I was not thrilled when I read that in the Wall Street Journal this morning," said Rep. John Campbell (R-Calif.)

, a member of the House Budget Committee, who like most other Republicans, voted to pass the ambitious 2012 spending plan written by Ryan.

"... I was not thrilled with those remarks, and was rather disappointed with those remarks. Obviously completely disagree with those remarks."

Rep. James Lankford (R-Okla.), a freshman on the Budget Committee, said that "typically, you'll find people in a presidential campaign running against the current president of another party, rather than running against his own party."

Several Republicans chalked it up, essentially, to Newt being Newt.

That Republicans in the House are speaking publicly about a GOP presidential candidate and former House speaker indicates the frustration lawmakers have about someone with Gingrich's stature knocking down a plan that they labored hard to pass, and sell.

Ryan shot back on the Laura Ingraham show Monday, saying, "with allies like that, who needs the left?"

Republicans say they were largely blindsided by the comment, which came on NBC's "Meet the Press" Sunday. But some in Congress said they've heard Gingrich say this before. Campbell, a staunch conservative, said that the Georgian told a group of Republicans in a closed meeting

earlier this year that they shouldn't "be messing with entitlements."

Former Majority Leader Dick Armey (R-Texas), a Gingrich leadership partner turned rival, told POLITICO that it fits Gingrich's track record of being "confused and conflicted" on health care policy.

It also showed once again that there can be serious divisions between Republican 2012 hopefuls and the House GOP majority.

Former Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty, for example, called Speaker John Boehner's (R-Ohio) budget deal last month "not serious" and added that "the more we learn about the budget deal, the worse it looks." Not to mention Reps. Michele Bachmann (R-Minn.) and Ron Paul (R-Texas), who frequently vote against their leadership as they seek the Republican nod.

But as Republicans face a tenuous political environment that's largely controlled by the Democratic Senate and White House, harsh criticism of GOP policy could hurt as candidates seek congressional support.

"I'm not inclined to support somebody that makes our jobs harder rather than easier, personally," said Rep. Tom Cole (R-Okla.), a member of the Budget Committee and former Republican National Committee chief of staff who considers Gingrich a serious candidate. "I don't know what other people think."

Some in the young set, like Lankford, even say they don't have much in common with the speaker.

"Newt was the voice of the 1995 Congress, and he was out a lot and up in front of the cameras a lot and has a lot of ideas, and a lot of ideas are great," Lankford told POLITICO. "But I don't believe in all of his ideas."

Cole, who has known Gingrich for more than 20 years, called Gingrich's comments this time around "not helpful."

"[Ryan] has the only real plan out there that achieves the stated goals, saves the system, gets us back on a fiscally sustainable course," Cole said. "With all due respect to the speaker, he hasn't laid out a plan like that. As far as I know, none of the Republican presidential candidate have and the president of the United States hasn't, so Paul Ryan looks more like a leader than all of them put together."

Gingrich's criticism of the Ryan budget comes at a bad time for House Republicans, who are already taking some heat on the home front at town hall events for their vote to overhaul Medicare. In fact, Ryan was in Chicago on Monday giving a speech to an economic club there defending the plan.

Gingrich, though, is holding firm to the critique. His camp clarified the part of his statement that seemed to have him embracing an individual mandate for health care, but they're not letting up on the Medicare piece..

Rick Tyler, Gingrich's spokesman, told POLITICO in a phone interview from Iowa that the Georgian "has the most credibility in getting large-scale change" considering he led the GOP into the majority, balanced the budget, instituted welfare reform and passed tax cuts.

"So people can criticize him that he's offering advice, but if I were Republicans, with a track record like [Gingrich's], I would listen to Newt's advice," Tyler said.

This isn't the first time Gingrich has reared his head in House Republican politics.

During the first debate over government funding, Gingrich sent Rep. Steve King (R-Iowa) a note that made its way to the leadership-appointed Rules Committee, expressing support for a measure that would allow King to offer an amendment to defund the Democrats' health care law. It put off many in House Republican leadership, as they were opposed to King's amendment.

He also spoke to the House Republican freshmen in a closed meeting in the heat of the latest government funding debate. In fact, he emerged to tell reporters that he supported Ryan's budget.

"We are in a period of very big challenges, and we need very big solutions, and we walked through the smart ways to get a balanced budget, which fits the general direction of Paul Ryan," Gingrich told reporters, detailing the talk in the well-attended meeting.

Armey said his former House leadership colleague doesn't move votes in the chamber when he opines on the issues of the day, but "just annoys [leadership] because, I think, with Newt it's the fear that somebody might listen to him."

"It's typical of Newt to be whimsical," Armey said in a phone interview with POLITICO on Monday. "We always say: Newt always has so many great ideas. Well yeah, but then he shifts between them at such a rate it's pretty hard to track it let alone keep up with it."

Of course, Armey, who now runs the conservative FreedomWorks group, is hardly neutral. He was suspected to be part of a group that plotted a coup that failed to oust Gingrich from leadership.

"My view right now is he has joined the 'don't care' crowd," Armey said. "It isn't about the nation's health care — the nation's fiscal health care — it's about [Newt's] presidential race."