

[GOP House Candidate's Deficit Reduction Strategy: Merge Commerce, Agriculture and Interior Into Super-Department](#)

By [Jesse Zwick](#) 10/18/10 2:24 PM

Republican House candidates, especially challengers seeking to portray themselves as outsiders to Washington politics, are almost universally running on a platform that our federal deficit has gotten out of control. They're also almost all opposed to letting the Bush tax cuts expire, however, so they're going to have to propose a lot of cuts to government spending in order to live up to their promise of deficit reduction. How are they planning to do it?

Getting into specifics about the cuts you'd like to make is never a popular strategy for candidates on the campaign trail, which explains why most of the answers GOP candidates have given me — scrap the remaining stimulus package dollars, repeal the new health care law, bring non-defense discretionary spending back to 2007-8 budget levels — are pretty vague and insufficient for dealing with the magnitude of the problem. A couple of candidates, however, were willing to talk seriously about entitlement reform — and one got particularly creative.

Trey Gowdy, a Republican who beat Rep. Bob Inglis (R-S.C.) in the primary and is looking to win a seat in South Carolina's 4th district, informed me via his campaign manager that he'd like to consolidate the Commerce, Agriculture and Interior Departments into one agency in order to eliminate duplicative services. His plan wins points for novelty, but it's unclear what kind of impact it would have besides setting off a lot of bureaucratic turf wars. (Tad DeHaven, a budget analyst at the Cato Institute, likens it to "rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic.")

Also of note from Gowdy is "a BRAC-like commission to review federal assets that could legitimately be liquidated." It's a truly novel proposal — as far as I've heard — that's based on [a commission that was set up by Congress to review](#) the Department of Defense's recommendations to close several military bases. As to what other federal assets might conceivably go on the chopping block, Gowdy didn't elaborate.

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