

# Follow-Through Time

Posted 01/27/2011 07:03 PM ET

**Popular Rule:** A new Gallup Poll shows Republicans' popularity at its highest since 2005. Will the GOP treat that vote of confidence as a call to action or a license for complacency?

For the first time in over five years, Americans have a more favorable than unfavorable opinion of the Republican Party, according to a USA Today/Gallup survey of 1,032 adults, age 18 and above, conducted from Jan. 14 to 16. The poll showed 47% of Americans holding a favorable view of the GOP.

It ends years of being in the doghouse with a public that came to realize this was a party not standing for what it was saying.

All the way back in early 2004, with the country understandably more focused on the global war on terror than fiscal insurgency, the Cato Institute's Veronique de Rugy could complain of "The Republican Spending Explosion," as she titled a briefing paper.

"Republicans have clearly forfeited any claim of being the fiscally responsible party in Washington," de Rugy charged, as total outlays rose from 18.6% of gross domestic product in fiscal year 2001 to 20% by fiscal year 2004.

"Spending increases were generally about \$50 billion per year in the mid-1990s, but some recent increases have been three times that amount," de Rugy noted during that year of George W. Bush's re-election. "In fiscal year 2005, total outlays will be up an astounding \$547 billion from fiscal year 2001, when Bush came into office."

With Medicare, then as now, on track to fiscal doom, Republicans expanded the entitlement program to include prescription drug coverage.

So only those with short memories will believe that Republican big spending began with Bush Treasury Secretary Hank Paulson's \$700 billion TARP bait-and-switch stratagem in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis.

But the Gallup findings reflect a second chance the public is giving the GOP. The many new faces in Congress — like Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., and Rep. Tim Scott, R-S.C. — have convinced voters they mean business when it comes to reining in government, along with other things their party claims to stand for.

One early test will be rescinding funds already appropriated by the previous Congress to defund what's left of the Democrats' 2009 stimulus.

Keeping the GOP campaign promise of cutting spending by \$100 billion and returning to 2008 spending levels before Congress' continuing resolution expires on March 4 should be viewed as just a beginning, not an end, on the road to fiscal responsibility.

Beyond that, congressional Republicans must get to the real crux of our problems, as addressed in House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan's, R-Wis., "Roadmap."

Its bold ideas, like making Medicare permanently solvent by expanding tax-free Medical Savings Accounts, reforming high-risk pools, and giving states more flexibility, are real solutions to our economy's clear and present dangers.

Even if vetoed and defeated in the short term, forcefully proposing what is right will be recognized as the powerful leadership the public has long demanded — but, until recently, hasn't gotten.