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["Symbolic" Measures Have Real Meaning for GOP Freshmen](#)

Posted by Scott Conroy | [Email This](#) | [Permalink](#) | [Email Author](#)

As newly elected Republican members of the House of Representatives seek to make the transition from successful campaigning to effective governing, their party's leadership intends to roll out an initial agenda for the 112th Congress that some media reports have described as being largely symbolic.

After all, the proposal to cut legislators' budgets by 5 percent will make only a tiny dent in the federal budget, the vote to repeal the health care reform law is widely expected to be dead on arrival when it makes it to the Senate, and detractors dismiss the planned reading of the Constitution on the House floor as a publicity stunt.

But according to incoming Republican House freshmen and the small-government adherents who fueled their rise to power, these first steps that the new Congress plans on taking have real and potentially far-reaching implications.

Incoming Republican Rep. James Lankford (OK-5) said that his constituents elected him and his freshmen GOP colleagues primarily to downsize government and that the office budget cuts will make for an important first step, despite their relatively minor impact on the overall financial state of affairs.

"I think you start with the easy parts of it, and you begin to move to things more difficult as the session progresses," Lankford told RealClearPolitics in an interview on Tuesday.

Lankford did not share the view that the vote to repeal health care reform will be primarily symbolic in nature and said that it was a worthwhile endeavor to pass the repeal legislation in the House and try to compel senators to defend the law that they voted to pass.

Lankford was even more effusive in his defense of incoming House Speaker John Boehner's planned public reading of the Constitution.

"Honestly, as a freshman member, I was surprised that we didn't do that already - that there wasn't already a time to say, 'Let's review,'" Lankford said. "It's the classic argument that at the end of a bad football game, the coach pulls out the ball and says, 'Let's start over from the basics. This is a football.' And I feel like that's where we are

with Congress right now. We have been overspending, we've been overregulating, we've been running over the basics of the free enterprise system. It's time for us to say, 'This is the Constitution.'"

Writing in the [Wall Street Journal](#) on Tuesday, Cato Institute scholar Roger Pilon argued that the public recitation of the Constitution would "help get a debate going that for too long has been dormant."

"You have to distinguish between 'symbolic' and 'merely symbolic,'" Pilon told RealClearPolitics. "Of course, the left is claiming these steps are 'merely symbolic.' But symbolism is important."

Pilon said that the House's upcoming vote to repeal health care reform was poised to begin as a symbolic move, but he was optimistic that it would initiate a chain reaction that would lead to defunding aspects of the law.

"The point is to throw down the gauntlet, to lay a marker, and then to get the debate going over the fundamental constitutional question - namely do we have the constitutional authority to do so much of what we're doing today," Pilon said. "After this vote next week is taken, we will then get down to the detailed examination, part by part, of Obamacare with votes to rescind - and far more importantly - to defund those various parts."

Republican freshmen know that they ultimately will be judged on the results they produce, and not their initial outreach to their base. Their task for the next two years will be to balance the tactics that are at least somewhat designed to make a point with results-oriented proposals that are intended to produce concrete accomplishments.

In a statement to RealClearPolitics, incoming Republican Rep. Bill Johnson (OH-6) said that his party's initial agenda is shaping up to accomplish both feats. "These early votes and actions are practical measures that will show the American people that the 112th Congress got the message: stop the reckless spending and focus on getting our economy back on track," Johnson said.

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