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Jim Jordan: House Republicans' eager budget cutter

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By George F. Will
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The wrestling room at Graham High School in St. Paris, Ohio, where [Jim Jordan](#), now 47, began the athletic career that took him to the University of Wisconsin and two NCAA wrestling championships, contains this sign: "Discipline is doing what you don't want to do when you don't want to do it." Today, as a third-term congressman from Ohio and chairman of the Republican Study Committee, Jordan leads what looks like an ongoing insurgency to discipline his party's leadership in the House of Representatives.

The RSC is the caucus of the most conservative Republicans in the House. Its members are determined to find whether their party's frugality is operational or merely rhetorical. Jordan is serenely confident that those in the caucus mean what they say.

Recently, the RSC, which includes more than 170 of the 241 Republican House members and more than 70 of the 87 freshmen, told the party's House leaders - every one of them very conservative - that their proposed budget cuts were too timid. The RSC, which has produced a plan to cut \$2.5 trillion from federal spending over the next 10 years, [rejected the leadership's proposal to cut fiscal 2011 spending less than \\$100 billion](#). And the leadership bowed to the led. The RSC, which Jordan says "helps Republicans remember we're Republicans," is not the tail that wags the dog. It essentially is the dog.

So House conservatives aced their first test of their sincerity about spending. But will the dog take a big bite out of a sacred cow, such as farm subsidies?

Michael Tanner of the libertarian Cato Institute [notes that 24 of the RSC's members](#) are on the House Agriculture Committee and that farm income in 2010 was \$92.5 billion, 34 percent higher than in 2009. Even subtracting government payments, farm income was 28.8 percent higher than the average of the preceding decade. And 73 percent of all farm subsidies go to the wealthiest 10 percent of recipients. Jordan's district in west-central Ohio receives \$30 million in direct payments, putting it among the top 50 beneficiaries of such subsidies.

Asked about this, Jordan smiles like Albert Pujols watching the approach of a hanging curveball. He says that he recently met with some corn growers who were in Washington to try to protect their programs, including the ethanol fiasco, and he told them, in the nicest possible way, that he is all for ethanol - to the extent that the market pronounces it viable. But, he says, the government subsidizes its production, protects it with tariffs and mandates the use of it - and still it cannot thrive in this rigged market.

How did the corn growers take this? Jordan laughs: "They know I'm just one of those crazy conservatives."

His explanation of why he got into politics is a verbal shrug: "You get married and have kids" - he has four - "and you get sick of having the government take your money and tell you what to do. I'm just a conservative guy." And an athlete looking for a surrogate sport.

One of the surprising number of representatives who [sleep in their offices](#) (why rent an apartment, Jordan wonders, when Congress will keep him in Washington just six nights in February?), he is in politics partly because he is too old to wrestle and too young to dampen his ferocious competitive fires. To spend an hour with him is to understand that the 112th Congress is going to be tumultuous.

Jordan is an apple that fell far from the tree, but the tree has moved toward the apple. His father was a Democrat, a member of the International Union of Electrical Workers who retired at age 48 after 30 years with General Motors and now, at 66, is a successful Ohio businessman. He makes bows for bow hunters, votes Republican and listens to Rush Limbaugh.

Many Republicans will urge Jordan to run next year against [Sherrod Brown](#), Ohio's liberal freshman senator. Jordan is disinclined because it would limit his ability to attend his son's high school wrestling matches. Jordan's high school wrestling record was 150-1. The RSC's record in this Congress is, so far, slightly better. On March 4, however, the continuing resolution currently funding the government expires; next, the government's borrowing will bump up against the debt ceiling. Jordan is determined that the RSC, using both deadlines as leverage for spending cuts, will then still be undefeated.

georgewill@washpost.com

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