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Could It Have Been the Polls?

All but seven House Republicans voted for a budget plan last month that would eliminate Medicare's guarantee to the elderly. It was always bad policy. But now that the vote has proved to be wildly unpopular, the party is suddenly running in the opposite direction.

On Thursday, Dave Camp, a Republican of Michigan and the chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, [said he was no longer interested](#) in pushing a plan that could not win support among the Democrats who control the Senate. Speaker John Boehner said Mr. Camp was just being realistic. Representative Eric Cantor, the House majority leader, suggested the proposal would probably not be a part of the debt-limit talks that began Thursday [because President Obama "excoriated us"](#) for the Medicare plan.

These Republican leaders are trying to make it sound as if they were shocked by the Democratic opposition. In fact, their real surprise was how much bitter resistance the Medicare idea encountered among voters — the ones they claim share their fervent desire to dismantle much of the federal government.

For the last two weeks, Republican lawmakers fanned out to town hall meetings across the country to defend their vote, only to face waves of angry constituents. Opinion polls showed the same thing.

It's good that Republicans are willing to admit they made a mistake, but they're not doing so because

they have suddenly seen Medicare's virtues. The retreat is solely because they know they angered a politically potent electoral group: older Americans, not to mention those who are planning to become old. With Democrats poised to run attack ads on the subject, the Republicans decided that some spending cuts are not worth defending. The record stands, and those ads are still going to run.

Will the party also back off cuts it supported to Medicaid, food stamps, Pell grants and Head Start? It should. But we suspect it won't because the low-income beneficiaries of those programs are not their usual supporters and don't vote in the same large numbers. Republicans are happy to cut, as long as they don't anger the wrong people.



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