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What was left out of the GOP's 'Contract'?

NOVEMBER 30 — Not even a month has passed since the Republican landslide, and already the Stupid Party is starting to unravel. At the Republican Governors' conference last week, the chief executives muttered about what a blunder it would be for the new majority to get hung up on "cultural issues" — i.e., issues the voters were mainly worried about — and from deep within the Republican belly on Capitol Hill there rumbled similar sounds, all before the lowing herd of the 103rd Congress had even lumbered into oblivion.

What this noise of dissonance ought to tell us is what every schoolboy already knew about Republicans: They're not a unified party, and since a good amount of ideological unity is essential for successful representative government, the chance for a real Republican — let alone a serious conservative — revolution is slim.

YET EVEN ASIDE from the Backstabber Faction of the party, which specializes in making sure the party's platform, issues and even some of its official candidates never jeopardize Democratic and liberal hegemony, what flops about as the core of the Republican right is no great shakes either. To understand this, consider the famous "Contract with America," of which

Republican rightists are busting with pride these days.

The Contract is a series of 10 "pledges" on the issues that Newt Gingrich and other GOP sagamores believed were important for the party to run on this fall and get to work on as early as possible when they return in the 104th Congress next year. For the most part, the pledges are harmless enough, though sometimes dressed up in bumper-stickerese — like the "American Dream Restoration Act" — that even political cynics find embarrassing.

But what is most striking about the Contract is what isn't in it — among other things, the aforementioned "cultural issues," about which liberal GOP governors are so worried. Since it is precisely these issues that have been at the heart of the conservative critique of the Clinton administration and indeed of the liberalism that has dominated this country for 60 years, there's very little in the Contract for real rightists to moo about.

Thus, the Contract says nothing about abortion or school prayer, the staple issues of the religious right that contributed significantly to the Republican victory. It says nothing about reversing judicial activism or its anti-constitutional roots that brought us those issues. It says nothing about homo-

sexuals in the military or about the matter of "homosexual rights" in general.

THE CONTRACT SAYS nothing about affirmative action or other civil rights issues, though Thomas Edsall, writing in the *Washington Post* last week, noted that the defection of white men from the Democrats "violates a core concept at the heart of the Democratic Party as the party of working people. White men are those experiencing the largest wage declines, the brunt of defense cutbacks and the dramatic attenuation of corporate loyalty." If liberal reporters like Mr. Edsall can understand the crisis white males face today and the political debt Republicans owe them, why can't Republicans?

The Contract says nothing about immigration, legal or illegal; nothing about gun control; nothing about the 10th Amendment and nothing about abolishing federal programs and agencies that have long been on the Republican butcher block — the Education Department, the Energy Department, Occupational Safety and Health, Environmental Protection and a dozen others.

It says nothing about foreign affairs except that U.S. troops shall not be placed under U.N. command; good enough, but there's nothing about re-

versing globalism and protecting national sovereignty, let alone trade issues.

What the Contract does do is commit the Republicans to a number of economic and fiscal policies that vow to benefit various GOP constituencies — businessmen, the elderly, the armed forces. Most of this is reasonable from a partisan point of view, but it does nothing to break with or reverse the New Deal model of Big Government, by which the federal leviathan manages social and economic relations for the benefit of specific client interests. Indeed, Franklin Roosevelt is a hero to Mr. Gingrich.

THE NEW MAJORITY may or may not have enough unity to pass the Contract's promises, but even if it does, they're not what serious conservatives wanted, and passing them wouldn't even begin to loosen the iron grip in which a dominant liberalism has held this country for so long.

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