

"WHAT I WOULD DO AS SPEAKER"

Honorable Robert H. Michel

Mr. Speaker, the House of Representatives faces an institutional crisis.

-- An ABC NEWS/ Washington Post poll one month ago reported 35% of Americans approve of the job the Congress is doing, while an astounding 59% disapprove.

-- A Gallup poll taken late last year showed that Congress trailed every major American institution when it comes to the confidence of the American people.

The lead story in the latest issue of National Journal is "Congress in Disrepute".

Individual political leaders go up and down in the polls.

But when an institution itself receives such bad notices, something is very wrong. There is a mood of bitter despair and outraged anger on the part of Americans toward their House.

The call for term limitations is but one aspect of this new mood, and the cause of this crisis can be traced to those who control and have controlled the House for almost two generations: The Democrats.

Such a crisis cannot be met by simply reshuffling the same old Democrat Party majority.

We don't need reshuffling -- we need a new deal in the House of Representatives.

We need a new majority, a Republican majority.

That is why we have taken this Special Order. We want to tell the American people what they can expect from a Republican new deal in the House.

We will hear directly from those who will implement the reforms:

Our learned friend Gerry Solomon will instruct us on the need for Republican leadership in the Rules Committee.

Future Chairmen like Bill Gradison and Bill Archer will give us the benefit of their economic expertise.

Our Conference Chairman, Jerry Lewis and House Republican Research Committee Chairman Duncan Hunter will discuss our defense and security needs. House Republican Policy Committee Chairman Mickey Edwards will speak on institutional reform.

Bill Thomas will speak of campaign reform.

Vin Weber on welfare reform, Rod Chandler on health care, Bill McCollum about crime control, and Andy Ireland on regulation will all instruct and enlighten us.

And, of course, our eloquent Whip, Newt Gingrich, will explore the philosophical differences between the two parties and what those differences mean in practice.

But first let me put all these reforms in context.

A Republican House majority will embark on a truly conservative revolution in the House.

Our goal will be to restore institutional virtues that have been lost, preserve strengths that have survived, and protect traditional American values. As Speaker of the House, I will lead the first comprehensive reform of the House of Representatives in modern times.

So much of what we do around here is determined by how we do it. In the House, all too often process is substance.

So one of the first things I will do as Speaker is to establish a more orderly schedule for legislation. Currently we do very little in the early part of the year and then try to cram important legislation into the end of the schedule.

The result is chaos: Hurried legislation, unread legislation, and pork barrel legislation -- legislation in panic, legislation in the dark of night. It doesn't have to be like that. We can and will do better.

Next, I will guarantee that all controversial bills come to the floor with rules guaranteeing free and open debate.

In 1977, 85 percent of all rules were open rules. By 1990, that figure had fallen to 45 percent, and the trend toward even more closed rules is becoming clear. The closed rule as a means of stifling dissent is legislating by censorship. It is a disgrace. It has to go.

But there is more to the crisis of the House than the rules under which we debate.

When a party has been too long in power -- in eastern Europe, in China, or in the House of Representatives -- certain characteristics arise:

- an arrogant lack of responsiveness;
- a delusion that the entrenched party is irreplaceable and above criticism;
- and, most importantly, a compulsion to build bureaucracies.

In the 35 years I have been a Congressman, the House under the Democrats has changed from a relatively small and efficient institution into a chaotic, bureaucratic empire.

Today we have 11,000 staff members and 1,800 support staff. Since 1954, the year Republicans lost control of the House, the legislative budget has soared by over 3,000 percent, while the consumer price index has increased by only 500 percent. As a majority, Republicans would aim at cutting committee staffs in half, which would save at least \$26 million dollars a year.

There are many other structural reforms we will make. But I just wanted to give you some idea of the comprehensive nature of the undertaking.

Mr. Speaker, pundits talk about the need for big ideas in politics. Big ideas are fine.

But in the final analysis politics is like the pizza business -- if you want to succeed, you have to deliver. And the House Democrat majority can't or won't deliver.

It won't deliver free and open debate. It won't deliver efficiency in legislating. It won't deliver a lean, mean staff for the micro-chip age. It won't deliver a sense of purpose to our deliberations. It won't deliver an institution worthy of its history, its promise, and its responsibilities. House Republicans are ready to lead.

It is time for a new deal in the House, a Republican majority that can restore this great institution to its rightful place as the people's House.