

Remarks  
House Republican Leader  
Robert H. Michel  
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At the very outset I want to welcome again formally our 18 new freshman members to the Conference. They are without a doubt - a premier class. What a great honor it is to be renominated as your candidate for Speaker for the 102nd Congress.

You've heard me say it before; that to be a good Leader means being a good listener. But there comes to mind times when a Leader has to do more than listen. He has to speak his mind, and this is one of those times. Particularly when we're talking "in-house".

Let me get right to the point: The 102nd Congress can be successful legislative and political Congress for House Republicans. Or it can be a total disaster if we don't recognize that, outnumbered as we are, we have to work together to achieve a unity of purpose. I'm here to tell you as your Leader I'm going to be devoting all my energies to bringing about that condition.

You elected me to lead. I'm going to lead. We'll have our disagreements from time to time. I welcome them. I just don't like to be blind-sided, and, as most of you know, I take constructive criticism well. As your elected Leader, I must confess to having deep concerns when we make this Republican Conference a battleground wher we spend our time sniping at each other, at the President, or at members of our Administration .

Lest I be misunderstood, let me say this: As columnist Dave Broder pointed out in yesterday's Washington Post, fights over philosophy are not necessarily bad. They can be a sign of party strength and diversity.

I believe the concept of empowerment is worth fighting for. I support it, because it is purely Republican philosophy. But wouldn't it be a tragic irony if the battle over empowerment left Republicans powerless. If you want to debate fine points of political philosophy, then I would suggest arguing with the latest Socialist addition to the Democratic Caucus, Bernie Sanders.

You know, there's a new word floating around town these days. It's called "paradigm". I'm no intellectual, so I had to look it up in the dictionary where it says: "a paradigm is an example or a pattern, an outstandingly clear example of something." Well, I don't want you to think that old Bob is behind the times -- or the "digms". So let me give you two paradigms of how we ought to operate in the 102nd Congress.

The first paradigm is that of guerilla warfare. This model sees the House as the place to lob grenades, disrupt communications, lay in ambushes, and steal marches on the opposition. Contrary to what some of you might think, I'm not against that way of acting. A little guerilla warfare can be a good thing, now and then, particularly when we feel we're being run over rough-shod by an autocratic majority.

But it can't substitute for the second and major paradigm, which is working constructively to enact our legislative program, and when we're up against the odds, exercising our Presidential leverage as a means of creating real victories out of possible defeats.

You know, that as we Republicans begin every single working day we are 101 votes behind. But every single day we are also one big vote ahead -- armed as we are with the President's veto power. Sure, that's a negative kind of power. But when you're fighting someone who outweighs you by a hundred pounds, it's best to use the martial arts -- like Ju Jitsu or Kung Fu -- that depend on the use of leverage.

Presidential leverage is our political Kung Fu.

When I was first elected leader during the first two years of the Reagan Administration, we were only 51 votes behind. With a unanimous vote on our side, we could go across the aisle, get 27 votes or 28 votes and we had victory in our grasp, as we did on a number of significant occasions. That ain't the situation that prevails today, folks. We're now outnumbered 268 to 167. And each of us should remember it every time we get the temptation to vote against a party position or to vote against the President.

Let's face it, the race for the Presidency in 1992 has already begun. Every step the Democrats take in the 102nd Congress will be aimed toward the White House in 1992. We can't just sit there and watch them use the House as a national campaign headquarters for their Presidential hopefuls, in and out of Congress.

I've mentioned the President, so let me say a few words about our relationship with him. President George Bush knows the House. He was once one of us. He's aware of our problems. He knows about tough votes. He also knows about constituent concerns. He knows because he has lived and worked through all of those things.

It has been said that we are not just here to serve the President. That's true. But we're in a much better position to serve our country by having "our" President in the White House rather than theirs. This doesn't mean we blur the distinction, and I recognize the dual role I have to play in making Pennsylvania Avenue a two-way street.

But the really important distinction for House Republicans is not the one between the branches, but the one between the two major political parties. All of us would have preferred that instead of falling further behind the majority, we would have narrowed the gap. Since we didn't, we all have to work harder to make up for our deficiencies in sub-committee, full committee, on the Floor, and yes, out there "on the hustings" where we all have a role to play in broadening the base of our party.

We will have a legislative agenda to fashion in cooperation with our Administration. We have mutual political goals and performance records to achieve.

In conclusion, let me say again to our senior members: We have an exceptionally fine, bright, aggressive freshman class to charge our batteries. Get to know them and be quick to give them a helping hand. And one personal note.

This job of Leader isn't all it's cracked up to be. Sometimes I have to make some really painful, agonizing decisions that affect you members personally, our party, and the image that is projected to the American people about this great institution in which we serve. I'm always mindful of the awesome responsibility you've entrusted to me to be your Leader.

Thank you so much again for your vote of confidence.

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