

Remarks by Robert H. Michel
Re-election as House Republican Leader
December 7, 1992

Let me begin with two numbers: 143 and 176.

We had 143 House Republicans during the first two years of the Carter Administration.

But we still managed to win a few big ones.

In the 103rd Congress we will have 176 Republicans.

As your Leader I pledge to you: in the 103rd Congress, we may be outgunned--but we won't be outfought.

This year we have all heard -- and used -- the word "change".

Let me just say a few words about how that word applies to House Republicans.

First, since we won't have a Republican President, we must now speak and act not just for ourselves, but for our party.

Along with the Republicans of the Senate, we have the spotlight on us.

For the next four years, in Washington, the voice of our party will be our voice, the heart of our party will be our heart, the ideas of our party will be our ideas.

That is a great responsibility and each of us has to live up to it.

And that is why we are so insistent about our right to free debate in the House.

We cannot live up to our responsibilities if our fundamental right to debate is denied or abridged.

But the trend away from free debate in the House is ominous.

In the 95th Congress, 85% of all rules were open.

In the 102nd Congress, this percentage of open rules dropped to 34%.

Even now the Democrats are concocting schemes to slash the time for Special Orders.

I have personally informed the Speaker we Republicans demand -- as our right -- free and open debate.

To our freshmen who have come here with direct or implicit promises to stay for a limited time, let me say this:

If the Democrats limit your right to debate, your three or four terms will be hollow, devoid of any real chance of changing things.

Gridlock isn't ended by cutting off or limiting debate.

It is in fact institutionalized by forcing us into "up or down" votes, with no opportunity for amendments.

One student of government has written that free legislative exchange of views is ..."a 'reality check' on other views".

I like that little phrase, "reality check".

In the 103rd Congress Republicans aim to give the Democrats a reality check every single day -- in every subcommittee, in every committee, on the floor, in one-minutes, and in extended Special orders, in the media, here in Washington and back home!

We Republicans want to truly democratize the House of Representatives.

But there are other aspects to change:

To our freshman I say: you came here to change things for the better.

We are going to be looking to you for your idealism, your enthusiasm, your original and maybe provocative views.

To our more senior members, let me say: Obviously, we no longer have the power of the veto on our side.

That's a big change we are going to have to live with.

We have to craft our own victories, reaching across the aisle on different issues to entice Democrats who are out of step with their leadership -- and there will be plenty of them.

To our ranking members of committees and subcommittees, change means even greater efforts because you are in the trenches and we need your leadership.

And, of course, the leadership itself has to be open to the forces of change and reform, and I'm glad to say we are eager to begin a comprehensive reform of the House.

One other change comes to mind:

In this town, information is power.

We have been used to calling Executive Branch officials, from the White House on down, and getting the information we need.

Well, obviously things have changed.

Those days of easy access are over.

We must rebuild relations with think tanks and other outside groups and individuals who share our values so we can get the information we need on a timely basis.

Our Policy and Research Committees are also going to have to develop our own body of research on a wide variety of topics.

Let me conclude by saying this:

There is a lot of talk these days about the direction of our party.

I'm known as a work-horse, not a philosopher, so I won't commit philosophy in your presence this morning.

Let me just say that, in the 103rd Congress, we House Republicans must serve our country through our exertions and inspire our party through our example.

Hard work and good example: If we can demonstrate both those virtues, and do it in unity, the future of our party and of our country will be bright indeed.