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The Tenuous Majority:

The Effect of Two-Party Competition
on the House of Representatives

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

JOHN P. MEIERS

Norman, Oklahoma

1999

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THE TENUOUS MAJORITY:

The Effect of Two-Party Competition
on the House of Representatives

A DISSERTATION

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Writing a dissertation has been one of the most challenging and rewarding endeavors of my life. But like most endeavors in life, it was not done alone. I have been the grateful beneficiary of numerous support from friends, family, and colleagues in academia and on Capitol Hill. Without their assistance, this dissertation would never have been written. Many of the key concepts regarding the Congress which I talk about in the concluding chapter were developed in Allen Hertzke's "Congress and the Political System" course and in Gary Copeland's graduate seminars on legislative process. I am especially indebted to Allen Hertzke for his love of students and political science, his tremendous scholarly capacity, and his commitment to furthering the scope of knowledge about American politics.

I would like to acknowledge the crucial support of key individuals who were pivotal in helping me finish this project: my dissertation director and major professor, Dr. Ronald M. Peters; my parents Paul and Linda Meiers; my friend Frank Smist; and my wife, Jeanine Meiers.

Ron Peters represents the finest blend of scholar, teacher, mentor, administrator, and manager. Most of the themes and subjects probed in this dissertation have their genesis in conversations with him throughout the past five years. I am deeply indebted to his wisdom of political history, political science, contemporary politics, and the art of writing a good dissertation.

My parents have provided an important spiritual foundation for me as I traversed through my graduate school years. My mother Linda has devoted her life to insuring that

each of her four children attain the highest levels of education possible. My own academic advancement would have been limited without her love and support.

Frank Smist first encouraged me to study congressional politics at the graduate level. He is a first-rate teacher who cares about his students, both in and out of the classroom. Frank first exposed me to politics both in the classroom as an undergraduate, and on the campaign trail during his campaign. I wish to thank Frank for all of his support, advice, and assistance through the past five years.

My wife, Jeanine, is my dearest love, my closest advisor, and my most cherished friend. Words cannot express my gratitude for the love and support she has given to me during the course of this project. Jeanine has been the loyal trooper who has followed me across the country in the 1990s in the pursuit of a finished dissertation. She helped me secure interviews on Capitol Hill, provided love and support, and served as an important resource in the writing process. This dissertation is a testament to her skills and faith in me.

I also wish to thank the silent heroes who helped me complete this project. At the University of Oklahoma, I wish to thank first and foremost LaDonna Sullivan, who has given me unqualified support during my tenure as a graduate student. LaDonna helped me navigate the bureaucratic mazes of the past five years, and has been a treasured friend. I am grateful to Geri Rowden, Debbie Else and Mary France for their timely assistance during the course of my graduate career. Robert Cox and Donald Maletz served faithfully on my graduate committees over the past five years, and I have benefitted from their wisdom and advice. I wish to extend special thanks to Danney

Goble, who agreed to serve as my outside member just prior to the dissertation defense. My students over the years at the University of Oklahoma have given me inspiration as a teacher and scholar. Seth Prince and Josh Wagner have been not only treasured students but also treasured friends. I also wish to thank my fellow graduate students, especially Craig Williams, Scott Buchanan, Lesli McCollum, Jon Mott, Mitch Fuller, and Jocelyn Jones for their friendship and support during the course of my graduate career. And at Rockhurst College, I wish to thank Dr. Charles Moran for his unwavering support of my academic career.

On Capitol Hill, I wish to thank Congressman Robert Ehrlich and his staff for making me a part of their family during my year in Washington. I especially wish to thank Ehrlich's Administrative Assistant, Steven Kreseski, and his office manager Diane Baker. Both are seasoned political professionals and bona fide veterans of the political battles of the 1990s. I learned much from each of them during my APSA Fellowship year, and I am grateful for all of their support and assistance in helping me complete this project. I also wish to thank Marj Kwah, Legislative Assistant to Congressman Ehrlich, who helped me understand the budget process in the House and the intricacies of the fiscal year 1999 budget process. I also wish to thank Richard Cross, a fellow lover of presidential biographies, for his wit, wisdom, wicked political humor, and amazing encyclopedic knowledge of all aspects of American politics. At the American Political Science Association, I wish to express my deepest thanks to Catherine Rudder and Jeffrey Biggs for running a first-rate program for further study and understanding of the modern Congress.

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THE TENUOUS MAJORITY

The Effect of Two-Party Competition on the House of Representatives

BY: John P. Meiers

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Ronald M. Peters, Jr.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the effects of two-party competition on the House of Representatives in the 1990s. Specifically, it analyzes how the competitive fights for majority control by the two parties are altering House elections, the party cultures of the two parties on Capitol Hill, and the governing process. Two-Party competition for the House of Representatives in the 103rd-105th (1993-1998) Congresses has fundamentally altered the electoral and institutional politics of the House, from how candidates are selected and elected to how congressional parties conduct themselves on Capitol Hill. In particular, congressional leaders are increasingly intervening in the recruitment process of House candidates, in order to produce the most electable candidates capable of helping secure control of the House. In addition, the party cultures of the Republican Conference and the Democratic Caucus are adapting to the incentives of two-party competition. Meanwhile, the governing process is being altered as well to the demands of intense competition through triangulation, shutdown politics, and more partisan governing tactics.

This dissertation relies on interviews of members of Congress and their staff, in conjunction with the historical record, to illustrate how the new race for the House and the

new era of tenuous, narrow House majorities is affecting American politics and the House of Representatives. The developments in House politics emanating from the new era of two-party competition challenge many of the existing theories and explanations of how the House of Representatives operates, both institutionally and electorally. Two-Party competition for the House, despite the problems in governance it brings to the House institutionally, is primarily a positive development, and presents new challenges for congressional scholarship, American government, and House politics.

CHAPTER ONE

The Race for the House: Theoretical, Analytical, and Historical Background

An era of intense two-party competition has descended upon the House of Representatives. From 1954 until 1994, one-party Democratic rule prevailed in the House. In 1994 House Republicans took control of the House after years of aggressive efforts to capture majority status. In 1996 and 1998, House Democrats came within striking distance of House control in fiercely contested campaigns for majority control. Control of the House of Representatives is now up for grabs, and the pressures and demands of two-party competition are altering the political and legislative milieu of the institution. The intense drive by the two parties to secure House majorities is a new motivator of congressional action and behavior. Over a three-election cycle (1994-1998), these changes can be detected through the variables of congressional elections, party culture, and the governing process. In this dissertation, I will show how two-party competition can be used as an analytical tool to help us better understand the activities and behavior of the Congresses of the 1990s and beyond. I will also illustrate how competitive pressures to obtain House majorities have tangibly altered the nature and character of the House of Representatives, from how members are elected to the House to their activities as politicians and legislators on Capitol Hill.

The fervent battle for House control by the two parties has characterized congressional elections since the 1994 midterm election, and continues into the 21st century with competitive fights for House control in 2000 and 2002. In the 1996 congressional elections, House Republicans won 48.9% of the total vote, while House Democrats won

48.5% of the total vote. This is the closest parity for House control since the elections of 1950 and 1952, when the two parties vied evenly for control of the House.¹ After the 1998 elections, a mere five seats separated the two parties in the House for control of the chamber. This is the closest majority seat margin since the 83rd Congress (1953-54). As illustrated in Table 1-1, over the course of the 1990s the majority party margin in the House has shrunk from 49 to five.

Table 1-1: Majority Party Margin, 102nd-106th Congresses

	Majority Party	Minority Party	Majority Party Margin
102 nd Congress (1991-1992)	267 (D)	167 (R)	49
103 rd Congress (1993-1994)	256 (D)	178 (R)	38
104 th Congress (1995-1996)	236 (R)	198 (D)	18
105 th Congress (1997-1998)	228 (R)	206 (D)	10
106 th Congress (1999-2000)	223 (R)	211 (D)	5

The competitive race for the House is, at its core, a fight for power between the two parties. This struggle for power is entirely consistent with the vision of the Framers of the U.S. Constitution and the foundations they laid for the American constitutionally separated system. The Founding Fathers expected all Americans to be politically active and to

¹ In 1950, each party won 48.9% of the total vote, but the Democrats maintained control of the House. In 1952, the Republicans won 49.3% of the total vote and the Democrats won 49.2%, but the Republicans captured control of the chamber. Norman J. Ornstein, et. al., Vital Statistics on Congress: 1997-98 (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc.), p. 52.

participate fully in the political process. The open system of government they created enlists the raw ambition of individuals to safeguard liberty. The Founding Fathers expected the House of Representatives to be the conduit through which this ambition is channeled so citizens could have a direct voice in the composition of their government. James Madison argued in Federalist #52 that the House of Representatives “should have an immediate dependence on, & an intimate sympathy with the people. Frequent elections are unquestionably the only policy by which this dependence and sympathy can be effectually secured.” Madison further stated in Federalist #57 that “The House of Representatives is so constituted as to support in the members, a habitual recollection of their dependence on the people.” Frequent House elections still remain an important method for Americans to protect and advance their individual freedom. House races, and by extension the fight for majority control, are the purest form of representation the Framers injected into the constitutional veins of the United States. Through biennial House races, citizens have a direct control of one branch of the federal government in a bicameral, separated system. Today, political parties are the mechanisms in which ambition is organized in terms of control and organization of the House of Representatives.

The Race for the House in the 1990s

The new era of two-party competition for the House has spanned the decade of the 1990s, from the 103rd (1993-1994) Congress to the 106th (1999-2000) Congress. The two parties in these Congresses have struggled to deal with the competing demands and pressures of legislating and governing amidst a larger war for majority control of the House. The transition from a previous era of one-party rule to a new era of competitiveness has been

messy, and has accompanied a decline in public confidence in the “people’s House.”² Public opinion polls show that the public frequently expresses more confidence in used-car salesmen than in the House of Representatives as a governing institution. It is easy to see why. From 1989 to 1999, the House of Representatives has experienced the demise of three successive Speakers of the House - Jim Wright (D-TX), Tom Foley (D-WA), and Newt Gingrich (R-GA) - in circumstances directly related to the fight for the House. Unstable speakerships, unstable House majorities, and fierce fights over the direction of public policy have become the hallmarks of this new competitive era for House control. Each of these developments have left an indelible mark on the House as a democratic and governing institution.

Consider the trauma that has descended on the House of Representatives in the 1990s as it entered a new period of competitiveness for House control: institutional tumult, resignations of key congressional leaders, ethics scandals, incivility between elected officials, indecision, and government shutdowns; the House, it seems, has consistently lurched from one political and governing crisis to the next. For an illustration of the changes in the legislative process in the House in this new era of two-party competition, pick up a newspaper or magazine and read the end-of-the-Congress wrap-ups for any Congress of the 1990s. Invariably, you will read the same disappointments. The House, it appears, is in chaos.

The 101st Congress (1989-1990) witnessed the resignation of Speaker Wright, budget

² John R. Hibbing and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, Congress as Public Enemy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 31-36.

failures, indecision, and increased partisan caviling.³ Gridlock, sagging poll ratings, ethics scandals, and meager legislative accomplishments crippled the “deadlocked” 102nd Congress (1991-1992).⁴ For the 103rd Congress (1993-1994), the criticism is even worse. Partisanship, obstructionism, and the inability of a unified Democratic government to govern hobbled this Congress as the Republicans swept the 1994 midterm election to assume power, producing the most incumbent defeats since the Watergate election of 1974.⁵ Extended government shutdowns, intense partisan fighting over the ethics and politics of Speaker Gingrich (R-GA), an intense polarization of the two parties in the House, and diminished civility besmirched the 104th Congress (1995-1996).⁶ The 105th Congress (1997-1998) experienced a coup attempt against Speaker Gingrich by House Republicans, meager legislative accomplishments, the frequent inability of a slim Republican majority to govern, the threat of a government shutdown in 1998, and the resignation of Speaker Gingrich after a disappointing loss for Republicans in the 1998 midterm election. In 1990, one observer wrote that the Congress was imitating the work habits of a college student who writes every

³ “101st Congress Leaves Behind Plenty of Laws, Criticisms,” Congressional Quarterly, 3 November 1990, p. 3683.

⁴ “Partisanship, Purse Strings Hobbled the 102nd,” Congressional Quarterly, 31 October 1992, pp. 3451-55.

⁵ “End of the Session Marked by Partisan Stalemate,” Congressional Quarterly, 8 October 1994, pp. 2847-51.

⁶ “From Revolution to Realism: the 104th Bids Farewell,” Congressional Quarterly, 5 October 1996, pp. 2832-44.

term paper the night before it is due.⁷ This apt observation could also be applied to the other Congresses of the 1990s.

These developments could be viewed as the breakdown of a dysfunctional legislative institution. This dissertation refuses to adopt this pessimistic perspective. Instead, as political scientists and observers of the modern Congress, we must view these developments as the messy consequences of the House leaving one era of stable non-competition and entering a new era of fierce two-party competition for majority control. The competitive requirements of two-party competition, an era of tenuous majorities, has sparked fundamental changes in how House elections are fought and the House itself is governed. The U.S. Congress is primarily a reactive legislative body which institutionally absorbs larger contextual changes in American society and politics and infuses them into congressional politics, both internally and externally. When we view the political developments in the House from the prism of two-party competition, we see an institution that is merely responding to the political realities of a new institutional and electoral regime.⁸ The roller-coaster ride of House politics in the 1990s is the inevitable result of a legislative body adapting to the contours of new competitive demands and pressures. These electoral and institutional changes emanating from two-party competition are in turn having a cathartic

⁷ See Janet Hook, "101st Congress Leaves Behind Plenty of Laws, Criticisms," Congressional Quarterly, 3 November 1990, p. 3684.

⁸ Allen D. Hertzke and Ronald M. Peters, Jr., The Atomistic Congress: An Interpretation of Congressional Change (Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1992), pp. 10-22. This dissertation adopts the theoretical framework of congressional change presented by Hertzke and Peters, but adapts it to the centralizing aspects of competitive House politics in both the Capitol and on the campaign trail in the 1990s.

effect on the House, both institutionally and electorally.

Competition for the House is a new prism through which congressional action and behavior in House politics, both within the House institutionally and on the campaign trail, can be viewed. Party competition for the House in modern times is a new and interesting political development that has important consequences regarding the direction of the federal government and the character of the governing process. In this context, the race for the House affects the life of every American, although this battle is raging behind the scenes and out of view to most Americans. The two parties differ substantially in terms of what they have done, and will do, with a House majority. They push different agendas, different legislative priorities, and appeal to different bases of support in the country when they control the House.⁹ These stark partisan differences drive the fierce fight for House control by the two parties. This dissertation seeks to bring this panoply of conflict for House control into full view. In addition to changing contemporary American politics and the House, the race for the House also impacts contemporary political science theories which guide our thinking of the modern House of Representatives. Congressional scholars must account for the theoretical implications of this new period of two-party competition and the effects it has on the House and American politics.

The tenuous House majorities of the 1990 and the new era of two-party competition raise several compelling questions that strike at the core of the U.S. experiment in self

⁹ The increasing homogeneity within the Democratic Caucus fueled many of these changes during the 1970s and 1980s, transforming the House into a more partisan body as House Democrats became more uniformly liberal and the Republican party became more uniformly conservative. See David W. Rhode, Parties and Leaders in the Postreform House (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 14-16, 40-58.

governance:

- ◆ In a competitive two-party system, when control of the House is up for grabs, what do the two parties do to try to capture the House and maintain control?
- ◆ How does two-party competition for the House alter congressional elections, especially in determining who runs and how elections are organized?
- ◆ How are the two parties changing internally and culturally during this process of majority-formation for House control and majority-retention?
- ◆ How does the process of majority-formation and majority-retention impact the governing process?
- ◆ What changes are Republicans making to the House as an institution to solidify their slim majorities?
- ◆ What might a future Democratic House look like?

Contemporary Congressional Scholarship: Governing and Electoral Dimensions

The race for the House demands a re-examination of congressional theories and the bodies of research which currently frame our understanding of how the House operates, both internally and externally. For 40 uninterrupted years the Democratic party controlled the House, which coincided with the blossoming of congressional scholarship and political science in the post World War II period. Congressional scholarship of the House of Representatives provided a fairly stable yet evolving view of the Democratic House of Representatives House as it transformed from the sleepy House of Sam Rayburn in the 1950s to the more partisan House of Jim Wright and Newt Gingrich in the 1980s and 1990s. Since the Democratic party enjoyed a perpetual tenure of majority status in the House, many congressional scholars accepted this as fact and then examined and explained the House of Representatives through the prism of one-party rule.

The current period of contestation for House control demands that we view existing congressional theories through a competitive prism in order to augment their explanatory power in the 1990s and beyond. This is not to state that previous examinations and theories

of the House are wrong, but only that their insights are colored from a non-competitive perspective. The current fight for the House is driving the incentive structures of the two parties in different directions than during the previous period of non-competition. The insights provided by previous examinations of the House provide a stable foundation for examining the current fight for majority control, and this dissertation builds on this solid scholarly foundation to help provide theoretical guidance. During the period of one-party Democratic rule, the Democratic majority enjoyed the logic of non-competition and was rarely jeopardized at the polls. After the midterm of 1958, House Democrats cemented their New Deal House majority with a stable majority of 283. After 1958, the Democratic House majority rarely dipped below a stable majority of 250.

By looking at the House from the perspective of intense two-party competition, additional insights into the House as a political institution can be gained. These insights augment the collective endeavor of congressional scholarship of providing a more thorough understanding of how the House works both internally and electorally. This process of looking at legislative institutions from other viewpoints is not confined to the U.S. House of Representatives. For instance, the scholarly community has recently focused attention on the health and performance of democratic legislative institutions amidst broader cultural and societal changes of the late 20th century. Putnam's study of the role of civic associations in democratic societies, for instance, discovered the important role played by social capital in

sustaining and nurturing successful representative institutions.¹⁰ Other analyses have focused on the impact of cultural and contextual developments on institutional changes in the U.S. Congress. My examination of the House of Representatives focuses on the variable of competition for House control beginning in the 103rd (1993-1994) Congress and continuing through the 1990s. Through this analysis, I seek to broaden our understanding of how the House of Representatives is functioning, and being altered, amidst larger shifts in the tectonics of House politics. Intense two-party competition for the House has emerged as one of the key driving forces behind congressional action and behavior in the 1990s. As a new political phenomenon, this activity has not been adequately examined by the existing congressional literature.

Two immense bodies of research have emerged in congressional scholarship which provide the collective foundation of contemporary knowledge of the House. One stream of literature has examined the House institutionally in terms of internal House governance. This body of research has probed the governing dimension of the Democratic House of Representatives, and has provided a changing view of the House as it transformed from the “textbook” Congress of the 1950s and 1960s to the more party-centered House of the 1980s and early 1990s. This literature presented the contemporary House of the post-reform period of the 1970s as a partisan and atomized institution led by coalitional party leaders. House leaders in the 1980s and 1990s aggregated member demands through strong procedural and

¹⁰ Robert Putnam, Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993); Robert Putnam, “Bowling Alone: America’s Declining Social Capital,” Journal of Democracy 6 (1), 1995; Robert Putnam, “Turning in, Tuning out: the Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in America,” P.S.: Political Science and Politics 28 (4), 1995.

agenda control of the House floor and a decentralized committee system. This literature, in addition to accepting Democratic rule of the House as the natural political order, also analyzed the House through the unique cultural template placed on the institution of the House by the majority House Democrats.

Another stream of literature has examined the House externally, through congressional elections and campaigns. This body of research has analyzed the electoral dimension of the House, presenting a stable view of House elections as candidate-centered affairs revolving around local issues, the emergence or absence of quality candidates, and the absence of exogenous party influence or national issues. The insights provided by these two bodies accurately captured the dynamics of the House of Representatives internally and externally over the past fifty years. Very rarely did these two bodies of literature intersect. Congressional scholars who probed the governing dimension usually focused exclusively on internal House politics and governance, while congressional scholars probing the electoral dimension of the House focused almost exclusively on campaigns and elections. Meanwhile, the shadow of perpetual one-party Democratic rule in the House weighed heavily in each of these analyses. In reality, however, each of the theories and explanations provided by these two bodies of research are conditioned to the extent to which the two parties are in competition for House control.

The Governing Dimension

One body of literature has focused exclusively on the internal governance of the House, both institutionally and politically. The “textbook” Congress accurately portrayed the House of the 1950s and 1960s as a body where the Democrats were firmly entrenched

as a majority party, a strong committee system drove much of the action in the House, and traditional norms of reciprocity, comity, and committee specialization dominated the institution. The “textbook” Congress also depicted a decentralized body where members exhibited bonds of comity and deference to committee seniority while eschewing strong party leadership. Over the past thirty years, new theories of the House have emerged which both built on the foundation laid by the “textbook” Congress and accounted for new political developments like the increasing power of party leaders and strong party rule in the House.

In the 1970s, congressional scholars analyzed the changes resulting from the post-reform Congress. Mayhew’s “electoral connection”, Fenno’s “homestyle”, and Fiorina’s “bureaucratic theory” each helped to develop the re-election thesis.¹¹ The re-election thesis presented members of Congress as single-minded pursuers of re-election, and postulated that congressional behavior can be best understood by this theoretical framework. This economic view of congressional action was buttressed in the 1990s by the discretion theory of Glenn Parker, which presented members of Congress as single-minded pursuers of discretion.¹² Each of these examinations viewed House members as relatively autonomous political operators who run their own entrepreneurial franchise operations in the House and display independence from party leaders and party influences in the House. Although the re-election thesis and discretion theory still account for much of congressional action and behavior in

¹¹ David Mayhew, Congress: The Electoral Connection (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1974); Richard Fenno, Homestyle: House Members in Their Districts (Boston: Little, Brown, 1978); Morris P. Fiorina, Congress: Keystone of the Washington Establishment (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1989).

¹² Glenn R. Parker, Institutional Change, Discretion, and the Making of Modern Congress (Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1992).

the new competitive era, they are bereft of explanatory power in terms of accounting for the new party-centered thinking of House parties, nationalized campaigns, and increased meddling in House races by congressional parties and their leaders.

New theories of the House emerged in the 1990s to account for the stronger party control and party leadership control in the 1980s and early 1990s. Each of these theories utilized strong parties and stronger procedural control of the House floor by the Democratic majority as a key variable for analysis. David Rhode presented a theory of conditional party government in the House where electoral changes in the makeup of the Democratic coalition encouraged stronger party leadership, stronger procedural control of the House politically and procedurally, and the rise of a more partisan politics in the House between an increasingly liberal Democratic majority and an increasingly conservative Republican minority.¹³ Keith Krehbiel advanced an information theory of congressional organization which presented the House as an information-seeking body which nurtures a strong committee system for the benefit of a member's party and party leadership. Individual members collect individualized benefits from this specialization while simultaneously providing collective gains to their party and party leadership in the currency of increased knowledge and information on the issues confronting the majority party in the House.¹⁴ Information theory presents an image of House members extremely reliant on the judgment of their party leaders and fellow party

¹³ David W. Rhode, Parties and Leaders in the Postreform House.

¹⁴ Thomas Gilligan and Keith Krehbiel, "Organization of Informative Committees by a Rational Legislature," American Journal of Political Science 34, 1990, pp. 531-64; Keith Krehbiel, Information and Legislative Organization (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1992).

members on the different committees, to make the right choices on various procedural and policy areas.¹⁵

These new perspectives of the House of Representative by congressional scholars in the late 1980s and early 1990s paid greater attention to the effectiveness of parties in the House. They also focused on the degree to which electoral forces affected the behavior and actions of congressional parties. Douglass Arnold presented a theory of congressional action where electoral calculations shape the legislative, political, and policy actions of congressional parties and coalitional party leaders.¹⁶ Cox and McCubbins presented a theory of party-centered government in the House where the majority party serves as a legislative cartel that “stacks the deck” in its favor in order to continue majority control.¹⁷ Under this theory, majority party leaders use strong procedural control of the House floor through the Rules Committee to guard the collective reputation of their party, insuring its viability as a safe electoral vehicle for members. Kiewiet and McCubbins likewise illustrated how congressional parties employ the legislative process to accomplish policy and electoral goals.¹⁸ In addition to focusing attention on stronger procedural control of the House floor by majority party leaders, scholars also placed especial attention to the larger agenda-setting

¹⁵ Keith Krehbiel, Information and Legislative Organization, pp. 66-84, 122-25.

¹⁶ R. Douglas Arnold, The Logic of Congressional Action (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1990), pp. 6-15.

¹⁷ Gary W. Cox and Mathew D. McCubbins, Legislative Leviathan: Party Government in the House (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 85-86.

¹⁸ D. Roderick Kiewiet and Mathew D. McCubbins, The Logic of Delegation: Congressional Parties and the Appropriations Process (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991).

process both in the House and in the Washington community at large.¹⁹

The image that emerges from this body of research is a decentralized House of Representatives led by a Democratic majority increasingly availing itself to strong procedural control of the chamber. The inherent tension between these two challenges, between decentralization and centralization in the House, presented increased challenges in governing the House to the prevailing Democratic majority. To protect their majority status, House Democrats used the perks of majority power to build a Berlin Wall of political, institutional, and incumbency advantages in the House which often discouraged House Republicans from even attempting to fight for majority control. House Democrats increasingly ruled the House with a strong procedural fist in the 1980s and 1990s, while congressional committees and norms of seniority continued to thrive in their own respective decentralized spheres of influence. The Democratic majority's major duties involved legislating and governing in a manner consistent with its own values and priorities.

Because House control was not seriously contested during this time, the Democratic House majority spent a large majority of its time managing internal party fissures and politics, especially in crafting legislative responses to policy concerns of the majority liberal Democrats within the Democratic Caucus. The reforms of the 1970s, both within the Democratic Caucus and in the House at large, focused on making the House as an institution more responsive to the policy concerns of the majority rank-and-file liberal Democratic majority. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, congressional scholarship focused on the

¹⁹ John W. Kingdon, Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policy (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1984).

increasing procedural control of the House by Democratic leaders to enact agenda items demanded by the increasing liberal majority within the Democratic caucus.

The Republican minority, meanwhile, received little attention from congressional scholars during this period. The logic of non-competition pervaded the thinking of politicians, pundits, and scholars from the 1960s to the early 1990s. The Republicans had last possessed a House majority in the first term of the Eisenhower administration, and political scientists rightly focused their scholarly attentions on the Democratic majority and its institutional control of the House. Generations of House Republican leaders decided to be good institutional players with the ruling House Democrats in order to cut deals and partake in a slice of the legislative wealth in the House. Scholars of the Republican House minority during this period aptly called this phenomenon a “minority party-mentality” or Stockholm Syndrome, where hostages sympathize with their captors and adopt their culture.²⁰ House Republicans were viewed as inconsequential losers, and they were subsequently ignored except for the lonely scholarly efforts of Charles O. Jones and Connelly and Pitney.²¹

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the House became even more partisan as the Republican minority increasingly abandoned the electoral dead-end of acquiescence and brought intense combat directly to the House floor. Partisanship in the House between the

²⁰ The “minority mentality” phenomenon eventually played a prominent role in House Republican thinking in the early 1990s. See Representative Vernon J. Ehlers, “Up in Michigan: Lessons for Becoming a Majority,” Catalyst, Spring 1994.

²¹ Charles O. Jones, The Minority Party in Congress (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970); William F. Connelly, Jr. and John J. Pitney, Jr., Congress’ Permanent Minority: Republicans in the U.S. House (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1994).

two parties had increased dramatically since the end of the Vietnam War as the two parties became more internally homogeneous and more ideologically separate.²² Frustration with the gridlock of divided government of the Reagan/Bush years created a new form of political combat between the two parties where scandal politics and independent counsels become key institutional weapons to inflict severe damage on the other party.²³ Increased partisanship, combined with increased willingness to use the politics of RIP (revelation, investigation, prosecution), produced a running feud in Washington between the two parties reminiscent of the Hatfields and McCoys. The Reagan, Bush, and Clinton presidencies each witnessed a greater willingness by the two parties to resort to the politics of scandal and RIP, with casualties as diverse as the contentious nominations of Republican Supreme Court nominees Robert Bork and Clarence Thomas, the resignations of Speakers Wright and Gingrich, and the impeachment of President Clinton. The increased political combat between the two parties for power in the late 1980s and early 1990s were a precursor to many of the tactics and strategies employed by the two parties in the war for the House of the 1990s.²⁴

²² David Rohde, Parties and Leaders in the Postreform House, pp. 1-39; Thomas Sowell provides a fascinating history of the issues and politics separating an increasingly liberal Democratic party from an increasingly conservative Republican party from the 1960s to the 1990s. See Thomas Sowell, The Vision of the Anointed (New York: Basic Books, 1995), pp. 104-142.

²³ Benjamin Ginsberg and Martin Shefter, Politics by Other Means: The Declining Importance of Elections in America (New York: Basic Books, 1990); Suzanne Garment, Scandal: The Culture of Mistrust in American Politics (New York: Times Books, 1992).

²⁴ For a taste of the more partisan and “hardball” politics employed by members of the two parties in the 1980s and 1990s, see Eleanor Clift and Tom Brazaitis, War Without Bloodshed (New York: Scribner, 1996).

The Electoral Dimension

While one body of congressional scholarship examined the internal dynamics of the House procedurally and politically through the perspective of the Democratic majority, another body of congressional scholarship emerged to provide theories and explanations of House campaigns and elections. This body of literature presented a candidate-centered system of House elections where ambitious candidates recruit themselves, raise their own money, hire their own consultants, win their own primaries, run campaigns based on local concerns, and owe their elections to the House to no one but themselves. Once in the House, incumbents are almost sure bets for re-election. Diligent constituent service, savvy use of office resources, and plum committee and subcommittee chairmanships helped all House incumbents, but especially House Democrats, build personal constituencies, raise campaign funds, and eventually become real players in the U.S. Congress.²⁵

Congressional scholarship probing the electoral dimensions of the House identified the decision by quality candidates to run for the House as the key determinant in whether a congressional race was competitive or not.²⁶ Due to the importance of quality candidates in determining the competitive nature of localized fights for individual House seats, congressional scholars focused especial attention on candidate emergence and races for open House seats. The key factor affecting the competitiveness of an individual House seat often

²⁵ Alan Ehrenhalt, The United States of Ambition: Politicians, Power, and the Pursuit of Office (New York: Times Books), p. 228.

²⁶ For more on this subject, consult: Who Runs for Congress? Ambition, Context, and Candidate Emergence, Thomas A. Kazee, ed. (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1994).

revolved around the decision by a quality candidate to run for office. Quality candidates became the omnipresent variable affecting House incumbency rates, the decline of marginal districts, the competitiveness of House elections both individually and collectively, and even the occasional national tides that swept a large batch of incumbents out of office like in 1974 and 1980. National parties, national campaigns, and national party leaders were either bit players or non-existent in terms of individual House races.

Due to the importance of quality candidates in determining the matrix of each House election, congressional scholars who explored the electoral dimension of the House carefully studied candidate decision-making processes. The overriding importance of quality candidates also encouraged congressional scholars to engage in the elusive search for the invisible decision of quality candidates to either run, or not run, for a House seat. When quality candidates did decide to run, their elections almost always revolved around local issues and concerns. Jacobson and Kernell unlocked one of the mysteries of congressional elections when they presented a theory of strategic politicians who wait to run for the House during the most optimum political environment for their party.²⁷

The Watergate election of 1974 provides an important example of Jacobson and Kernell's strategic politician thesis. In this pro-Democratic election following President Nixon's resignation, which provided a nationwide strategic and political advantage to Democratic candidates while a harsh environment for Republicans, numerous quality

²⁷ Gary C. Jacobson and Samuel Kernell, Strategy and Choice in Congressional Elections (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1983); Gary C. Jacobson, "Strategic Politicians and the Dynamics of U.S. House Elections, 1946-86," American Political Science Review 83 (3), September 1989, pp. 773-93.

Republican House candidates strategically decided to wait out the 1974 election altogether and run in a more advantageous election later in the decade. In the candidate-centered House campaigns of the post World War II era, strategic politicians and their Machiavellian calculations affected the presence or absence of competition for individual House seats more than presidential popularity, national issues, or economic determinants. The theory of strategic politicians, coupled with the theories of quality candidates and candidate-centered elections based on local issues, accurately captured many of the dynamics of House races around the country during the period of non-competitive, one-party rule in the 1954-1994 period.

Localized, candidate-centered House races revolving around quality candidates aided the Democratic majority's efforts to continue its majority status in the House. Democrats thrived in an electoral environment consisting of localized elections, where they possessed the ideas, vision, and proven appeals to the electorate to win House seats based on local concerns. In addition, Democrats held an overwhelming advantage of the state and local offices, providing a steady stream of quality candidates for House races. Politically talented House Democrats created a cottage industry of securing and taming Republican-trending districts in the South, Midwest, and West. House Democratic incumbents and candidates made compelling arguments that a congressional district's needs demanded a representative who could easily tap into the Democratic legislative pipelines of Capitol Hill.

The freshmen Democratic class of 1974 provides one example of how politically savvy Democrats could win and hold House seats through committee work, taking advantage of incumbency advantages, and divorcing themselves on the campaign trail from party

leaders and national party agendas. House Democrats gained 49 seats in the Watergate election of 1974, boosting the Democratic House majority to 291. Of the 75-member predominantly liberal activist Democratic freshmen, 49 had won seats previously held by Republicans.²⁸ To protect their seats in the non-Watergate elections of the 1970s and 1980s, the freshmen Democrats of 1974 pacified their Republican-leaning districts to win re-election through localized campaigns, the advantages of incumbency, and the inability of Republicans to field quality candidates who could compete against the Berlin Wall of Democratic incumbency advantages. All but two of these 75 freshmen Democrats retained their seats in 1976. By 1981, all but three of the remaining 44 House Democrats elected in 1974 either chaired a subcommittee or sat on one of the chamber's "power" committees - Rules, Appropriations, and Ways and Means.²⁹ The House, institutionally and electorally, truly became a creature of the cultural imperatives of the long-serving Democratic majority. Watergate boosted and expanded the longevity of the Democratic House majority until the early 1990s, providing Democrats with the gains to survive the Reagan-Bush era of the 1980s and Republican capture of the Senate in 1980.

The Impact of Competition and Non-Competition on the House of Representatives

Party control of the House has changed fourteen times between the 39th Congress (1865-67) and the 106th Congress (1999-2000). Thirteen of these changes occurred between 1864 and 1954, as illustrated in Appendix A. The political and legislative milieu of the House has changed each time the institution has moved between periods of competition and

²⁸ Burdett Loomis, The New American Politician (New York: Basic Books, 1988), p. 31.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 46.

non-competition for House control. Each period of competition or non-competition alters the legislative and political environment of the House in its own unique manner. Stable majorities provide an opportunity for the dominant party to imprint its culture and organization on the House as an institution. Incredibly narrow House majorities, on the other hand, can even inhibit the organization of the House itself. For instance, Republicans emerged with the narrowest House majorities in U.S. history in the elections of 1916 (216), 1930 (218), and 1952 (221); the narrowness of the Republican majorities in 1916 and 1930 prevented the GOP from even organizing the 65th (1917-1918) and 72nd (1931-1933) Congresses.³⁰

The presence of a competitive or non-competitive environment for House control, combined with the size of a House majority, tangibly impacts the governing process in the House and the nation at large. For instance, between 1874 and 1894 control of the House “see-sawed” between the two parties, as control of the House shifted in the midst of a competitive post-Civil War electorate. During this competitive period, no majority endured beyond six years. House majorities became more adept at using the procedural advantages of the House to govern, while House minorities perfected sophisticated obstruction tactics designed to embarrass the majority party and regain control of the House.³¹ During this

³⁰ Charles O. Jones, The Minority Party in Congress, p. 17.

³¹ Sarah A. Binder, Minority Rights, Majority Rule: Partisanship and the Development of Congress (Edinburgh, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 109-31; Ronald M. Peters, The American Speakership: The Office in Historical Perspective (Baltimore, Maryland: The John Hopkins University Press, 1990), pp. 52-91.

period, Speakers Thomas Brackett Reed of Maine (1889-91)³² and “Uncle Joe” Cannon of Illinois (1903-1910) instituted prerogatives for majority rule to combat minority intransigence in the House.³³ Reed engineered a series of reforms in the 51st Congress to place control of the House firmly in the hands of the majority party.³⁴ Reed’s reforms crystallized the goal of a majority party in the House: provide leadership, govern, and pass the party program.³⁵ These changes in the organization of the House persist to the present day.

Another competitive era for House control emerged between 1946 and 1954, when control of the House changed four times between the two parties (1946, 1948, 1952, 1954). But unlike other competitive periods for House control, partisan conflict in this period was less acrimonious. Republican leader Joe Martin (R-MA) and Democratic leader Sam Rayburn (D-TX) engaged in norms of reciprocity, comity, and civility. For instance, when the Democrats regained control of the House in 1955 after a period of four party switches in eight years, Rayburn continued to keep the Minority Leader’s office and Martin kept the

³² Randall Strahan, “Thomas Brackett Reed and the Rise of Party Government,” in Masters of the House, ed. by Roger H. Davidson, Susan Webb Hammond, and Raymond W. Smock (Boulder, Colorado: Westview, Press, 1998); Ronald M. Peters, Jr., The American Speakership, p. 63.

³³ Ronald M. Peters, Jr., The American Speakership, pp. 75-87.

³⁴ The Reed Reforms included the ending of dilatory motions by the minority, counting nonvoting members as “present” for the purpose of establishing a quorum, reducing the necessary number of members to 100 for the purposes of establishing a quorum, and reducing the necessary power to refer measures to committee without debate.

³⁵ Ronald M. Peters, Jr., The American Speakership, pp. 63-72.

Speaker's office.³⁶ This period of competition differs remarkably from the intensely partisan House of the competitive 1874-1894 period, and from the intensely competitive and partisan race for majority control in the 1990s. The political system channeled conflict in different ways in the three eras, illustrating the importance of structural factors in determining the nature and tenor of the race for the House. In the 1946-1954 period, the underlying foundations of committee and seniority dominance within the House took the edge off of intense partisanship. By the 1990s, the House of Rayburn and Martin had changed into a different political institution. These structural changes in the management of political conflict in the House play an important role in how the parties battle for House majorities.

Periods of competition and non-competition affect not only the tenor of the House, but also how the country is governed. The precedents from these periods of competition and non-competition have become embedded into the historical lexicon and folklore of the House of Representatives, from Sam Rayburn's "go along to get along" to Newt Gingrich's "politics is war without blood." During the 67th Congress (1921-23), the Republicans possessed a large, 168-seat majority party margin in the House due to large Republican gains in the 1920 campaign. For the remainder of the 1920s, Republicans enjoyed healthy House majorities that allowed Republican policies, like tax cuts and reduction of the national debt, to be enacted in tandem with the Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover presidencies. A similar effect took place in the 1930s as the Great Depression fueled large Democratic House gains

³⁶ Joe Martin, My First Fifty Years in Politics (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1960), pp. 8-9. 229.

in the 1930-1936 period.³⁷ At the zenith of this stable majority in the 75th Congress (1937-1939), Democrats possessed a record-setting 244 seat margin in the House, with only 89 Republicans serving in this Congress. The large and stable Democratic House majorities of the 1930s enabled Democrats, in tandem with President Franklin Roosevelt, to enact important Democratic policy goals emanating from the New Deal, like the Works Progress Administration, Social Security, and labor legislation.

The presence or absence of competition for House control saturates the politics of the House, affecting everything from leadership races to how individual members view their role in the institution. The House Republican minority leadership races during the 1954-1994 period provide one compelling example of how the presence or absence of competition affects political behavior in the House. Republican inability to obtain a majority during the long, forty year period of Democratic rule sparked several internal House Republican leadership battles. In 1958, Republican disappointment over severe losses in the 1958 midterm election led to the ouster of the more institutionally-minded Republican Minority Leader Joe Martin (R-MA) by the more confrontational Charlie Halleck (R-IN). Continued Republican frustration with minority status led to Gerald Ford's (R-MI) ouster of Halleck in 1964. In the 1980s, decades of frustration by Republicans with their extended minority status fueled the rise of Representative Newt Gingrich (R-GA) from minority backbencher to Minority Whip in 1989, and ultimately to Speaker in 1995. Republican thirst for a House majority fueled each of these leadership fights and ascensions.

³⁷ Although Republicans held the House briefly for two separate two-year periods (1947-49 and 1953-55), these "deviating" victories were short-lived and did nothing to alter the underlying natural Democratic majority in the country.

The recent 40-year period of non-competition for House control (1954-1994) is unique in American political history, and likewise had an indelible impact on the House as an institution. During this period, it was widely assumed in the political and academic communities that the Democrats had a perpetual grip on the House of Representatives that made House Republicans a “permanent minority” in the House.³⁸ Republicans were a minority for an unprecedented 40 years, while no other House majority since the Civil War had breached 16 years. The House truly became the political preserve of the Democratic party, and many House Republicans gave up hope of ever achieving majority status. This long period of Democratic rule in the House shaped the legislative process and political environment of the House as it conformed to the imperatives of one-party rule and non-competition. In this non-competitive environment, action in the House shifted to internal House Democratic politics and the policymaking process that arose under the security of extended Democratic rule.

The incentives to escape minority status in the House are enormous. In the House, the majority party controls the floor through the Rules Committee, soaks up much of the staff and office resources, and shares little of the legislative wealth with the minority party. Speaker Thomas Brackett Reed once stated that the purpose of the minority party in the House was to form a quorum, and its only right was to draw a salary. House minorities do not have the power, respect or prerogatives of members of the minority party of the Senate; the difference between the two minorities is between that of serving as an outnumbered

³⁸William F. Connelly, Jr. and John J. Pitney, Jr., Congress’ Permanent Minority?: Republicans in the U.S. House, pp. 1-14.

member of a corporate board and serving time in a prison cell. This difference negates the need for a bicameral focus in this dissertation and focuses analysis squarely on the House of Representatives and the intense competitive campaigns for House control waged by both parties.

To break free of the indignities of minority status, House minority parties in the 1990s have utilized aggressive strategies and attack politics in the drive for House majorities, with the ethics process becoming a new weapon to gain majorities. From the 101st Congress (1989-1990) to the 103rd Congress (1993-1994), the Republican minority increasingly used attack politics and obstruction in its drive to end its long period in the minority. During these Congresses, the Republican Minority increasingly eschewed the acquiescent legislative role carved out for Republicans. Instead, House Republicans undermined the Democratic majority by transforming its Berlin Wall of incumbency advantages into its Maginot Line. The Berlin Wall that protected one-party rule and non-competition, and the efforts of Newt Gingrich and House Republicans to smash it, are pivotal to understanding the current era of partisan struggle for the House. Since 1994, the Democratic minority has adopted these same aggressive tactics and strategies in their fight to regain a House majority.

The rise of a new era of two-party competition is likewise affecting the House politically and institutionally, altering the political and legislative terrain upon which all House members and parties operate. During the previous era of non-competition, the Democratic majority never fell below 242 seats. Since 1994, no House majority has breached 236 seats, producing some of the slimmest House majorities of the 20th century. For the first time since the House was expanded to 435 members in 1913, a House majority

has governed in three consecutive Congresses with majorities below 240, as shown in Table 1-2. Narrow majorities provide lower majority party vote margins from which to govern and legislate in the House.

Table 1-2: Narrow House Majorities of the 20th Century

Year	Majority Party	House Majority
1917-19	Republicans	216*
1923-25	Republicans	225
1931-33	Republicans	218*
1943-45	Democrats	222
1953-55	Republicans	221
1995-97	Republicans	230
1997-99	Republicans	227
1999-2000	Republicans	223

* House Democrats organized the House in these Congresses despite a slim GOP majority.

Sources of Two-Party Competition in the 1990s

Each period of viable two-party competition for the House arises from different political circumstances. For instance, during the competitive 1946-1954 period, a Solid Democratic South dueled a Republican North and industrial Midwest for control of the House. The era of two-party competition that began in the 1990s arises from several recent and long-term structural political changes. The political factors fostering increased competitiveness for House control include the shift of the Solid Democratic South into a new Republican South, the decline in party loyalty among American voters, and the rise of the new swing districts of the 1990s. These developments have altered the political matrix of

House seats in the country, transforming a previously non-competitive situation into an intensely competitive environment for House control.

Several cultural, political, and social trends from the 1950s to the 1990s have laid the foundation for increased competition for House control. In many respects, the political universe of the 1990s is radically different from the political universe of the 1950s. In the 1950s, for instance, American voters displayed a strong allegiance to political parties and received their news from one of the three major television networks. Politicians in this era, meanwhile, operated under different rules than politicians of the 1990s. For instance, the news media and individual journalists refused to report the sexual foibles of President John F. Kennedy. This political universe changed in the 1970s and 1980s as a result of Watergate and the Vietnam War. Voters became increasingly dis-engaged from party politics, with one-third of the electorate declaring themselves independents by the 1990s. C-SPAN, talk-radio, cable television, and Internet publications like the Drudge Report emerged in the 1980s and 1990s to provide voters with other avenues to learn about political developments which were outside the control of the three major networks. Investigative and attack journalism emerged in the post-Watergate era to probe scandal and the personal lives of politicians, from Iran-Contra to Gary Hart to Bill Clinton. The increased media outlets insured a means to communicate scandals and ethics violations to the public. Meanwhile, the increased use of television as a medium to communicate with voters fueled a money chase on Capitol Hill by politicians of both parties scrambling for advertising dollars for their campaigns.

Each of these cultural and political trends laid the groundwork for attack politics in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s. As these trends pushed politics in a decidedly

partisan direction, demographic changes laid the groundwork for increased competition in the individual House races. One important factor leading to increased competitive for House control in the 1990s is the shift of the old solid Democratic South to a new Republican South.³⁹ While the South has shifted to the GOP, the Northeast has increasingly gravitated toward the Democrats. The shift of the South to the GOP has been the biggest catalyst of two-party competition, insuring the two parties with rough parity in terms of the seats they can expect to solidly control. In 1960, Republicans controlled six of the 104 House seats in the South (.05%); after the 1996 elections Republicans controlled 71 of the 125 House seats in the South (56%). In the 1994 election alone, Republicans captured 21 southern Democratic House seats; in 1996, Republicans captured an additional eight southern Democratic House seats. As the South has become increasingly Republican turf, Democrats have increased their gains in the Northeast, solidified their hold on inner-city urban areas, and competed for seats on the Pacific coast and suburban areas with New Democrat House candidates.

These regional shifts have provided both parties with natural bases of support. But both parties quickly reached saturation levels in terms of the magnitude of gains they could expect in their regions of support. In this environment, the swing seats emanating from the 1991 redistricting have arisen in prominence. The swing seats are those districts displaying loyalty to neither political party. Presidents and representatives of differing political parties win the districts in different elections. The swing seats represent the true battleground in the

³⁹ Earl Black and Merle Black, The Vital South (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992, pp. 3-28.

quest for House majorities in the current era of two-party competition for House control. These districts represent ground zero in the aggressive drives by the two parties for House control, where nationalized campaigns, party agendas, the image of party leaders, and competing party philosophies each combine into a combustible political mixture. There are approximately 60 swing seats scattered across the United States which serve as a political barometer of the country, as displayed in Appendix B.

The political story of America between 1988 and 1998 is contained in these swing seats. Fifty-one of these 60 House districts have experienced a change in party control in their representation in the U.S. House since 1990. These are the House districts that elected George Bush to the presidency in 1988 (54 of 60), helped elect Bill Clinton to the presidency in 1992 (50 out of 60), and then re-elected Bill Clinton in 1996 (55 of 60). These districts have also tipped the balance of power in the House in the 1990s, and have reflected trends in the nationwide fight for House control in an era of two-party competition. House Democrats swept the swing seats in 1992 (44 of 60) as Bill Clinton won the presidency. House Republicans swept these seats in 1994 as they won control of the House in their nationalized campaign (41 of 60). The aggressive Democratic campaign for House control in 1996 resulted in a swing seat victory of eight seats, with Republicans controlling 33 seats and Democrats winning 27 seats. In 1998, the two parties achieved virtual parity in their swing seat victories as Republicans won 32 seats and Democrats won 28 seats, mirroring the nationwide Democratic gain of five House seats.

The two parties are currently fighting to increase their bases of regional support while finding the center of political gravity pivotal to win the swing seats. This creates interesting

political problems as the parties appeal both to their hard-core base voters and the more apolitical swing voters. Congressman Lee Hamilton (D-IN), a 34-year veteran of the House, described this change in American politics in the following manner:

The intensity of politics has gone up over the past few years. The more ideologically inclined individuals are being motivated to engage in political campaigns. Politicians, being politicians, naturally respond to these intense ideological groups. But the end result is that the parties are moving apart. The Democrats are being dragged to the left and the Republicans to the right. There is no one in the middle anymore, just a group of politicians who are responding to narrow ideological constituencies.⁴⁰

To gin up their bases, both parties must often use the legislative process to energize their core constituencies and increase their turnout. Both parties have experienced the fate of ideological activists affecting primary outcomes and producing unelectable nominees for the general election campaign.⁴¹ The two parties must now appeal to swing, moderate voters while simultaneously appealing to their bases of support on the right and left extremes. This delicate balancing act has left several political casualties and road-kill in its wake; there are few saints on the road to a House majority. Majority status has become the new cocaine of party politics, and this addiction drives the new race for House control. The changes resulting from the new race for the House are likely to persist in the next Democratic House, and the enduring repercussions of the tenuous majority will affect the House legislatively and politically for years to come.

⁴⁰ Interview with Congressman Lee Hamilton (D-IN), 21 May 1998.

⁴¹ For a discussion of this phenomenon, see Aaron Wildavsky, Revolt Against the Masses (New York: Basic Books, 1971); Jeane Kirkpatrick, The New Presidential Elite (New York: Basic Books, 1976); and Nelson Polsby, Consequences of Party Reform (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983). Unrepresentative nominating electorates have produced several ideologically pure but unelectable presidential candidates, like Republican Barry Goldwater in 1964 and Democrat George McGovern in 1972.

During the 103rd, 104th, and 105th Congresses, both Democratic and Republican House majorities have been forced to deal with the political realities of increased two-party competition. The campaign operatives engaged in the incredibly competitive 1996 race for the House have described it as “Armageddon,” “total warfare,” and “trench warfare,” -- unrelenting warfare for every competitive district in the nation.⁴² House majorities face a perilous political course in this new era of two-party competition. Aggressive battles for majority status now accompany the traditional duties of legislating and governing by a House majority. The imperatives of majority-formation and majority-retention activities provide structure to the House, altering it in the process. The Democratic majority of the 103rd Congress, and the Republican majorities of the 104th and 105th Congresses, have each encountered severe political problems as they have attempted to both govern and defend their majority. The parties now slug it out in no-holds-barred fights for House control, especially in the critical swing districts that determine who is going to sit in the Speaker’s chair.

Research Design and Structure

This dissertation probes the new race for the House by analyzing how it has affected three Congresses of the 1990s: the 103rd (1993-94), the 104th (1995-96), and the 105th (1997-98). It is based on three data sources: information gathered from the public record, interviews conducted with Members of Congress and staff members on Capitol Hill, and observations from my experience as an American Political Science Association Congressional Fellow in the 105th Congress. This dissertation could not have been written without the fellowship experience in Washington, D.C. The fellowship year provided

⁴² Interviews with DCCC and RNCC staffers, April-May 1998.

invaluable immersion in the House as an institution during the throes of two-party competition and jockeying for majority status. It also provided time to interview members of Congress to provide a more balanced and long-term view of the institution over time as it has adapted to the contours of two-party competition. In addition, I unabashedly gleaned as much information as possible from the Internet, tapping the research potential of the world wide web. I found *Thomas* (the home page of the House of Representatives) and the on-line home pages of major newspapers like the New York Times, Roll Call, The Hill, the Washington Times, and the Washington Post to be invaluable sources of information.

In addition to the public record, I obtained valuable insights and quotations from interviews with Members of Congress and their staffs. For this dissertation, I conducted 52 interviews with Members of Congress and their staffs between November 1997 and August 1998, 30 interviews conducted with House members and 22 formal interviews conducted with congressional staffers. These interviews are listed in Appendix C. The interviews I conducted with Members of Congress provided important background information and a road-map of larger trends in American politics and the new race for the House. In addition, I benefitted from numerous informal conversations with congressional staffers, political pollsters, and political strategists during my year on Capitol Hill. Many members requested anonymity in return for frank discussions of the politics involved in my dissertation topic. I am grateful to those members who agreed to be interviewed, and re-interviewed, to obtain their reactions to new developments. Almost all of the interview subjects requested off the record interviews, given the sensitive nature of much of what was discussed (especially party strategies, Member's views towards other Members, and behind-the-scenes politicking

among Members and staff).

For each of Congress under review, I will examine the effects of two-party competition for House control on House elections, party culture, and governance and leadership in the U.S. House. In terms of House elections, I will examine the tactics and strategies of both parties used in the competitive contests for House control in the 1990s. The current era of competition for House control has witnessed nationalized campaigns by one or both parties in each of the Congresses under examination (103rd-105th). The prominence of these nationalized campaigns in the war for House control, especially for the critical swing seats, is adding a new dimension to our understanding of congressional elections, which during the previous era of non-competition had been confined to the all-politics-is-local thesis. The nationalized campaigns of 1994, 1996, and 1998 provide important new templates for understanding and analyzing possible election strategies available to the new parties in periods of competition and non-competition. In addition to examining the nationalized campaigns for House control in the 1990s, I will also examine the tactics employed by the two parties and their leaders to raise funds, recruit candidates, and provide campaign resources to increase the chances of majority control. Quality congressional candidates are especially important in victories in the swing districts, where the strength of individual candidates and their campaign messages are more important than party appeals. To obtain House majorities, leaders of both parties are intervening heavily in selected districts to recruit the best candidate to protect or grab key electoral plums, and training candidates how to win their elections.

In addition to examining election strategies and tactics, I will also examine the party

cultures of the two parties and how they are changing and adapting in the midst of a competitive environment. The concept of culture makes an important contribution to political analysis, even though it has been given little attention in the literature and thus conceptually muddled. Political culture provides the context in which politics occurs, links individual and collective identities, defines and organizes political behavior within a distinct political entity, and provides a framework for interpreting the actions and motives of others. For instance, on a larger demographic level, every decade another ten members of the House represent predominantly suburban districts. These new suburban members come into the House of Representatives with a distinctly different cultural background than rural or urban members of Congress.

For the purposes of this dissertation, party culture is used to capture two important, but often divergent, developments in the race for House control. On the one hand, there is an enduring party culture of House Democrats and House Republicans that animates fundamental differences between the two parties on policy, organization, ideology, and how their internal politics are conducted. Many Republican members of the House, for instance, have strong roots in the business community and are unwilling to make service in the U.S. House a lifelong career.⁴³ Many House Democrats, on the other hand, come to the House from a background of public service and have a belief in using the power of the federal government to improve people's lives. These differences, derived from the demographic trends which provide the electoral foundations of the two parties, produce important,

⁴³ Alan Ehrenhalt, The United States of Ambition: Politicians, Power, and the Pursuit of Power (New York: Times Books, 1991), pp. 208-227.

enduring and fundamental differences in party cultures in the House. In the 105th Congress, 55% of House Republicans had careers in business or banking, compared to only 27% of House Democrats. Many House Republicans come to Congress for short “commando raids” against the growth of the power and spending of the federal government. The enduring elements of the party cultures of the two parties in the House, which are demographically based and change slowly over time due to tectonic demographic and political shifts in the country at large, are illustrated in Table 1-3.

Table 1-3: Enduring Elements of Republican and Democratic Culture in the House

	Democratic Culture in the House	Republican Culture in the House
Organization	Coalition party, socially and politically heterogeneous with multiple power centers and demographic constituencies; party legitimacy determined by who you represent	More unitary, socially and politically homogeneous party comprised of leadership factions; expectation of being a “good soldier” to the party cause; party legitimacy determined by who you know and which leadership faction you are associated
Values	Strong federal government is necessary to counterbalance private economic domination; fairness as overriding value	Belief in free enterprise, limited government, and individual pursuit of their own dreams; individual success and limited government as overriding value; commitment to cultural conservatism by the Family Values Caucus

In addition to the enduring, demographically-driven elements of party culture, which are very difficult for party leaders and members to change or control, there is also another element of party culture which can be altered and controlled by party leaders and members. This element of party culture involves internal cohesiveness, solidarity, and team work to achieve legislative and political goals. The demographically-controlled elements of the party cultures of the two parties are not dramatically changing in the current era of competitive control. But the temporary party cultures revolving around group cohesiveness do change

and alter from Congress to Congress as required by political developments and situations. For instance, during the rise of House Republicans to power in the early 1990s, Minority Whip Newt Gingrich molded a distinct party culture of teamwork for House Republicans which enabled them to think and act like a team to capture a majority. In the 103rd-105th Congresses, House Republicans molded a distinct party culture based on the principles of party-building, loyalty to party and leadership factions, and working as a team to elect a Republican House majority. In the 104th and 105th Congresses, House Democratic leaders have likewise attempted to foster greater feelings of teamwork and group camaraderie among Democratic members to secure a new House majority. My examination of party culture will examine how party leaders, in the midst of competitive pressures to secure House majorities, are molding temporary adaptations to broader cultural frameworks.

In addition to elections and party cultures, I will also examine changes in the process of governing and legislating in the House during the current era of two-party competition. Agenda-control, leadership procedural control of the chamber, and the types of legislation and issues pushed in the House by the majority and minority parties each play prominent roles in the new race for the House. In addition to managing their internal coalitions in the House, majority and minority parties in the current competitive era use the governing process as an important electoral tool. Shutdown politics, triangulation, discharge petitions, and recess strategies are each representative of the intersection of the governing process in the House and the new demands of party competition for House control. The party-centered theories of congressional organization and action paid little attention to the goal of capturing or defending a House majority and how this activity affected the governing process.

Competitive incentives now play a powerful role in shaping the governing and legislative activities of the two parties in the House.

The 1994 and 1996 elections played a large role in spurring many of the ideas of this dissertation. This dissertation seeks to both provide a snapshot of the competitive fights for House control in the 1990s and, in addition, illustrate how the electoral and institutional changes produced by intense two-party competition affect the House of Representatives. Although the activities in the 103rd-105th Congresses are relatively recent, it is important that as political scientists and observers of the modern House of Representatives we understand and analyze the changes emanating from the new era of two-party competition. In addition, as citizens who care about the state of democratic institutions, it is imperative that we seek additional perspectives for long-term understanding of the House of Representatives, both historically and politically.

CHAPTER TWO

THE 103rd CONGRESS AND THE 1994 CAMPAIGN:

The Republican Takeover of the House and the New Era of Two-party Competition

The 103rd Congress and the 1994 campaign formally ushered in a new era of two-party competition for House control. The 1994 election, in addition to ending 40 years of Democratic reign in the House, provided Republicans with a 52 seat net gain. During the 103rd Congress, the two parties fashioned their governing and electoral strategies from differing assumptions, each with an eye toward attaining a House majority in the 1994 elections. The Democratic majority, united with a Democratic president for the first time in 12 years, intended to govern and pass into law several Democratic legislative priorities that had been stymied in the Reagan-Bush years. The Republican minority, sensing Democratic vulnerability on universal health care reform and Democratic tax and spend policies, unabashedly pursued majority status in the 1994 midterm election. House Republicans employed attack politics against the Democratic majority, focused their efforts on drawing sharp partisan distinctions, nationalized the 1994 congressional elections, and concentrated on farm team efforts to recruit, train, and elect scores of Republicans to the U.S. House. Unlike previous decades, the political field had shifted in the 1990s, moving the House into a more competitive environment. As House Republicans took advantage of this new competitive playing field, the Democratic majority became blind-sided by the events of the 103rd Congress and the imperatives of defending a House majority in a competitive environment.

The 103rd Congress brought new challenges and opportunities for the Democratic

House majority. Bill Clinton's inauguration as president in 1993 ended 12 years of divided government and gridlock, presenting Democrats with their first chance to govern since the Carter Administration in the 1970s.¹ House Democrats had high hopes they could pass into law Democratic policy priorities on the budget, health care, and domestic policy. Despite this opportunity to govern, the 1992 election presented ominous signals to the Democratic House majority that its long era of one-party rule was in jeopardy. The 1991 redistricting process shifted 19 House seats from the slower-growing, and Democratic-leaning, Northeast and Industrial Midwest regions to the faster-growing, and Republican-leaning, regions of the South and West. The 1992 elections witnessed an anti-incumbent attitude fueled by an economic recession, the defeat of President Bush for re-election, a protest vote of one-fifth of the electorate for independent candidate Ross Perot, and the election to the presidency of Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton with 43% of the vote.

Amidst the volatile politics of the 1992 presidential election, House Democrats lost a net ten seats, while 110 new House members poured into the House of Representatives. This was the largest influx of new members into the House since 1948. Many of the 63 new Democratic freshmen came to Washington stressing Perot's themes of reducing the burgeoning \$290 billion federal deficit, implementing fiscal austerity to deal with looming entitlement problems, and congressional reform. Fifteen Democratic freshmen were elected to swing seats with under 55% of the vote, and four were elected to swing seats with under

¹ David S. Broder, "Good Overture From Clinton," Washington Post, 22 January 1993, p A 21.

50% of the vote.² Although voters gave Democrats control of the presidency and the Congress, the foundations of this new power were weak. Democrats lost seats in the House, there was no net change in Senate seats, and Bill Clinton won a plurality victory in a three-way presidential race. Each of these developments laid the groundwork for the competitive 1994 election as voters soured on the Democratic agenda and President Clinton, while House Republicans went on the attack.

Much like the Titanic's maiden voyage, silent icebergs awaited beyond the horizon to sink the high hopes that Democrats could deliver on an ambitious Democratic domestic policy agenda and survive the 1994 midterm. House Republicans effectively boycotted the governing process in the 103rd Congress, obstructing, undermining, and vilifying as much of the Democratic agenda as possible. Neither party in the House sought bipartisan compromise or governance. While Republicans boycotted the governing process, Democratic leaders pursued a partisan governing strategy of looking within their own caucus to pass budget, crime, and health care legislation. The Democratic majority subsequently moved to the left as its leaders searched for a working majority within its liberal-dominated caucus. This sharp move to the left on domestic policy created political problems for marginal House Democratic members facing tough races in 1994. This move to the left also provided House Republicans with an opening to attack Democrats throughout the 103rd Congress, and gave Republicans lethal ammunition for their 1994 nationalized campaign for House control.

Internal Democratic fissures, meanwhile, made agreement within the Democratic Caucus on large-scale policy initiatives like health care reform impossible. By the summer

² "Wave of Diversity Spared Many Incumbents," CO Almanac 1992, p. 15-A.

of 1994, the Democratic House majority faced an inability to govern as its crime and health care proposals collapsed. In the 1994 midterm elections, Republicans bludgeoned the Democratic majority with its record on raising taxes, attempting to pass a national health care system, and refusing to pass welfare and congressional reform. These attacks allowed the GOP to gain 56 previously Democratic House seats, including 25 Democratic swing seats. The high-profile items of the Democratic agenda in the 103rd Congress, especially universal health care reform and the 1993 budget accord, boomeranged against all but the most liberal Democratic incumbents holding the safest liberal seats. House Democratic leaders did not fully realize the dangers to their House majority, especially to moderate and conservative Democratic candidates running in the non-urban areas, until it was too late.

While midterm elections are historically bad for presidents, the 1994 midterm represented a massive meltdown of Democratic campaigns and an unmitigated disaster for House Democrats.³ The defeat of Speaker Thomas Foley (D-WA) marked the first time since 1860 that a Speaker of the House faced defeat in a re-election bid. Representative Jay Inslee (D-WA), one of the 34 Democratic incumbents ousted in 1994, likened the election as “very similar to Mount St. Helens going off.”⁴ House Democrats lost 34 incumbents and the largest loss of House seats in a midterm election since 1942. The Democratic majority of 258 in the 103rd Congress evaporated into a Republican majority of 230 in the 104th

³ See Harold W. Stanley, “The Parties, the President, and the 1994 Midterm Elections,” in Bert A. Rockman and Colin Campbell, eds., The Clinton Presidency: First Appraisals (Chatham, New Jersey: Chatham House Publishers, 1995), pp. 188-211.

⁴ Norah M. O'Donnell, “Still Recovering From 1994's GOP Eruption, Democrats In Washington State Target White, Metcalf, Smith Seats,” Roll Call Politics, 23 April 1998, p. 26.

Congress, with 73 new Republican freshmen flooding into the House and every Republican incumbent winning re-election. The Democratic loss of open seats in 1994 was the largest loss of open House seats in 103 elections going back to 1790.⁵ In the critical swing seats, the Democratic swing-seat majority of 44-16 transformed into a Republican swing-seat majority of 41-19. Republicans grabbed 21 conservative House seats in the South, West, and Midwest that had been previously represented by moderate or conservative Democrats. These seat gains provided a regional boost to Republicans in their natural bast of support - the South - and moved the battle for House control to the pivotal swing seats. For the remainder of the 1990s, the two parties would fight on the campaign trail for majority control over a relatively modest number of swing and marginal seats.

Although the House was slowly moving into a period of two-party competitiveness in the early 1990s, the Democratic majority continued to operate in the 103rd Congress as if the era of non-competition would continue unabated into the 21st century. House Democratic leaders in the 1980s and early 1990s had used their strong procedural control of the House floor and the Rules Committee to structure the legislative process to block consideration of initiatives opposed by liberals within the Democratic Caucus, like entitlement reforms, term limits, and deficit reduction based on domestic spending cuts. In the 103rd Congress, Democrats continued to govern in this manner, although they met stiff resistance from a newly aggressive Republican minority and moderate Democrats queasy about confronting voters without centrist legislative accomplishments. The middle class

⁵ Dave Kaplan and Juliana Gruenwald, "Longtime 'Second' Party Scores a Long List of GOP Firsts," Congressional Quarterly, 12 November 1994, p. 3232.

anger that ejected President Bush in the 1992 election did not dissipate in the 1994 election cycle; instead, House Republicans trained it on House Democratic incumbents and candidates in a nationalized campaign for House control. These competitive demands drove the dynamics of the 103rd Congress, both within the House in terms of legislation and governing and on the campaign trail with the Republican's nationalized campaign.

The 1993 Clinton budget, universal health care reform, and the 1994 crime bill defined the 103rd Congress and the fight for party control in 1994.⁶ President Clinton and congressional Democratic leaders believed that an intense focus on domestic policy accomplishments would help all House Democrats running for re-election in 1994. In addition, House Democratic leaders decided that they would stress policy issues like health care reform and deficit reduction over more mundane internal house-keeping matters like congressional reform and lobbying reform. They also decided to eschew Republican involvement in the health, budget, and crime bills in order to produce more Democratic legislation, and used their procedural powers in the House to block measures that threatened the policy and political preferences of the liberal majority within the Democratic Caucus. As the Democratic majority governed from the left both to craft policy and pass legislation, it shut down the legislative process to measures desperately needed by moderate and conservative House Democrats facing tough races in the swing seats or in the South and West. Each of these decisions laid the foundation for the electoral terrain of the 103rd Congress, and haunted the Democratic majority as it faced aggressive Republican attack

⁶ For more on this subject consult: Elizabeth Drew, On the Edge: The Clinton Presidency (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994).

campaigns in the 1994 midterm.

On August 5, 1993, House Democrats passed by a razor-thin margin of 218-216 the 1993 Omnibus Budget-Reconciliation Act (PL 103-66). This legislation cut the deficit by \$504.8 billion over five years, primarily through \$250.1 billion in tax increases and cuts in military spending. Opponents of the 1993 budget accord in both parties attacked it for raising taxes too much and curbing domestic spending and entitlement spending too little. Forty-one House Democrats opposed this budget plan due to its over-reliance on tax increases and avoidance of domestic spending cuts. Every House Republican, meanwhile, opposed the 1993 budget and castigated it as the largest tax increase in the history of public finance. In addition to the deficit reduction package of 1993, the Clinton Administration made reform of the nation's health care system a top priority. On September 22, 1993, President Clinton unveiled a 1,342 page health care reform proposal requiring universal health care for every American citizen, the creation of new health alliances, and employer mandates for health coverage of employees. Democrats were unable to find agreement on health care reform, and sustained opposition from congressional Republicans and outside interest groups helped to kill it at the end of the 103rd Congress. Once again, Republicans castigated the Clinton health care plan as a big-government power grab.

In addition to health care reform and reducing the deficit, Democratic leaders also tackled anti-crime legislation in the 103rd Congress to do something about crime in the wake of the 1992 Los Angeles riots. On September 13, 1994, President Clinton signed into law a \$30.2 billion, six-year anti-crime bill (PL 103-322) that provided money for new prisons, banned 19 types of semi-automatic assault rifles, provided funding for 100,000 new police

officers, and extended the federal death penalty to dozens of new and existing federal crimes. Although the final version of the crime bill moved federal crime policy to the right, Republicans focused their attacks on the more liberal crime bill originally produced by the Democratic majority. While each of these high-profile legislative items tackled an important public policy issue - reducing the deficit, reforming health care, and addressing the crime issue - the manner in which the Democratic majority handled each issue politically and procedurally became hot issues for the Republican nationalized campaign of 1994. The Republican minority repeatedly framed each of Democratic domestic policy initiatives as a big-government power grab of raising taxes, coddling criminals, and launching new social programs.

As the Democratic majority stumbled in the 103rd Congress, House Republicans increasingly availed themselves to the attack politics advocated and preached by Republican Minority Whip Newt Gingrich. During the 1980s and 1990s, Gingrich schooled an entire generation of House Republicans in aggressive majority-forming strategies and tactics, and advocated tough political street-fighting tactics to achieve a Republican House of Representatives. In the 103rd Congress, House Republicans had more to gain by obstructing and impeding the Democratic majority in order to gain a Republican majority in 1994 than in cooperating with Democrats to craft policy solutions that could lengthen their stay in the minority. Defiance supplanted acquiescence within House Republican ranks. The end of divided government in the 103rd Congress freed House Republicans of the political handcuffs that had previously bound them to some modicum of responsibility for governance in the Reagan-Bush years. Unlike previous Congresses, where House Republicans helped make

divided government work between Republican presidencies and Democratic Congresses, House Republicans pursued an aggressive strategy for achieving majority status in the 103rd Congress.

GOVERNING

The Democratic Majority Governs

House Democratic leaders confronted several daunting challenges as they constructed the Democratic legislative agenda for the 103rd Congress. House Democratic leaders faced a complex relationship with President Clinton, who ran for president in 1992 as an outsider “New Democrat” promising change and economic renewal amidst the recession of the early 1990s. Clinton made several criticisms of the Democratically-controlled Congress in 1992, including a 30-second television advertisement in the New Hampshire primary that condemned the Democratic Congress’s recent congressional pay raise. In addition, candidate Clinton offered a third-way in American politics “neither conservative or liberal, Democratic or Republican,” while dodging numerous personal scandals on the road to the White House.⁷ After the 1992 election, House Democratic leaders were compelled to work closely with a president-elect untested in the ways of Washington. Representative Tim Penny (D-MI) captured this complex relationship between House Democrats and Clinton, especially House Democratic concern of the “character issue,” when he stated “With Clinton,

⁷ William Schneider, “For Democrats, No News is Good News,” National Journal, 25 July 1992, p. 1762; Richard E. Cohen, “Keeping Their Distance,” National Journal, 11 April 1992, pp. 865-68; Richard E. Cohen, “No Honeymoon Cruise,” National Journal, 7 November 1992, p. 2552.

there is a fear that another shoe will drop.”⁸

As Clinton assumed office in 1993, House Democratic leaders confronted the challenge of forming a united Democratic legislative agenda that could keep the diverse House Democratic caucus together and provide a record for all House Democrats in the 1994 campaign. Democratic leaders also confronted numerous public policy problems facing the United States in the short and long term, from reviving the sluggish economy to reducing the deficit and reforming the nation's health care system. In addition, Democratic House leaders were stripped with the safety provided by divided government they enjoyed in the Reagan-Bush years, where they possessed the perfect foil to deflect blame. The election of a Democratic president brought the power of unified government to House Democratic leaders. It also left the Democratic majority fully exposed to the scrutiny and demands of governing responsibilities.

Speaker Foley, in conjunction with other House Democratic leaders, decided shortly after the 1992 election that Democrats would spend the 103rd Congress legislating a Democratic agenda in tandem with the new Clinton presidency. Providing tangible policy results became an important goal for House Democratic leaders, especially after the gridlock of the 102nd Congress. In 1992, President Bush had vetoed 21 bills including several legislative items important to House Democrats like family leave, motor voter registration, and an urban tax bill.⁹ Democratic leaders reasoned that a healthy governing agenda that

⁸ Richard E. Cohen, "Keeping Their Distance," National Journal, 11 April 1992, pp. 865-68.

⁹ "President Bush's Vetoes...A Near Perfect Record," CQ Almanac 1992, pp. 6-7.

included health care reform, deficit reduction, and the passage of scores of Democratic domestic policy priorities would provide a substantial legislative record for all House Democrats as they faced re-election in 1994, especially the 63 Democratic freshmen facing their first re-election races. In reality, the Democratic legislative agenda of the 103rd Congress, especially the budget and health care items, split the Democratic Caucus between its liberal and moderate wings, unified House Republicans in opposition, and energized conservative base voters important to Republican electoral hopes.

As part of this Democratic strategy to govern in a responsible fashion in order to provide a record for the 1994 election, Speaker Foley persuaded president-elect Clinton shortly after the 1992 election to make deficit-reduction a top legislative priority. The decision to tackle the deficit problem became the first key decision made by House Democratic leaders and President Clinton.¹⁰ A majority of the 1992 Democratic freshmen were deeply affected by the message of fiscal discipline articulated by Ross Perot in the 1992 presidential campaign, including deficit reduction, fiscal austerity, and congressional reform.¹¹ By addressing the deficit issue first, which animated the angry Perot voters in 1992, Democratic leaders thought they would be making an important down payment on the pressing political needs of the Democratic freshmen for 1994.¹² To aid in the goal of deficit reduction, Clinton's 1992 campaign promise of a middle class tax cut was dropped even

¹⁰ Bob Woodward, The Agenda: Inside the Clinton White House (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), pp. 70-84.

¹¹ Graeme Browning, "The Gang of 114," National Journal, 22 January 1994, p. 158.

¹² Elizabeth Drew, On the Edge, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), p. 61.

before his inauguration in 1993.¹³

The push for deficit reduction by Foley and Democratic House leaders dominated the Democratic agenda in 1993 as the Clinton Administration and congressional Democrats hammered out a budget accord that could reduce the deficit while attracting enough Democratic votes to pass. For House Democratic leaders, delivering on the big-ticket items of a Democratic domestic agenda, like deficit reduction and health care reform, superseded matters like congressional reform which they considered a boring institutional issue which voters did not care about. Throughout the 103rd Congress, Democratic leaders governed in a manner that minimized the potential for mischief not only by Republican attack but also within Democratic ranks. For instance, Democratic leaders believed that if a popular reform like congressional reform passed early in the 103rd Congress, other key reforms like campaign finance reform would be ignored by Democratic members and therefore never be enacted. As a result, congressional accountability became the “train” for a unified Democratic reform package. When congressional reform did not materialize in a timely fashion, the entire Democratic reform effort was undermined.

On health care reform, like the 1993 budget agreement, Democratic leaders governed from the left in pursuit of Democratic votes at the expense of cutting Republicans out of the policymaking process. In the process, Democratic leaders ignored modest, bipartisan health care proposals produced by moderate and conservative House Democrats which attracted moderate Republican interest. Instead, Majority Leader Gephardt (D-MO) offered a

¹³ John M. Broder and Michael Ross, “Clinton Nominee Scales Back Promise of 8 Million New Jobs,” Los Angeles Times, 22 January 1993, p. A 26.

leadership-drafted legislative health care proposal that attempted to meet President Clinton's demand of universal coverage while still being able to attract enough Democratic votes to pass on the House. This legislation, unveiled on July 29, 1994, actually went farther to the left than the Clinton health care reform proposal in terms of expanding the reach and scope of the federal government. Both the Clinton health care plan and the House Democratic health care reform package pursued the goal of universal coverage, a new government entitlement program only popular with liberal voters in the Democratic base. No health care reform passed in the 103rd Congress as rank-and-file House Democrats in tough re-election races abandoned both the Clinton health care reform proposal and the more liberal House Democratic leadership package of health care reforms. As Democratic leaders pursued a partisan liberal strategy on health care reform, they stoked the flames of opposition among House Republicans and laid the groundwork for the nationalized Republican campaign in the 1994 campaign. Meanwhile, Democratic pursuit of a solution to health care reform crowded out consideration of President Bill Clinton's 1992 election promise to reform the nation's welfare system.

The Democratic majority in the 103rd Congress, dominated by the duty to govern, pursued substantive policy solutions to the deficit, crime, and health care problems confronting the United States. Despite this duty to govern, Democratic leaders led a party with little discipline and the difficulty of marshaling an increasingly individualized caucus. Rampant House Democratic defections on each of the major Democratic agenda items forced narrow wins, typified by the narrow Democratic victory on the 1993 budget accord that relied on a razor-thin margin of 218 Democratic votes as the Clinton Administration and House

Democratic leaders pried reluctant votes with every remedy available. On the crime bill, Democratic leaders pursued a similar strategy of operating within the Democratic caucus to find the votes for passage. Once again, House Democrats held a substantive debate within their ranks on crime policy, and crafted legislation without bipartisan input or Republican support. On health care reform, Democratic leaders followed the leadership of President Clinton and the task force led by First Lady Hillary Clinton; when this effort collapsed, so did House Democratic efforts to enact major health care reform. On each of these legislative measures, House Democratic leaders took seriously their responsibility to govern and deliver on a post-Cold War domestic policy agenda. But on each issue, Democratic leaders became stymied and hamstrung as its flaccid majority became pulled in several competing directions, an aggressive minority attacked, and the Clinton presidency floundered.

Despite these problems, the Democratic majority governing strategy led to the enactment of a wide variety of policy proposals into law. In addition to the 1993 budget and 1994 crime bill, the Democratic majority enacted into law a \$2.5 billion aid package for Russia, the Brady Bill, an expansion of the earned income tax credit, family and medical leave legislation, motor-voter legislation, the North American Free Trade Agreement, the reinventing government initiative, national service legislation, and Goals 2000. The Democratic majority also completed all the 13 must-pass appropriations bills on time, the first time since 1988. These legislative victories, however, were obscured by the larger hot-button issues of the 103rd Congress, especially the debates surrounding Democratic health and budget policies.

While focusing legislative attention on their domestic agenda, House Democratic

leaders exerted strong procedural control of the House floor and the Rules Committee to block serious consideration of congressional reform, welfare reform, and additional deficit reduction based on spending cuts.

These agenda items, strongly pushed by the Republican minority and a growing cadre of moderate and conservative Democrats, created political headaches for House Democratic leaders trying to maintain control of the legislative agenda. Democratic inaction on welfare reform and congressional reform provided additional political headaches for House Democrats running in marginal districts. Although House Democratic leaders kept a strong control of the legislative in the House, this strong control had the adverse effect of denying House Democratic incumbents in tough races a forum to push issues of concern in their respective districts. House Democratic leaders won the fight on the formal agenda on the House floor, but in many aspects lost the larger symbolic wars over the definition of the 103rd Congress to base and swing voters in the 1994 campaign. Democratic management of the House, and the issues they selected to pursue in the 103rd Congress, became hot issues in for House Republicans in 1994 as they articulated anti-Clinton, anti-Democratic themes in their campaigns.

The fight over discharge petitions in the 103rd Congress presents a compelling example of how Democratic leaders fought to maintain control of the legislative process in order to govern, but created political problems for House Democratic incumbents in competitive districts facing the brunt of Republican attacks. House Democratic leaders and committee chairmen had traditionally kept tight control of the legislative process in order to govern effectively, and increasingly used this procedural control of the chamber to block

floor consideration of several items to conservative Democrats and Republicans, including term limits, the line-item veto, the balanced budget amendment, welfare reform, and congressional reform.¹⁴ A discharge petition provided the only legislative route for dissenting members to bypass the procedural control of the House by congressional leaders and committee chairs. If 218 House members sign a discharge petition regarding a piece of legislation, then that legislation bypasses the committee and is immediately brought to the House floor for consideration. Since 1931, discharge petition signatures were secret pursuant to a ruling of Speaker Nance Garner (D-TX).

In 1993, House Democratic leaders fought a growing coalition of House Republicans and conservative Democrats, led by Representative James Inhofe (R-OK), over the secrecy requirement of discharge petitions. House Republicans believed that opening the discharge petition signature process would provide an avenue to publicly illustrate the intransigence of the Democratic House majority on other issues important to Republicans and conservatives, like welfare reform, term limits, congressional reform, and spending cuts. House Republicans publicized the discharge petition issue through talk radio's Rush Limbaugh show, Perot's United We Stand America, and direct-mail fund-raising appeals.¹⁵ In the process, they succeeded in transforming a previously arcane procedural fight into a successful symbolic rallying point in the war for House control in the 103rd Congress, framing the issue as open, accountable government versus old-style congressional barons.

¹⁴ "218 Votes for Sunshine," Washington Post, 14 September 1993, p. A 20.

¹⁵ Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein, "No Smoke, No Barons," Washington Post, 27 September 1993, p. A 19; Mary Jacoby, "Surrender! Leaders Cave on Discharge," Roll Call, 23 September 1993, p. 1.

House Democratic leaders argued that ending the secrecy requirement would open the discharge petition process to abuse, place pressure on members from interest groups seeking discharge petition signatures, and deprive the committees and the majority party control of both the legislative process and the legislative agenda. Energy and Commerce Committee chairman John Dingell (D-MI) opposed the discharge petition drive by stating “you lay the basis for the entire bypassing of the committee system.”¹⁶ Rules Committee chairman Joseph Moakley (D-MA) explained that the Republican media campaign, aimed at Perot voters and talk radio audiences, drove the dynamics of the debate: “This secrecy thing just took over, and nobody looked beyond it...Instead of the court of last resort, they [discharge petitions] will become the court of first resort.”¹⁷ The fight over ending the secrecy requirement of discharge petitions, in addition to providing campaign ammunition for House Republicans, deprived Democratic leaders of an important procedural tool for governing the House.¹⁸ Discharge petitions would later be used by the Democratic minority in the 105th Congress to embarrass the Republican majority on campaign finance reform and managed care reform, just as the Republican minority used them in the 103rd Congress to embarrass the Democratic majority.

The discharge petition fight in the fall of 1993 created additional problems for

¹⁶ Mary Jacoby, “Surrender! Leaders Cave on Discharge.”

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Mary Jacoby, “GOP Will Use Discharge Petitions To Bring Attention to Two Issues,” Roll Call, 14 February 1994, p 1; David E. Rosenbaum, “In Jargon-Filled Talk About Budgets, A Debate of Politics Over Substance,” New York Times, 19 July 1994, p. A 16.

Democratic leaders as they struggled to maintain control of the agenda in the fall of 1993 and the spring of 1994. After their defeat on discharge petitions, House Democratic leaders used their control of the legislative and governing process to defeat a coalition of fiscally conservative House Democrats and Republicans clamoring for more deficit reduction. Democratic leaders used their procedural powers and twisted arms to defeat two bipartisan deficit reduction measures, the “Penny-Kasich” and “A-to-Z” proposals. During consideration of the 1993 budget plan, House Democratic leaders promised fiscally conservative House Democrats a chance to vote on additional deficit reduction and spending cuts before the end of 1993.¹⁹ But this promise became a mirage to many conservative Democrats clamoring for political cover on deficit reduction before the 1994 elections. The fiscal year 1995 budget resolution passed by the House contained no new deficit reduction.

To keep their promise to Democratic deficit hawks on spending cuts, the Clinton Administration and Democratic leaders presented a \$11.5 billion rescissions package in November of 1993 as part of Vice President Gore’s “reinventing government” initiative. Deficit hawks Timothy Penny (D-MI) and John Kasich (R-OH) offered an amendment to this rescissions bill to cut an additional \$90 billion over five years, primarily through cuts in Medicare and defense spending.²⁰ House Democratic leaders and Clinton Administration officials mounted an aggressive campaign to kill the Penny-Kasich amendment by placing pressure on members about the deleterious effect of spending cuts on various federal

¹⁹ “Congress Wrangles Over More Budget Cuts,” CQ Almanac 1993, p. 140.

²⁰ Donald Lambro, “Bipartisan Spending Scissorhands,” Washington Times, 4 November 1993, p. A 16.

operations.²¹ As a result of this intense arm-twisting against further deficit reduction based on domestic spending cuts, the Penny-Kasich amendment narrowly failed, 213-219, on November 22, 1993.

After the death of Penny-Kasich, House Republicans and conservative Democrats used the discharge petition process in an attempt to bring the “A-to-Z” deficit-reduction proposal to the floor, sponsored by Representatives Robert Andrews (D-NJ) and Bill Zeliff (R-NH). The “A-to-Z” plan called for devoting 56 hours of floor time in the House for debate and votes on any spending cut amendment brought to the floor by members.²² As Democratic leaders and the Clinton administration continued to block additional deficit reduction on the House floor beyond the 1993 budget agreement, support for the “A-to-Z” deficit reduction plan grew among frustrated deficit hawk Democrats and among House Republicans.²³

Democratic leaders viewed the “A-to-Z” proposal as an irresponsible abridgment of the appropriations process and a publicity-seeking gambit by an aggressive minority party seeking the majority. House Majority Leader Richard Gephardt (D-MO) charged that the “A-to-Z” plan would “turn the United States Congress into the United States Circus,” and

²¹ Eric Pianin, “Administration Steps Up Attack on Penny-Kasich Spending Cuts,” Washington Post, 19 November 1993, p. A 27; Rick Henderson, “Deficit Chickens,” Reason, February 1994, p. 38; Michael Barone, “The Rocky Road Ahead for Clinton,” U.S. News & World Report, 6 December 1993, p. 36.

²² George Hager, “Appeal of ‘A to Z’ Puts Leaders in a Precarious Position,” Congressional Quarterly, 25 June 1994, p. 1681.

²³ House Democratic Leaders Block ‘A to Z’ Plan,” CQ Almanac 1994, p. 88; Bill Zeliff, “Blocking A to Z Spending Cuts,” Washington Times, 5 May 1994, p. A 19.

helped lead the successful Democratic leadership drive to kill the proposal by discouraging Democratic members from signing the discharge petition.²⁴ To stop the growing list of signatures to the “A-to-Z” discharge petition, Democratic leaders promised fiscally conservative House Democrats House floor votes on eight budget process votes dealing with spending cuts later in the 103rd Congress. In the summer of 1994, Democratic leaders employed king-of-the-hill procedures to structure the debate surrounding the promised budget process votes, blunting their intent and insuring no substantive action would be enacted into law before adjournment.²⁵ The “A-to-Z” proposal gained 204 of 218 needed discharge petition signatures before dying at the end of the 103rd Congress, while each of the budget-process bills passed by the House in 1994 died at the end of the 103rd Congress due to inaction in the Senate.

Through the discharge petition fights and the defeat of Penny-Kasich and “A-to-Z,” Democratic leaders protected their control of the legislative process, protected the primacy of their domestic agenda in the 103rd Congress, and defended the prerogative of their House majority to govern unimpeded by minority party mischief. But by protecting their procedural

²⁴ Patrice Hill, “House Democrats Maneuvering to Head Off Spending-Cut Session,” Washington Times, 18 June 1994, p. A 4.

²⁵ In the 1980s and 1990s, the Democratic Majority frequently used modified rules to procedurally structure activity on the House floor in a manner advantageous to all House Democratic incumbents. In the “king-of-the-hill” procedure, House Democratic leaders would allow members to vote on a series of amendments to a bill, but only the amendment that won last would ultimately be adopted. This procedure allowed members to vote for all the amendments offered, while Democratic leaders could insure their desired amendment could ultimately win out by simply making it the last amendment to receive a floor vote. The Republican majority of the 104th and 105th Congresses used “queen-of-the-hill” procedures to similarly control the amending process. Under these procedures, the amendment garnering the most votes was ultimately adopted.

control of the floor so the Democratic majority could govern, Democratic leaders ignored the larger policy concerns fueling these fights, like the drive to balance the budget and end decades of deficit spending. By failing to more forcefully address the deficit issue beyond the 1993 budget agreement, Democratic leaders hurt vulnerable House Democrats in swing seats and in conservative districts as Republicans framed the political debate of a “tax-and-spend” Democratic Congress that could not be trusted with the power of the purse.

The decision by House Democratic leaders to use their institutional and procedural powers to block welfare reform, congressional reform, Penny-Kasich, “A-to-Z,” and entitlement reforms provided an already aggressive House Republican minority with ready-made campaign issues for continued attacks against Democratic incumbents and challengers running in marginal and conservative districts. In addition, vulnerable House Democrats on the front lines of two-party competition in the 1994 campaign were deprived of important political cover on the issues which animated Perot voters and Republican base voters like ending deficit spending and reforming Congress institutionally. A southern House Democrat placed this situation in perspective regarding the agenda of the 103rd Congress:

If Democrats had come in and pushed a balanced budget and welfare reform in the 103rd, we would still be the majority party today. The House Democratic leadership, the liberals, said ‘absolutely not.’ But the real kicker is that much deeper cuts passed under the Republicans in the 104th. So we could have gotten away with the spending cuts in the 103rd and possibly saved the House.

House Democratic leaders decided that the House Democratic majority would govern from within the Democratic Caucus, in conjunction with the new Clinton presidency, to address Democratic policy concerns blocked during the Reagan-Bush years. With an acquiescent Republican minority intent on governing with the majority party, this strategy

may have been successful in retaining the Democratic majority in the 1994 election. But in an era of stiff two-party competition, this strategy failed to defend Democrats holding swing seats, Democrats defending conservative districts in the South, or for Democratic retention of the large number of Democratic open-seats in the South and across the nation. The three big-ticket items on the Democratic legislative agenda consisting of the 1993 budget, the crime bill, and health care reform exhibited the limits of the Democratic governing strategy of the 103rd Congress. The 1993 budget passed by a two vote margin of 218-216, the rule for the crime bill faced defeat on the House floor, and internal Democratic disputes and organized opposition by Republicans and other health-policy groups prevented health care reform legislation from even coming to the House floor.

The Republican Obstruction Strategy

The Republican minority of the 103rd Congress adopted an obstructionist strategy designed to paint clear party lines between the two parties for the 1994 elections. House Republicans made several decisions early in the 103rd Congress to both oppose the Democratic agenda and even attempt to kill it before it could be enacted into law. This strategy became intricately linked with Republican efforts to grab a House majority in 1994. House Republicans decided early on to oppose the major items of the Democratic agenda, including the 1993 budget plan and universal health care reform.²⁶ These decisions contributed to the legislative train wreck at the end of 1994, as the entire Democratic legislative agenda came crashing down amidst internal House Democratic fissures,

²⁶ Michael Rust, "The GOP Gropes for a Winning Agenda," Insight on the News, 28 February 1994, p. 18.

Republican obstructionism, and aggressive attacks by House Republicans on the motives and policies of the Democratic majority. This obstruction strategy represented the abandonment of previous Republican acquiescence in the House and the adoption of negative attack politics to aggressively fight for a Republican House of Representatives.

In the Reagan-Bush era (1981-1992), House Republicans worked with the Democratic majority and a Republican White House to produce laws and make the legislative system work, especially with the 1986 tax reform law in the 99th Congress (1985-1986), the legislative deals of the 100th Congress (1987-1988), and in the formulation of the 1990 deficit reduction accord in the 101st Congress (1989-1990). Republican control of the White House, combined with the leadership of Republican Minority leader Bob Michel (R-IL), provided incentives for House Republicans to cooperate in the governing process. Even on legislative matters like the tax-increasing 1990 budget agreement, which violated the anti-tax philosophy of most House Republicans, a majority of House Republicans worked with the Democratic majority and a Republican White House to tackle the deficit issue collectively. In the 103rd Congress, House Republicans gambled it was better to obstruct and attack the Democratic agenda of increasing the size and scope of the federal government instead of working with the Democratic majority to improve their policy proposals. In the 1994 election, House Republicans used this opposition as the cornerstone of their nationalized campaign.²⁷

The death of the Clinton health care plan illustrates the success of the Republican

²⁷ Tod Lindberg, "Capitol Gain: What Republicans will do if they win the Congress," Policy Review, Summer 1994, p. 23.

obstruction strategy of the 103rd Congress. House Republicans viewed the Clinton health care plan not only as a bad agenda item legislative, but also as a big-government power grab that threatened long-term GOP prospects for majority control at all levels of government.²⁸ In 1991, Gingrich predicted that passage of Democratic-sponsored national health care would culminate in middle-class dependence on a mammoth federal entitlement program, making the middle class politically indebted to the Democrats at election time.²⁹ House Republicans labeled the Clinton health care plan “Clintoncare,” a grand embodiment of contemporary big-government liberalism. Republican strategist William Kristol became one of the first pundits to publicly urge Republicans to oppose the Clinton health care plan, and called President Clinton’s health care effort a big-government power grab of 14% of the U.S. economy akin to the German decision to invade Russia in 1941. According to Kristol, if Clinton took Moscow by passing his health plan, the balance of political power would permanently shift in the Democrats favor. If Republicans resisted universal health care reform and turned “Clintoncare” into the Democrat’s Stalingrad, then a hollow liberalism would lose everything in the 1994 elections.³⁰

Instead of working with House Democrats and the Clinton Administration to improve health care reform legislation, House Republicans followed Kristol’s advice and attacked the

²⁸ Thomas Scarlett, “Killing Health Care Reform,” Campaigns & Elections, October/November 1994, pp. 34-37.

²⁹ Haynes Johnson and David S. Broder, The System: The American Way of Politics at the Breaking Point (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1996), pp. 38-40.

³⁰ Adam Meyerson, “Kristol Ball: William Kristol Looks at the Future of the GOP,” Policy Review, Winter 1994, p. 14.

Clinton health plan as a big-government scheme to create 155 new bureaucracies, expand 47 others, create 100 new federal regulations, and enact unpopular social policies through the back door.³¹ The 1,364 bill detailing the Clinton health plan, the product of 500 public policy experts in secrecy on First Lady Hillary Clinton's Health Care Reform task force, became an easy target for attack. Republican Conference Secretary Dick Armey (R-TX) framed the Republican agenda against the Clinton care plan in blunt language that left no room for legislative compromise on health care reform. Framing the decision to adopt a universal health care system the choice between a free state and socialism, Armey stated "The new testament sets forth how people should live in about 180,000 words. The health care plan bill does it in 260,000."³²

These aggressive tactics used by House Republicans were not confined solely to the Clinton health care plan. House Republicans used similar strategies and arguments to likewise frame the 1993 Clinton budget plan as a tax-and-spend budget that did nothing to tackle the deficit. Similarly, House Republicans framed the first version of the Democrat's 1994 crime bill as a social spending bill which was weak on criminals.³³ Through these efforts, House Republicans eschewed policy-making roles with the Democratic majority and discovered there was greater political mileage, and a Republican House majority, through attack, opposition, and obstruction. For House Republicans, opposition and obstruction of

³¹ Dick Armey and Newt Gingrich, "The Welfarization of Health Care," National Review, 7 February 1994, pp. 53-56.

³² Ibid., p. 54.

³³ David S. Cloud, "Health Care's Painful Demise Cast Pall on Clinton's Agenda," Congressional Quarterly, 5 November 1994, pp. 3142-45.

the Democratic legislative agenda laid the groundwork for their nationalized campaign for majority control.

As they campaigned for a House majority in the new era of two-party competition, House Republicans bypassed the legislative process in order to use symbolism to frame arguments and issue agendas against the Democratic House majority in media outlets. Representative John Boehner (R-OH), who successfully framed the House Bank scandal against the Democratic majority as a freshman member in the 102nd Congress, stressed the importance of “taking your case to the public. Find a way to relate what you’re trying to do to the American public.”³⁴ Minority Whip Newt Gingrich (R-GA) articulated his media strategy against the Democratic majority, and the Republican focus on media symbolism, by stating:

If people ask, ‘Why is he on TV all the time,’ my answer is ‘That’s how you reach 260 million people.’ If you’re out there taking the Democrats on, people say ‘Why are you doing that?’ The answer is: ‘That’s how you attract attention so people can tell who’s you and who’s them.’³⁵

In order to find and articulate symbolic issues that could resonate with the public at large and focus their attention on majority party in the House, required a different type of thinking by House Republicans regarding their role in the House. Instead of acquiescing, they attacked. Instead of legislating, they obstructed. Representative Bill Paxon (R-NY), NRCC Chairman in the 103rd Congress, captured this new minority party governing strategy by stating “During the ‘80s, everyone was, in a way, their own leader. In winning the House,

³⁴ Juliet Eilperin and Jim Vande Hei, “Some Wounds Never Heal: Today’s GOP Leadership Struggle Has Roots in ‘Guerrilla’ Warriors of the 1980s,” p. 27.

³⁵ Ibid.

we went from being guerrillas in the jungle to managing what became a very large army.”³⁶ Managing this army required new campaigning and media skills from Republican House leaders, rather than legislative aptitude and deal-making skills.

The obstruction and attack politics of House Republican in the 103rd Congress culminated in the death of the Democratic legislative agenda at the end of the 103rd Congress.³⁷ House Republicans, in conjunction with their Senate colleagues, openly killed much of the legislative agenda during the waning days of the 103rd Congress.³⁸ The first salvo of this strategy was fired on August 11, 1994 when Gingrich led a coalition of House Republicans, anti-gun control members, and black Democratic members to defeat the rule governing the crime bill. Although this bill later passed on August 21, 1994, House Republican leverage from the defeat of the crime bill rule forced House Democratic leaders to restructure the bill to place less emphasis on crime prevention and more emphasis on criminal punishment. The crime bill hurt Democratic incumbents and challengers as Republican campaign appeals ridiculed social programs in the bill like “midnight basketball.” Despite the fact that House Democrats were passing into law massive anti-crime legislation, Republicans successfully painted them as weak on crime. Through these efforts, House Republicans successfully framed the crime bill as a big-government social program

³⁶ Ibid., p. 26.

³⁷ David S. Cloud, “End of Session Marked By Partisan Stalemate,” Congressional Quarterly, 8 October 1994, pp. 2847-49; “The October Massacre,” The New Republic, 24 October 1994, p. 7.

³⁸ Susan Feeney, “Gingrich’s Dream to Become Reality,” Dallas Morning News, 10 November 1994, p. A 27.

filled with pork barrel spending and liberal social engineering schemes. These characterizations provided important political ammunition to Republican House candidates all across the country in the 1994 campaign as they launched negative attacks on Democratic congressional candidates.

Republican victory on the crime bill emboldened further efforts in at the end of the 103rd Congress to decimate, obstruct, and impede the rest of the Democratic legislative agenda. On September 26, 1994, Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell (D-ME) pulled the health care reform bill from the Senate floor due to this Republican obstruction, effectively killing health care reform for the 103rd Congress.³⁹ In addition, House Republicans, in conjunction with Senate Republicans utilizing their filibuster power, prevented consideration or passage of campaign finance reform, mining law overhaul, safe drinking water legislation, and Superfund environmental cleanup reform.⁴⁰ Republicans even obstructed consideration and passage of bills they supported as part of this overall strategy to make the Democratic majority look incompetent and unable to govern. The GATT free trade accord, a lobbying gift ban, and a bill forcing Congress to comply with the laws of the land each died at the end of the session despite being supported by most House Republicans.⁴¹

³⁹ "Clinton's Health Care Plan Laid to Rest," CQ Almanac 1994, p. 319.

⁴⁰ "Assessing the 103rd Congress...What Passed and What Didn't." CQ Almanac 1994, pp. 10-11.

⁴¹ The GATT trade accord was passed into law in a special session of the 103rd Congress held after the 1994 election. The Republican majority passed the rest of these items into law in the 104th Congress.

By deliberately obstructing these items, Republicans exploited the Democratic majority and made it appear unable to govern, which in turn laid the groundwork for the 1994 Democratic meltdown. This strategy successfully transformed the stable, healthy Democratic House majority of 1993 into a tenuous and decaying majority in 1994. Through these majority-forming activities, House Republicans pioneered a new type of aggressive politics to obtain majority status in a more competitive environment. President Clinton complained that Republicans pursued an end-of-session strategy designed to “stop it, slow it, kill it or just talk it to death.”⁴² But the obstructionism of the end of the 103rd Congress served an important majority-attaining purpose for House Republicans because it provided a foundation for the attack politics of the 1994 campaign.⁴³ Killing the Democratic House majority, and achieving a Republican House majority that could govern in an entirely different direction in the 104th Congress, became more important for House Republicans than helping Democrats enact legislative accomplishments into law in the 103rd Congress.

Although successful in derailing the 103rd Congress and the Democratic majority’s legislative agenda, this obstruction strategy set a precedent followed by the Democratic minority in the 104th and 105th Congresses. The Republican template of the 103rd Congress and the 1994 election would be picked up and used by the Democratic minority of the 104th and 105th Congresses. The incentive structures of minority parties in this new period of two-party competition had shifted from governing with the majority party to cut the best

⁴² Douglas Jehl, “Clinton Assails G.O.P. for Effort to ‘Kill It or Just Talk It to Death,’” New York Times, 8 October 1994, p. A 1.

⁴³ William Schneider, “Will Obstruction Be Its Own Reward?,” National Journal, 15 October 1994, p. 2434.

legislative deal, to boycotting the legislative process entirely in order to deliberately sink the majority party's legislative agenda.

PARTY CULTURE

Democratic Culture and the Need for Change

During the long period of non-competition and one-party Democratic rule (1954-1994), a distinct Democratic party culture emerged in the diverse and heterogeneous Democratic Caucus. This party culture stressed a more individualistic approach to individual campaigns and congressional careers, and encouraged a decentralized House managed by therapeutic Democratic House leaders adept in art of coalition politics. As a congressional party, House Democrats have always been more diverse than their Republican colleagues, and this trend continued in the 103rd-105th Congresses. The Democratic Caucus of the 103rd Congress, for instance, contained 14 Hispanic members, 38 African-American members, and 36 female members, while 90% of the members of the Republican Conference in the 103rd Congress were white and male. In comparison, only 66% of the members of the Democratic House majority were white and male. Additionally, the two parties differed on ideology, with the House Democratic Caucus becoming increasingly liberal and the House Republican Conference becoming increasingly more conservative. Each of these demographic differences between the two parties in the House sparked differing reactions in their respective party cultures to the imperatives of two-party competition.

The principles of committee seniority and deference to committee and subcommittee chairmen played an integral role in Democratic party culture in the House during its long

tenure as a majority party.⁴⁴ Power in the Democratic House flowed upward from numerous subcommittee chairs and the independent standing committee chairs operating relatively autonomous committees. In addition, numerous legislative service organizations like the Congressional Black Caucus provided other independent forums for members in a decentralized House. The decentralized committee system and legislative service organizations allowed House Democratic members to stress their individual autonomy despite increased leadership control of the House floor and the legislative agenda. This Democratic party culture, attuned to the needs of managing a diverse caucus in a heavily decentralized House, required a distinct type of management skills by Democratic House leaders based on deference to the committee chairs while instilling greater control on the House floor. As a result, Democratic House leaders spent a majority of their time internally managing a decentralized House and a diverse Democratic Caucus. Although possessing powerful controls on the legislative agenda within the House, Democratic House leaders had little influence over the types of agendas and issues advocated by individual House Democrats in their individual re-election races.

Democratic party culture nurtured a vast committee system to both manage the House and member preferences. This committee system rewarded seniority of membership, the accrual of informational knowledge on specific areas of legislative concern through committee service, and the relative autonomy of committees vis-a-vis party leaders. The Democratic committee system served an important purpose in a decentralized House of

⁴⁴ Christopher J. Deering and Steven S. Smith, Committees in Congress (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1997), pp. 126-33.

Representatives, rewarding members for focusing on their legislative business within their committees, and wielding individual power through committee and subcommittee chairmanships. In the seven Congresses between 1980 and 1994, the Democratic House majority organized the House of Representatives with an average of 290 committees, including standing committees, subcommittees, select and special committees, joint committees, and subcommittees of joint committees.

The proliferation of committees under Democratic rule tangibly shaped the legislative process in the House in the 103rd Congress. In the 103rd Congress the Democratic majority, totaling 258 total Democratic members, utilized 258 total committees to conduct its work in the House. On the crime bill, for instance, Judiciary Chairman Jack Brooks (D-TX) incorporated the work of 13 House committees in a single, omnibus crime bill. In comparison, the Republican majority of the 104th Congress utilized only 198 total committees to organize House operations. House Democrats used this large committee system to legislate and govern, providing several perches for the accrual of power by individual Democratic committee chairs and several informational sources for the creation of legislation. House Democratic leaders, meanwhile, used these committee inputs, in addition to their strong procedural control of the House floor, to address legislative matters in a congressional session.

Each of these elements of the Democratic House and the party culture it engendered provided an important buffer between the governing and electoral dimensions of the House. House Democrats secured their own election to the House, focused on their re-elections in candidate-centered campaigns, and built up their own loyal constituencies independent of

House Democratic leaders. Each House Democrat focused on their own individual re-election campaigns separately instead of running as a unified party on party-based appeals. Incumbents used their own “homestyles” and personal constituencies to create layers of personally loyal constituencies and to win election in candidate-centered races. In a non-competitive environment of one-party rule, this focus by House Democrats on their own races sufficed to re-elect the Democratic majority. The fate of the average House Democrat was not tethered to other Democratic House races, and Democratic control of the House was never viewed as being in jeopardy. This distinct Democratic party culture permeated the politics of the House of Representatives during the era of unbroken Democratic majorities (1954-1994), culminating in individualized elections and the avoidance of national Democratic party appeals to win re-election to the House.

This distinct Democratic party culture in the House, the result of decades of one-party rule and non-competition for House control, did not serve the needs of retaining a Democratic majority in the intense two-party competition of the 103rd Congress and the 1994 campaign. The 1994 election and the change in power came as a stark surprise to several House Democrats who felt their majority would continue to flourish as it had for the previous four decades. In the race between Speaker of the House Thomas Foley (D-WA) and Republican challenger George Nethercutt, for example, Foley campaigned hard on his ability to use his position as speaker to bring federal dollars to the Fifth District of Washington.⁴⁵ But in a twist, Nethercutt used this pork-barrel mentality against Foley, especially the

⁴⁵ Timothy Egan, “Foley Wages Lonely Fight to Keep Job of 30 Years,” New York Times, 7 November 1994, p. B 10; Timothy Egan, “The No. 1 Congressman and His No. 1 Test,” New York Times, 29 October 1994, p. A 1.

nationalized Republican campaign themes of balancing the budget and limiting government spending, to undercut Foley's arguments for re-electing both himself as a member of the House and Speaker, and for re-electing a Democratic House majority. Nethercutt adopted the larger Republican arguments used by Republican House candidates nationwide that these pork barrel projects contributed to larger problems like increased federal deficits, larger national debts, and the mortgaging of America's economic future.⁴⁶ In the end, Foley's reliance on traditional Democratic arguments for re-election to the House failed, and Nethercutt won 51%-49%. These arguments also failed for 33 other House Democratic incumbents in 1994. A House Democrat from the Midwest articulated the challenges confronting House Democrats in the 1994 campaign and the loss of majority status:

The Democrats were naturally shellacked. Most had come from governing environments in the states where they were in the majority, and then had graduated to the House where they never knew anything but being in the majority. They were always used to being in charge, and never had to learn about what it meant to be in the minority. So of us were experienced being in the minority in our state legislative backgrounds, and I think we took 1994 better.

An attitude of primogeniture prevailed among several members of the House Democratic majority as a result of their stable House majority. For decades, House Democrats enjoyed the privileges and perks of this majority status, from control of the floor to control of committee and staff resources. The Democratic House of the 103rd Congress contained 146 possible chairmanships of committees, creating lots of opportunity to hold and wield power; the Republican House of the 104th Congress contained only 110 possible chairmanships. Nineteen House Democrats chaired two or more standing committees or

⁴⁶ Maureen Groppe, "After Democratic Boom in '92, Party Tries to Avoid a Bust," Congressional Quarterly, 29 October 1994, pp. 3092-94.

subcommittees in the 103rd Congress, compared to only one House Republican in the 104th Congress. One House Democrat described the psychological impact of the loss of majority status for Democrats after the 1994 election by stating, “There was a severe depression among Democrats in 1994. These guys had called all the shots forever, and now they were powerless.” A senior House Democrat placed this problem in perspective:

There was a real fallout from the long period of Democratic rule in the House. The Democrats became lazy, and didn’t see the new dynamics developing in the House. For instance, the special orders were being used by Gingrich and COS to attack the institution in prime time to a C-SPAN audience. Gingrich was the first to challenge Democratic rule in the House, but House Democrats discounted him. Gingrich had no legislative record, never played a critical role in committee work, and we foolishly discounted what he was doing. But Gingrich successfully portrayed senior Democrats as irresponsible pork-barrelers, even though this is a stereotypical view because this is what Congress does! Gingrich bided his time until Michel’s retirement, and was like a mole carving out the strength of the Democratic majority. We didn’t see the full extent of the damage until the 1994 election.

For several House Democrats, the longevity of the Democratic majority in the 1954-1994 hurt the Democratic majority in 1994 by blinding it to the new realities of two-party competition in the country at large, and against the increased competitiveness of Republican attack politics in the 1990s. One House Democrat compared years of Republican attack politics against the Democratic majority as being pelted with hand grenades without any political protection:

Forty years of Democratic control was the precursor to the Gingrich ascension. It created unity within the Republican conference for support for Gingrich’s tactics. The Gingrich strategy of discrediting the Democratic majority by discrediting the institution of the House was irresponsible. It worked, but it was like pulling the pin on a hand grenade and throwing it down the subway. The damage wasn’t just contained to the Democrats. It also hit fellow Republican members, like in the House Bank scandal. The damage also haunted the GOP long term, because the House is the butt of all the jokes. The repercussions of public cynicism will haunt any majority - Republican and Democrat - for a long time to come.

In addition to being blind-sided by the aggressive Republican campaign of 1994, the traditional leadership style of House Democratic leaders came under fire from moderate and conservative House Democrats who confronted the stiff two-party competition of the 1994 election. These members believed that Democratic party culture, which emanated from the long era of non-competition and which buttressed a decentralized House and localized re-election efforts, no longer served the needs of protecting the Democratic majority. As the 103rd Congress progressed, tensions grew between the needs of endangered Democratic incumbents seeking to maintain their seats, and the traditional mode of operation of the Democratic House. Several defeated House Democrats, and those receiving close calls in the 1994 campaign, expressed acrimony and bitterness at a Democratic party culture and leadership they believed was not in tune with the new realities of a two-party competitive system for House control. Representative Eric Fingerhut (D-OH), a freshmen Democrat representing a swing in Ohio who was defeated for re-election, assailed Democratic leaders for their complicity in endangering the Democratic majority in the 1994 campaign:

Losing candidates are supposed to accept the blame for their defeat and maintain a dignified silence. I accept the blame, but as a victim of the so-called slaughter of the innocents -- reform-minded Democratic freshmen of the 103rd Congress who were defeated for re-election --I cannot stay silent...My anger is directed at the Democratic congressional leaders, some of whom were defeated on Nov. 8 and some of whom were not. Rarely has a group of political leaders so richly deserved defeat.

Speaker Tom Foley and his team completely misread the message of the 1992 election. They chose to see it as a vindication of their opposition to the Reagan and Bush Administrations rather than as a call for sweeping change in Washington. They ignored the calls of many freshman Democrats to move quickly on reform legislation, and some of these leaders even ridiculed our efforts and belittled us personally.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Eric Fingerhut, "A Democrat Throws Stones," New York Times, 17 December 1994, Section 1, p. 23.

In addition to Fingerhut, other House Democrats upset with the direction of the 103rd Congress directed criticism at their party leadership. Representative Robert Andrews (D-N.J.), sponsor of the “A-to-Z” deficit reduction plan, attacked the Democratic congressional leadership as being out-of-touch to the new political realities of two-party competition and the politics of the 1990s:

We are in the midst of a middle-class political revolution in this country. That shouldn’t be news to anyone reading this, but it is big news to people in Washington and, in particular, Democrats...

...Unless Democrats do something to reduce government spending, we are going to become extinct. The issue facing Democrats today is whether we change or die, and I’m one of those Democrats who say it’s time we change. We must bring our party back in tune with the middle-class revolution that’s sweeping America.⁴⁸

These sentiments illustrate the depth to which several House Democrats felt their leadership, and the party culture of the Democratic Caucus, had been lacking in the midst of an extremely competitive environment for House control. One House Democrat complained that the 1994 crime bill, in which Judiciary Committee member Charles Schumer (D-NY) successfully included an assault-weapons ban popular to liberal members and in liberal districts, hurt several of his moderate and conservative Democratic colleagues running in intensely competitive elections in 1994:

Schumer cost us the election in 1994. Why did he do it? Northeast liberals screwed the rest of us by imposing what’s popular in their districts on the rest of America. That killed us in the South and West. I hope a future Democratic Congress will never do that.

Another Midwestern House Democrat commented on the left-ward drift of the 103rd Congress and its effect on the 1994 election:

⁴⁸ Robert E. Andrews, “Democrats: Change or Die,” Wall Street Journal, 10 November 1994, p. A 16.

The 103rd Congress illustrates the problems created by the demise of the old Southern committee chairs. The old committee chairs from the South, like Carl Vinson, protected and nurtured the Democratic majority. But beginning in the 1970s, Democrats moved too far to the left. It all started there. From the 1970s to 1994, the liberal Democrats ran the House and it moved too far left. The Democratic center moved to the Northeast, to the liberal wing.

The problems experienced by House Democrats in the 103rd Congress and the 1994 campaign would become critical ingredients to efforts by leaders and members of both parties to refashion their party's culture toward the needs of a more competitive era in the 104th and 105th Congresses. In the process, principles of committee seniority and committee autonomy would be re-examined by both parties as they searched for a better way to navigate the stormy competitive politics of obtaining and retaining a House majority in the 1990s.

Republican Culture Working for the Majority

While House Democratic party culture eschewed party-based appeals and concepts of teamwork to defend the Democrat's majority status, the party culture of House Republicans in the 103rd Congress increasingly became attuned to majority-forming goals and thinking. Although House Republicans were traditionally more homogeneous than their more heterogeneous House Democratic counterparts, they increasingly became more wedded to a concept of party and the idea of working together as a unified team to achieve majority status. In addition to muting the internal differences between moderate and conservative Republicans in the House, House Republicans elected a relatively homogeneous conservative leadership team in the 103rd Congress dedicated to the pursuit of a Republican House majority.

House Republicans became increasingly more ideological and confrontational in the 102nd and 103rd Congresses. This new ideological focus became the foundation of a new

House Republican party culture that advocated fighting Democratic efforts to enlarge the federal government. After the defeat of President Bush in 1992, House Republicans faced the danger of balkanization among differing factions without the unifying force of a Republican presidency.⁴⁹ But as Democrats governed from the left in the 103rd Congress, Republican ideology in favor of welfare reform, balancing the budget, and cutting taxes quickly displaced a Republican presidency as the source of unity and direction for the Republican minority.⁵⁰ Unanimous Republican opposition in the House to the Clinton budget plan of 1993 illustrated the primacy of ideology within House Republican ranks, transforming the 1993 budget into a Democratic budget plan. Near universal House Republican opposition to the Clinton stimulus plan, BTU energy tax proposals, VAT tax proposals, and the employer mandates of the Clinton health care plan also illustrated the importance of a more ideological focus within Republican party culture in the House.

House Minority Whip Newt Gingrich played a strong role in the formation of House Republican party culture based on the precepts of party-building. These efforts were best exhibited by Gingrich's efforts to recruit, train, and elect the farm team members of the Republican freshmen classes of the 1990-94 period. This new generation of Republican candidates and House freshmen possessed strong majority-forming attitudes inculcated by House Republican farm team efforts. Gingrich encouraged these attitudes by stating "My

⁴⁹ Richard L. Berke, "G.O.P. Seeks Identity and a Message," New York Times, 31 January 1993, p. A 28; James A. Barnes, "Faction Fight," National Journal, 19 December 1992, p. 2888.

⁵⁰ For an excellent analysis of this change in the Republican Conference in the 1980-1995 period, see Douglas L. Koopman, Hostile Takeover (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.), pp. 133-148.

strategy was always that you just keep building momentum and building momentum and you would capture 70 or 80 percent of the incoming freshmen every two years and at some point you would have transformed the whole structure.”⁵¹ Many of these members had no prior legislative experience, supported term limits and the concept of limiting both government and the length of public service through term limits, and opposed many of the attributes of the Democratic House like strong committee chairs and longevity of congressional service. When Republicans took control of the House in 1995, the new Republican majority was comprised of 122 members (53%) who had served for two years or less. Thirty-nine of the Republican freshmen elected in 1994 pledged to serve only a fixed number of terms.⁵² In addition, 47% of the 73-member Republican freshmen class of 1994 had never held elective office prior to their election to the House.⁵³

The new Republican party culture engendered by Gingrich helped form the thinking of these new Republican recruits, and helped to nurture and instill majority-forming views and attitudes. The Republican freshmen of 1990-1994, in addition to being devoted to the principle of obtaining a Republican House majority, were also well-versed in articulating the nationalized ideological appeals of the Republican nationalized campaign of 1994. The 1990 Republican freshmen of the 1990 election represented the first wave of an infusion of highly

⁵¹ Dan Balz and Serge F. Kovalski, “Gingrich Divided GOP, Conquered the Agenda; Revolt Gave Glimpses of Its Future,” Washington Post, 21 December 1994, p. A 1.

⁵² Benjamin Sheffner, “Self-Imposed Term Limits Affect Nearly Half of House Freshmen,” Roll Call, 15 June 1995.

⁵³ Robin Toner, “73 Mr. Smiths, of the G.O.P., Go to Washington,” New York Times, 8 January 1995, p. A 1.

ideological House candidates inculcated in the majority-forming philosophy and precept laid down by Newt Gingrich's farm team efforts. In the 102nd Congress, the "gang of nine" Republican freshmen, led by Republican freshman John Boehner (R-OH), gained notoriety by attacking the Democratic majority on the House Bank Scandal and transforming this attack into a Republican campaign issue in the 1992 elections. The 47-member House Republican freshmen class of 1992 played a similar role in the 103rd Congress.

These more aggressive freshmen, and the majority-forming party culture shaped by Gingrich which molded them into adept attack politicians, required a type of Republican leadership team in the 103rd Congress. In the 1980s, "Old Bull" Republicans led by Minority Leader Bob Michel governed in tandem with House Democratic leaders. Michel's career as both a member and congressional leader revolved around governing and legislating in tandem with the Democratic House majority and with Republican presidents. As a congressional leader, Michel prided his aptitude for legislative detail, his ability to influence and make a positive imprint on legislation, his friendships with Democratic Speakers Tom Foley and Tip O'Neill, and his firm grasp of the rules of the legislative process in the House.⁵⁴ Michel, for instance, gave the following advice to younger Republican House members: "Be gentlemanly and once you've made your point, get on the business with governing."⁵⁵

The House Republican leadership races in preparation for the 103rd Congress

⁵⁴ Janet Hook, "House GOP Hones a Sharper Edge as Michel Turns In His Sword," Congressional Quarterly, 9 October 1993, pp. 2714-18.

⁵⁵ Dan Balz, "Gingrich, Allies Made Waves and Impression: Conservative Rebels Harassed the House," Washington Post, 20 December 1994, p. A 1.

witnessed the rise to power of a more aggressive and conservative leadership team devoted to the goal of achieving a Republican House majority, with “Old Bulls” aligned with Michel being defeated in every leadership race below Minority Leader: Dick Armey (R-TX) defeated Jerry Lewis (R-CA) as GOP Conference Chairman, Tom DeLay (R-TX) defeated Bill Gradison (R-OH) as Conference Secretary, and Bill Paxon (R-NY) became the new chairman of the Republican National Congressional Committee after the primary election defeat of Representative Guy Vander Jagt (R-MI) in 1992. These leadership races played an important role in further shaping Republican party culture toward thinking and working as a team for majority status. The House Republican leadership team of Gingrich, Armey, DeLay, Paxon did not want to govern with the Democratic majority or legislate in tandem with the Senate and presidency. Instead, they wanted to force House Republicans to think as a unified team working to defeat the Democratic majority on the House floor, defeat Democrats at the polls, and elect a conservative Republican majority which could drive domestic policy in a different direction.⁵⁶ A House Republican elected in 1992 recalled the change in focus and party culture brought about by Gingrich and the new generation of Republican leaders in the 103rd Congress:

Newt put discipline in the Republican party in the House. I came into the House in 1992, and even then I saw how much discipline was lacking. People went their own way and did whatever they wanted. Newt pulled me aside in 1994 and said he had a plan to make every Republican member either raise or contribute \$65,000 to the campaigns of other Republicans. Newt traveled to over 130 congressional districts. He raised over \$100 million in 1994, either directly or over his signature on fund-raising letters. Visit just two or three congressional districts in a week and see how much work and energy it takes to do. Newt

⁵⁶ Gloria Borger, “Welcome to Gingrich Nation,” U.S. News & World Report, 21 November 1994, p. 44; Jonathan Alter, “Spiro Agnew With Brains,” Newsweek, 28 November 1994, p. 34.

did it non-stop for several years straight. He did it as well in 1996 to protect the Republican majority.

This commitment to party exhibited by Gingrich contrasted greatly with the cultural view of Minority Leader Bob Michel, who saw his political role from the prism of governance and legislating with the Democratic majority. In the summer of 1993, this younger leadership team comprised of Newt Gingrich (R-GA), Dick Armey (R-TX), Tom DeLay (R-TX), John Boehner (R-OH), and Bill Paxon (R-NY) confronted Minority Leader Bob Michel (R-IL) with an ultimatum, informing him that if he did not leave, he would face a challenge from one of them as House Republican leader in the 104th Congress.⁵⁷ In the fall of 1993, Michel announced his retirement from the House at the end of the 103rd Congress. In an interview, a moderate House Republican captured the dynamics of Michel's retirement from the House in the 103rd Congress:

Michel knew a new generation was rising to power, and he knew to get out when he did in 1994. Of course, a Michel speakership in the 104th Congress would have been different. There probably would not have been a government shutdown in 1995. There would not have been the incivility of the 104th Congress. Each speaker sets their own style.

Each of the new Republican House leaders of the 103rd Congress, especially Armey, DeLay, and Gingrich, campaigned hard for the new freshmen of the classes of 1990-1994, and built strong ties with them electorally and ideologically.⁵⁸ This new generation of Republican leadership and members exhibited a greater ideological focus, utilized attack politics to draw clear party lines against the "corruption" and "liberalism" of the Democratic

⁵⁷ Juliet Eilperin and Jim Vande Hei, "Some Wounds Never Heal: Today's GOP Leadership Struggle Has Roots in 'Guerrilla' Warriors of the 1980s," Roll Call, 2 October 1997, p. 27.

⁵⁸ Fred Barnes, "The Newtoids Cometh!," The New Republic, 7 November 1994, p. 32.

majority, and possessed a strong attachment to party and teamwork to obtain majority status. For instance, in speeches to Republican campaign activists, Gingrich complained that one of the great failings of the Republican party is “we don’t encourage you to be nasty.”⁵⁹ As a result, Gingrich urged Republicans to be more bold in attacking Democrats in their campaigns. Gingrich himself called President Clinton an “enemy of normal Americans,” labeled Democrats “cultural masochists,” called the AIDS crisis the result of “liberals who advocated free sex,” and advocated Communist Chinese leader Mao Tse-tung’s motto that “politics is war without blood.”⁶⁰ Other House Republicans followed Gingrich’s aggressive lead. During the 1994 crime bill debate, Dick Armey told House Democrats “Your president is just not that important for us,” and told President Clinton that passage of his 1993 budget plan would make him a one-term president.⁶¹ A top Democratic staff aide in the 103rd Congress commented on the changes in congressional politics engendered by this new Republican aggressiveness by stating:

Gingrich engaged in the institutional victimization of the House. He held the House to ridicule, and this was encouraged by other Republicans and picked up by talk radio. In terms of probity in the House, it is now gone, a victim of what the GOP reaped in their pursuit of majority status.

⁵⁹ Peter Osterlund, “A Capitol Chameleon,” Los Angeles Times Magazine, 25 August 1991, p. 37.

⁶⁰ David Marannis, “No More Mr. Nice Guy,” Washington Post, 30 March 1990, p. A16; Dale Russakoff, “Gingrich Lobs a Few More Bombs,” Washington Post, 10 November 1994, p. A 1; Ernest Tollerson, “Scholars View Gingrich’s Provocative Oratory as Brilliant But Polarizing,” New York Times, 17 December 1995, p. A 15; Benjamin Sheffner, “Gingrich: ‘Politics Is War Without Blood,’” Roll Call, 29 May 1995, p. 9.

⁶¹ Michael Barone and Grant Ujifusa, The Almanac of American Politics 1996 (Washington, D.C.: National Journal, 1995), p. 1328.

Through these attacks, Gingrich and other House Republican leaders molded a new Republican party culture which encouraged negative attacks on Democrats to draw sharp party lines, force Republicans to think about winning majority control, and confront House Republicans with the need to govern as a majority party instead of wallowing in minority status. Instead of every Republican incumbent going their own way in the House, they were suddenly united together as a common team advocating similar principles and political strategies to gain a House majority. These principles and strategies prominently displayed the sharpening of party lines on issues like taxes and corruption, which in turn transformed the parties into warring camps.⁶² These tactics and strategies were not amenable with the traditional House Republican mission of legislating with the Democratic majority to secure individualized gains. Representative Robert Walker (R-PA) justified this change in focus to the more confrontational politics by stating:

I don't see much evidence that Republicans won great victories when they were not confrontational but passive instead. In 34 years we were not able to get a majority; there's no victory there.⁶³

The drive for majority status by House Republicans in the 103rd Congress led to increasingly aggressive rhetoric against House Democrats, and even against Republicans who helped the Democratic majority govern. Representative Vin Weber (R-MN), a close Gingrich ally during the 1980s and early 1990s, articulated this majority-forming attitude of the Gingrich Republicans when he stated "We believed we had a chance to be a majority and

⁶² Thomas B. Edsall, "The Great Divider," Washington Post, 23 March 1989, p. A 27.

⁶³ Ronald D. Elving, "Gingrich Lieutenants Balance Political Style and Tactics," Congressional Quarterly 8 April 1989.

only two things stood in our way. The first thing was the Democrats. The second thing was the Republicans.”⁶⁴ Gingrich articulated this same philosophy when he stated “For a great part of its minority life, the Republican party has allowed itself to become co-opted as an arm of government. Too often it has allowed itself to be cajoled into providing the necessary votes for the majority party to win.”⁶⁵

As the de facto leader of Republican efforts to gain a House majority in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Gingrich used hostile rhetoric against the Democratic majority, labeling the Democratic House majority a “left-wing in the House...engaged in a conspiracy to avoid fair elections.”⁶⁶ Gingrich’s theory was simple: if the Democratic Congress could be portrayed as corrupt, then the Republicans could capitalize on this weakness to take the majority.⁶⁷ Gingrich had long advocated aggressive tactics, declaring in 1979 as a freshman “If the majority party is content to run the House like a plantation, they can do so. But they can’t make me dress up and serve mint juleps with a smile.”⁶⁸ During his ascension to House Minority Whip in 1989, Gingrich openly scoffed the more acquiescent attitude of House Republicans as he narrowly defeated “Old Bull” Edward Madigan (R-IL) by two votes in the

⁶⁴ Dale Russakoff and Dan Balz, “After Political Victory, A Personal Revolution,” Washington Post, 19 December 1994, p. A 1.

⁶⁵ “Bauman & Co.: House Guerrilla Fighters...Attacking Spending, Taxes, Government,” Congressional Quarterly, 7 July 1979, pp. 1442-43.

⁶⁶ Rhodes Cook, “Is Competition in Elections Becoming Obsolete?,” Congressional Quarterly, 6 May 1989, p. 1060.

⁶⁷ Rhodes Cook, “Self-Inflicted Wounds Cost GOP Majority in 1980s,” Congressional Quarterly, 3 March 1990, p. 689.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

race for Minority Whip:

The Old Guard tends to say, 'Oh, gee, the Democrats are in charge. How can we be nice enough to them that they'll let us pretend we're part of the game?' I represent the wing of the party that says 'Fine, we'll take up that challenge.'⁶⁹

Instead of helping Democrats govern, Gingrich and like-minded House Republicans aggressively sought a House majority instead of focusing on making the legislative process with the Democratic majority. In an interview, a House Republican involved in the 1994 campaign praised the leadership role of Gingrich:

Nobody worked harder for the majority than Gingrich. Gingrich is the visionary who saw the Republican Majority early on and worked to obtain it. Newt provided leadership, vision, and unified the party. He didn't get any sleep the last three weeks of the 1994 campaign because he was on the red-line, visiting lots of congressional districts and being the number one booster of our party. We knew the Sunday before the election in 1994 that we were going to have a fifty-two seat pick-up. By traveling through the districts, we were able to get a sense of the country.

Increased House Republican unity led to greater homogeneity among the House Republican leadership structure in the 103rd Congress. The new Republican leadership team exhibited a common affinity for a shared conservative ideology and commitment to ideas like limited government.⁷⁰ The ascendant House GOP leadership team of Gingrich, Armey, DeLay, Walker, and Paxon represented a homogenous group of House Republicans committed to attaining majority status in the House rather than cooperating with Democrats to help pass legislation or make the House run smoother. In 1994, 53 Republican incumbents contributed \$2.7 million to a common pool for use in 1994 campaign. In

⁶⁹ Jacob V. Lamar, "An Attack Dog, not a Lap Dog: House Republicans Make Feisty Newt Their No. 2 Man," Time, 3 April 1989, p. 22.

⁷⁰ Fred Barnes, "Revenge of the Squares," The New Republic, 13 March 1995, p. 23.

addition, 100 Republican incumbents in the 103rd Congress gave Frank Lucas \$80,000 to help him win his special election in Oklahoma to grab an open Democratic seat. Republican candidate Ron Lewis received \$102,000 from 115 Republican members to help him win his special election to win an open Democratic seat. Instead of working as a team to help govern and legislate with the Democratic majority, House Republican party culture encouraged the creation of a new Republican House majority that could implement into law its own ideas, its own legislation, and its own priorities. Through this new thinking, House Republicans united as a quasi-parliamentary shadow government scheming how to govern with a majority instead of being a diffuse group of individual politicians working hard to secure their own gains from an entrenched majority party.

ELECTIONS

Democratic Governing Strategy as Electoral Strategy

While House Republicans focused on attaining majority status, the Democratic majority's governing strategy of producing legislation and making unified government work became its electoral strategy for the 1994 campaign. House Democratic leaders and members believed that by passing into law the Democratic agenda of deficit-reduction, health care reform, the crime bill, family and medical leave, national service legislation, and gun control legislation, voters would reward Democrats in the 1994 midterm. But this strategy backfired as House Democrats confronted determined and aggressive Republican efforts to terminate the Democratic House majority. The determined threat to Democratic majority prospects in 1994 from Republican attack politics did not become fully apparent until after the dust settled in the 1994 election. House Democrats faced unmitigated disaster in 1994,

losing 56 Democratic House seats to Republicans while only grabbing four open Republican House seats in return. Thirty-four House Democrats lost their re-election bids, including Speaker of the House Thomas Foley (D-WA), House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Dan Rostenkowski (D-IL), and Judiciary Committee Chairman Jack Brooks (D-TX). The 1994 election was truly the House Democratic majority's political Pearl Harbor.

Like the sneak-attack at Pearl Harbor, the signs of danger were either down-played or unknown until after the Republican attack in the 1994 election. As House Democrats entered the 1994 election cycle with relative tranquility of decades of non-competition for House control behind them. They also possessed the incumbency advantage of 40 years of majority status. House Democrats had not encountered serious competition for the majority since the elections of 1980 and 1982, and this threat to their majority dissipated in 1982 with the gain of 26 Democratic seats. In the 103rd Congress, however, the Democratic majority was particularly vulnerable in 1994 in the pivotal swing seats and in conservative districts in the South and West where Democratic incumbents were either vacating their seats or confronting quality Republican challengers. Of the 34 House Democratic incumbents defeated in 1994, 25 represented swing seats. House Democrats tried to save themselves and their majority in 1994 by protecting themselves with traditional incumbency advantages like localized races, personal name recognition, and running away from an unpopular Bill Clinton. But these majority-retaining tactics, which had previously shielded the Democratic majority in the 1970s and 1980s, did not work in 1994.

The most exposed House Democrats in 1994 were the moderate and conservative House Democrats representing seats that had slowly drifted into a conservative Republican

orbit or had become true swing seats. The Democratic majority had spent the 103rd Congress legislating from the left, and compiled a record that hurt moderate and conservative Democrats in marginal districts. Moderate and conservative House Democrats like Jim Slattery (D-KS), Dave McCurdy (D-OK), and Larry LaRocco (D-ID) had spent most of their political careers making distinctions between their own moderate to conservative positions and those of the more liberal national Democratic party. As House Republicans drew sharp partisan distinctions in the 103rd Congress, it became increasingly difficult for these Democrats to articulate their own independent stances and voting records. One House Democrat, talking about what went wrong for Democrats in 1994, stated:

The Democrats got arrogant with power, moved to the left with their liberalism, and the country reacted in a big way. You could have taken Joe Ignoramus and put him in charge of the Republican's 1994 campaign and the GOP still would have demolished the Democrats. 1994 was probably the toughest year to run as a Democrat in the past half century. Clinton had moved way too far to the left in 1993-94 with gays in the military, government-run health care, and a budget that increased taxes while doing nothing to eliminate the deficit.

Echoing this sentiment, a House Democratic aide described the 1994 election as:

an anti-Democratic blowout that occurs when a majority gets sloppy. This is a once-in-a-lifetime situation...Democrats were simply vulnerable on health care and tax and budget votes of the 103rd Congress. Republicans took advantage of these Democratic mishaps on health care, the crime bill, and the Clinton taxes. Bringing the first Clinton budget to the floor without a solidified majority was sloppy. Mezvinsky and several other Democrats paid for this sloppiness with their seats. Scores more lost their seats due to the sloppiness of the health care plan.

The 1994 election presented a temporary alignment of political forces that cost House Democrats their House majority. As one House Democratic member stated:

You won't see anything like 1994 for a long, long time. You won't see the Contract with America again. That was a good strategy at the time, when the country was upset. The Democrats ruled the House well, but did a poor job ruling the country. Talk radio, 1994, what Gingrich did was all a reaction to that.

In comparison to the years spent by House Republicans building and training a farm team of future House candidates, the House Democratic majority invested little time and effort in training and recruitment efforts. In the 1954-1994 period, House Democrats relied on the overwhelming Democratic advantages at the state and local level to produce the next generation of Democratic House candidates. During the 103rd Congress, however, a large number of senior House Democrats decided to either retire or run for higher office, creating numerous open seat races difficult for the Democratic majority to defend.⁷¹ Twenty-eight House Democrats retired or ran for higher office in 1994, and Democrats had to defend a total of 31 open seats in the 1994 campaign.

Traditionally, these seats would have been retained by the next generation of politically talented and savvy Democratic politicians from the state and local level. But in 1994, these open seats were seriously contested not only with the usual crop of Democratic candidates, but from a wave of graduates of the newly ascendant Republican farm team effort to recruit, train, and elect Republican House candidates. In addition to confronting better trained Republican House candidates, Democrats had to defend many of these open seat vacancies in competitive political terrain, especially in the increasingly Republican South. For instance, ten southern House Democrats retired in 1994, opening conservative districts ripe for Republican takeovers. Republicans grabbed eight of these seats in the 1994 campaign. In 1992, Democrats won 58 of the 86 open House seats due to a numerous quality candidates, the strength of the Clinton-Gore ticket on the East and West coasts, and the

⁷¹ Michael Wines, "Many in Congress Are Deciding They Want Out, to the Democrat's Dismay," New York Times, 28 April 1994, p. A 1.

weakness of the Bush re-election effort.⁷² In 1994, by contrast, Republicans grabbed 22 of the 31 open Democratic seats, while Democrats only grabbed four of the 21 open Republican seats.

The large number of Democratic open seats served yet another blow to Democratic efforts to maintain their House majority in 1994. Incumbents can normally hold their seats due to higher name recognition and personally loyal re-election constituencies. But these advantages disappear when seats become vacant. Open seats are more easily influenced by national tides and structural political changes within a district. During the 20 elections held between 1954 to 1992, an open seat was almost four times more likely to change parties than a seat held by an incumbent. Between 1954 and 1992, 410 of the 7,832 incumbents running in a general election lost with the seat changing parties. During this same period, 203 of the 798 open seats changed sides.⁷³ In previous decades, open-seat races to the House have contributed little to party shifts due to the small pool of open seats, the superior abilities of non-incumbent Democratic challengers able to hold open seats for their party, and favorable redistricting drawn in favor of Democrats.⁷⁴ In 1994, each of these open seat advantages which favored Democrats evaporated, contributing to massive Democratic meltdown nationwide. For decades, the Democratic majority relied on an all-volunteer force of quality Democratic House candidates graduating from the state and local level. In 1994, the

⁷² Susan B. Glasser, "Democrats' Open-Seat Victories in House Blocked GOP From Bigger Gains Overall," Roll Call, 5 November 1992.

⁷³ Calculations from Vital Statistics on Congress, 1997-1998.

⁷⁴ Rhodes Cook, "GOP Counting on Open Seats To Deliver Major Gains," Congressional Quarterly, 9 July 1994, p. 1883.

conscripted Republican farm team, which produced scores of quality candidates for Republican efforts to take the House, defeated the Democratic all-volunteer force of House candidates.

In addition to losing 22 open seats to Republicans, the Democratic majority lost 34 incumbents. Traditionally, the institutional and political advantages of incumbency and the legacy of the Democratic party nurtured and protected Democratic incumbents. In 1994, however, these incumbency advantages failed for several Democratic incumbents, continuing a trend begun in 1992. The retirements of 41 House Democrats in 1992 and 28 in 1994 were the largest numbers of Democratic retirements in consecutive election cycles since the 1930s. These retirement decisions, in the midst of a period of two-party competition, hurt the Democratic majority in 1992 and killed it in 1994 as Democrats were forced to defend too many open seats. In the 104th and 105th Congresses, both parties would place special emphasis on urging senior members not to retire for fear of losing critical open seats necessary to cobble together a House majority, or to retire early enough for the party to rally around the most viable candidate to retain the open seat.

House Democratic leaders in the 103rd Congress did little to stop the retirement flow that began in 1992 and which continued unabated in the 103rd Congress. House Democrats, relying on the inevitability of a Democratic House majority, focused little time or effort on plugging potential dangers to their majority like the growing number of Democratic open seats to defend. While the Democratic majority slept electorally, the Republican minority feverishly devoted massive amounts of time, energy, and money into nationwide farm team efforts to recruit, train, and elect Republican House candidates. In the 104th and 105th

Congresses, House Democrats would place special emphasis on the nuts and bolts of recruiting quality Democratic candidates after the jolt of their 1994 losses. In the 103rd Congress, however, Democratic leaders, and a majority of members, focused on passing their legislative program and finding the votes in the Democratic Caucus to pass legislation in the House. The goal of protecting the Democratic majority on a seat-by-seat basis was not on the Democratic political radar screen.

Fund-raising advantages remained the one bright spot for House Democrats in the midst of the fiercely competitive race for majority control in the 103rd Congress. Despite the push by Gingrich and other House Republicans to deny House Democrats their traditional fund-raising advantages, a majority of the funds in the 1994 campaign cycle went to the Democratic House majority. House Democrats continued to enjoy the traditional money advantage they had experienced in previous decades as a majority power. Former DCCC Chairman Tony Coelho (D-CA) defended this tactic of Democratic dominance of PAC contributions by stating “We are going to be the majority party for a long time. So it doesn’t make good business sense to give to Republicans.”⁷⁵ Democrats enjoyed the fruits of majority status in their proven fund-raising appeals, and this fund-raising advantage continued into the 103rd Congress. But House Democrats raised funds individually, irrespective of collective party needs. House Republicans harangued PACs and safe Republican incumbents to contribute to Republicans in tight races that could make the difference in party control. House Democrats, on the other hand, did not engage in this

⁷⁵ Ruth Shalit, “The Undertaker: Tony Coelho and the Death of the Democrats,” The New Republic, 2 January 1995, pp. 17-18.

collective activity to help beleaguered Democratic candidates at the expense of safe Democratic incumbents.

Republicans on the Attack

House Republicans employed aggressive attack politics in their successful drive for House control in 1993 and 1994. House Republicans virulently attacked the Democratic majority and individual Democrats, used ethics as a political weapon against House Democrats, and aggressively contested for majority control of the House. The nationalized Republican campaign for majority control in 1994 contrasted sharply with previous Republican campaign efforts, which traditionally mimicked the Democratic strategy of individual incumbent re-elections and localized campaigns. In addition to employing attack politics, House Republicans benefitted from the dividends of long-term political investments made in the previous decade. These investments included the cultivation of a farm team of quality Republican House candidates, more aggressive fund-raising tactics, adoption of ethics attacks as viable tools to achieve majority status, and the use of highly charged rhetoric to portray Democratic rule in the House as “corrupt”. Through these tactics, House Republicans increasingly cast their lot with the aggressive style of majority-obtaining activity long advocated by Newt Gingrich since the 1970s. These majority-attaining tactics increasingly monopolized the time of House Republican members and leaders in the 103rd Congress. In the process, their structures were altered from the traditional tasks of governing and legislating to plotting strategy to secure a Republican House majority for the 104th Congress.

To win majority control of the House in 1994, House Republicans nationalized the

election on anti-Democratic and anti-Clinton ideological appeals to supplant traditional Democratic incumbency advantages.⁷⁶ Republican candidates and campaigns used an unpopular Bill Clinton as a blunt hammer against all House Democratic incumbents and Democratic open-seat candidates. Republican disappointments in House races in the 1980s fueled this new Republican willingness in 1994 to freely use attack politics to achieve majority status. If Republicans had maintained control of all the House seats they had held at one point or another in the 1980s, they would have held a House majority in 1990.⁷⁷ But inexperienced candidates and inept campaigns lacking in strategic focus and clear agendas cost Republicans a total of 55 House seats during the 1980s. Newt Gingrich emerged as one of the first House Republicans to argue that House Republicans could never win a House majority until they learned to coordinate their legislative and campaign strategies on the same themes and issues that had produced Republican presidential landslides in 1972, 1980, and 1984. A senior House Republican involved in the 1994 takeover effort stated in an interview:

Before Gingrich and 1994, there was never an attempt to nationalize the elections. the GOP would look at the election as a district-by-district building process to gain the majority, much like the Democrats did. Part of the problem was having Republican presidents - this made it difficult to nationalize the elections, especially in presidential years.

The nationalization strategy for House races, as advocated by Gingrich, was relatively straight-forward: first, undermine Democratic credibility by defining the party and its rule

⁷⁶ David Maraniss and Michael Weisskopf, Tell Newt to Shut Up!, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), pp. 4-10.

⁷⁷ Rhodes Cook, "Self-Inflicted Wounds Cost GOP Majority in '80s," Congressional Quarterly, 3 March 1990, pp. 687-691.

in the House as corrupt and too liberal for the United States; then, draw attention across the country to a positive message and image of Republican governance. Newt Gingrich served an important role as the Patton figure who propelled House Republicans to victory over several election cycles in the 1990s. Like Patton, Gingrich articulated aggressive strategies for victory, built and nurtured a fighting machine capable of winning, was consistently bullish on success, and repeatedly urged his troops to see victory on the horizon. As the catalyst of the Republican victory, Gingrich personified the Republican takeover effort and became its focal point. This personification aided Republicans during their ascension to majority status in the House. But it also hurt Republicans in the 104th and 105th Congresses as the Democrats utilized aggressive anti-Gingrich strategies to hamper Republican efforts to hold their slim majorities.

During the 103rd Congress, House Republicans made an all-or-nothing gamble for a House majority. Instead of cooperating with House Democrats on policy matters, House Republicans openly attacked Democratic positions on the budget, on taxes, on health care reform, and on the crime bill. In September of 1994, 367 House Republican incumbents and House candidates unveiled on the Capitol Steps the Contract With America, a campaign document promising House floor votes on 10 domestic policy reform items in the first 100 days of a Republican 104th Congress.⁷⁸ House Republicans had proposed a joint Capitol Steps event in 1992 in conjunction with President Bush, but Bush refused to participate for

⁷⁸ David E. Rosenbaum, "With Band and Reagan's Political Music, G.O.P. Goes for House," New York Times, 28 September 1994, p. A 16.

fear it might jeopardize his already troubled re-election campaign.⁷⁹

The Contract With America personified the 1994 campaign and the all-out Republican effort to contest majority status and achieve a House majority in the 103rd Congress. The Contract laid down distinct partisan lines between the two parties, articulated a clear agenda for all Republican candidates, articulated partisan differences between a Republican and Democratic House majority in the 104th Congress, and sent important signals to Republican base voters on the need to terminate the Democratic majority and elect a Republican House majority. The Contract With America established a strong and clear ideological focus for Republicans in the 1994 campaign, especially its election promise to balance the budget, reform welfare, enact tax cuts, and pass congressional reform. The Contract With America not only defined the 1994 campaign, but provided a clear direction for a Republican-controlled 104th Congress by promising House floor votes on each of the ten items in the Contract within the first 100 days of the new Congress. Each of the 367 Republican candidates attending the Contract With America Capitol Steps ceremony signed an oath to keep their promise to bring each of the Contract items to a floor vote if the Republicans achieved a House majority. In addition, Republicans openly asked voters to vote a Republican House of Representatives out of office in 1996 if Republicans did not keep their promise to vote on each of the legislative promises contained in the Contract With America.

The Contract With America united all Republican House candidates in a common

⁷⁹ Steven Engelberg, Jeff Berth, and Katharine Q. Seelye, "Files Show How Gingrich Laid a Grand G.O.P. Plan," New York Times, 3 December 1995, p. A 1.

message against Democrats, against Bill Clinton's first two years in office as president, and against the record of the Democratic majority of the 103rd Congress. It also triggered the Republican's nationalized campaign of 1994. Republican congressional candidates from all over the country campaigned on the themes of the Contract, arguing that a Republican-controlled Congress would be dramatically different from the "liberalism" of the Democratic-controlled 103rd Congress.⁸⁰ Congressman Bill McCollum (R-FL) placed the role of the Contract in perspective:

Don't underestimate the impact of the Contract with America. It was a brilliant maneuver that unified the Republican candidates running in 1994. It was very significant for our candidates to approach the voters and our campaign activists with a policy document that we could hand them and say 'This is what we will do if you elect us.'⁸¹

Another House Republican described the electoral importance of the Contract With America to Republican strategies to capture the House of Representatives by stating:

The Contract With America was not radical. It also wasn't brilliance, either. The beauty of the Contract was that Newt Gingrich was able to take everyday axiomatic things and turn them into commonsense policies. For instance, 'we should have a balanced budget,' or 'we should reform welfare.' These are not controversial with the American people. They were supported by 80% of the public in the polls. The Contract provided energy for the Republican base that increased turnout. It also provided a governing document for when the Republicans gained the majority.

In addition to the Contract, Republican candidates launched negative attacks against President Clinton and House Democrats. Republican candidates from all across the country ran television commercials "morphing" the faces of their Democratic opponents into Clinton's face. The anti-Clinton strategy of linking a Democratic House candidate to the

⁸⁰ Jeanne Cummings, "Gingrich Has Midas Touch for GOP Candidates," The Atlanta Journal and Constitution, 28 October 1994, p. B 1.

⁸¹ Interview with Congressman Bill McCollum, 22 May 1998.

unpopular Clinton, whose popularity ratings fell to a low of 37% in both the summer of 1993 and 1994, began in the off-year elections of 1993 and the various special elections of the 103rd Congress. President Clinton campaigned for Democratic candidates in six special and off-year elections in 1993, and each these offices went from Democratic to Republican.⁸² Republican election victories in these races had a “snowball effect” of encouraging more aggressive anti-Clinton tactics in the next election. In June of 1993, Republican Kay Bailey Hutchison captured a Democratic Senate vacancy in a Texas special election on anti-Clinton themes. In the 1993 off-year elections, Republicans captured mayor’s offices in Los Angeles and New York City and won Democratic governorships in Virginia and New Jersey.⁸³

The strategy of “morphing” a Democratic candidate into an unpopular Bill Clinton most clearly emerged in May of 1994, when Republicans captured two previously Democratic House seats in special elections using anti-Clinton themes. On May 10, 1994, Republican Frank Lucas captured the 6th district of Oklahoma on anti-Clinton themes following the early retirement of Representative Glenn English (D-OK). On May 24, 1994, Christian book-store owner and political neophyte Ron Lewis captured the second district of Kentucky in a special election following the death of 84-year old William Natcher (D-KY), Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee.⁸⁴ Lewis aired TV ads “morphing”

⁸² William Schneider, “Why Clinton Played the Perot Card,” National Journal, 13 November 1993, p. 2756.

⁸³ Dave Kaplan and Elizabeth A. Palmer, “As Voters Clean House Again, Democrats Are Left in Dust,” Congressional Quarterly, 6 November 1993, pp. 3065-68.

⁸⁴ “House Special Elections,” CQ Almanac 1994, p. 592.

his Democratic opponent's face into Bill Clinton.⁸⁵ These victories energized House Republicans, and laid the groundwork for the anti-Clinton nationalized campaign of the 1994 election. Don Sweitzer, political director for the Democratic National Committee, explained the success of the Republican anti-Clinton strategy by stating "He [Clinton] has become the person you can point to for your anger over the state of things, because he is the President."⁸⁶

In addition to attacking House Democrats in a negative fashion, House Republicans capitalized on the two-party competition of the 1990s through their farm team efforts between 1987 and 1994. For decades, poor recruitment and a lack of quality candidates hurt Republican efforts to challenge open seat opportunities and Democratic incumbents. Through GOPAC, Republicans began training a bench of Republican candidates for state legislative races capable of graduating to, and winning, races for the U.S. House of Representatives. This farm team effort experienced growing success in the 1990-1994 election cycles. Between 1987 and 1993, GOPAC trained 10,000 candidates all over the country in how to campaign for office and win election. Newt Gingrich justified the time and energy devoted to farm team efforts by stating:

In most election contests, the Republican party is still like a medium-sized college football team going to the Super Bowl. The Democratic coalition consists of the party, the big city machines, the labor unions, the left-wing activist groups, and the alliances with the news media and with academics on college campuses. They have both a bench and training skills that we can't even begin to play against.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Rhodes Cook, "Using Clinton as a Punching Bag...May Have Limits as a GOP Tactic," Congressional Quarterly, 22 October 1994, pp. 2992-93.

⁸⁶ Michael Kelly, "Clinton's Escape Clause," The New Yorker, 24 October 1994, p. 46.

⁸⁷ Representative Newt Gingrich, "The Life of the Party," Policy Review, Winter 1990, p. 8.

The GOPAC farm team efforts concentrated on “doctrine creation.” This entailed creating and disseminating a domestic reform message that attracted conservative Republican candidates to run for office, which would eventually turn the Republican party into a majority party at every level of government, including the U.S. House. GOPAC fashioned itself as the “Bell Labs” of Republican politics, adopting the “teach them to fish model” of political candidate training. Instead of being an ATM machine dispensing campaign cash to Republican House campaigns, GOPAC trained Republican candidates in the nuts-and-bolts of winning elections. Few political organizations in Washington, D.C. actually perform this pedagogical role for candidates on the mechanics of winning a campaign. These farm team efforts, pivotal to Republican success in gaining a House majority in 1994, required lots of time and energy from House Republican leaders like Gingrich, DeLay, Armey, and McCollum. In the 104th and 105th Congresses, the House Democratic minority would follow a similar strategy of diverting time and energy away from the task of governing and legislating and toward the process of recruiting candidates on a nationwide basis capable of winning a House majority.

Through GOPAC, Gingrich and other like-minded Republicans trained an entire generation of Republican candidates in the language, message, ideas, and campaign tactics of attack politics. The GOPAC audiotope program, for instance, sent thousands of campaign training audiotapes to Republican candidates all over the country instructing Republican candidates in the language of aggressive political combat. In 1990 alone, GOPAC trained over 2,800 activists in 32 states in political campaign techniques, and sent 36,000 campaign training tapes to Republican candidates running for office at every level of government.

These tapes provided a blueprint of aggressive political combat, encouraging Republican candidates to think in terms of an aspiring Republican House majority. These techniques included “vision, strategies, projects, tactics,” “listen, learn, help, lead,” “wedges, magnets, shields, turf,” “we are the majority,” and “defining the left.”

Through audio-tapes, video-tapes, and language manuals, Gingrich taught Republican candidates how to “speak like Newt.”⁸⁸ On the tapes, Gingrich instructed Republican candidates to use negative words and language to adversely define Democratic opponents, including “sick,” “pathetic,” “traitors,” “greed,” “anti-family,” and “disgrace.”⁸⁹ Gingrich also encouraged Republican candidates to refer to Democratic policies using negative words like “decay,” “permissive,” “perpetual dependence,” “welfare cheaters,” “liberal,” and “bureaucratic welfare state.”⁹⁰ He also advocated aggressive combat with Democrats, instructing Republican candidates that “political fights make news.” GOPAC’s aggressive campaign training techniques were modeled after TRADOC, the U.S. Army’s futuristic war-fighting doctrine, with the overall goal of “capturing the U.S. House of Representatives.”⁹¹ A House Republican involved in these efforts stated:

⁸⁸ Stephen Engleberg, Jeff Gerth, and Katharine Q. Seelye, “Files Show How Gingrich Laid a Grand G.O.P. Plan,” New York Times, 3 December 1995, p. A 1.

⁸⁹ Michael Kranish, “Gingrich Rise to Power Fueled by PAC Money, Master Plan,” Boston Globe, 20 November 1994, p. 1.

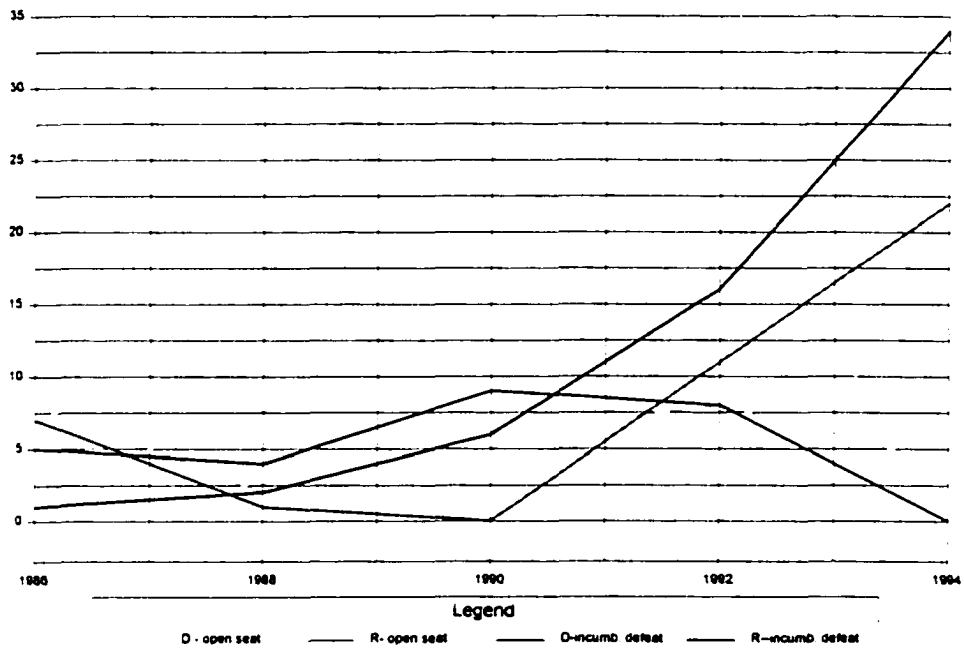
⁹⁰ Dan Balz and Serge F. Kovalski, “Gingrich Divided GOP, Conquered the Agenda,” Washington Post, 21 December 1994, p. A1; *In the Matter of Representative Newt Gingrich*, House Report 105-1, 105th Cong., 1st sess., 1997, p. 231.

⁹¹ Damon Chappie, “Gingrich Enlists Army, But Top Official ‘Wary’,” Roll Call, 3 October 1996, p. 1.

You need a change in control of the House because it brings in new ideas and new blood. Newt is the guy who went out into the desert during his first years here and learned Army command doctrine. He applied military doctrine to our 1994 campaign, and this really energized us in terms of dynamic leadership.

The new focus on candidate training and recruitment helped House Republicans achieve increasing success in defeating Democratic incumbents, retaining open Republican House seats, and capturing open Democratic House seats in the 1992-1994 period, as illustrated in Figure 2-1. In the 1986-1990 period, House Democrats gained a net of eight open seats and defeated nine more Republican incumbents than they lost. In the 1991-1994 period, however, this situation reversed. House Republicans gained a net of 23 open seats and defeated 42 more Democratic incumbents than they lost in the elections of 1992 and 1994. In 1994 alone, Republicans captured 39 of the 52 open seats, grabbing 22 open Democratic House seats. The farm team efforts of House Republicans played a role in the election of nine of the 18 Republican freshmen of 1990, 40 of the 47 Republican freshmen

Figure 2-1: GOP Farm Team Efforts,
1986-1994



in 1992, and 58 of the 73 new Republican freshmen in 1994.

Republican emphasis on gaining House seats and a House majority, including electing new House Republicans, winning open seats, and defeating Democratic House incumbents, did not come without a price. The massive amount of time, energy, and resources spent by House Republican members and leaders to achieve a majority in the 1990-1994 period came at the expense of the governing and legislating process. A senior House Democrat placed the Republican farm team efforts, and the amount of time they required, in perspective:

What Gingrich did to recruit and train candidates took time and money. Gingrich did what the old political parties used to do, but ceased doing a long time ago. Political parties used to play this role that Gingrich did with the new Republican candidates and newly elected freshmen. No one else was doing the kinds of things Gingrich was doing to get people involved in the process.

In addition to nationalized strategies and farm team efforts, House Republicans engaged in hardball fund-raising tactics in the 103rd Congress. In 1994, House Republicans pressured PACs and lobbying groups, which had traditionally given a majority of their campaign donations to Democratic House incumbents and lobbying groups, to contribute more extensively to Republican campaigns. Gingrich bluntly warned PAC representatives in 1994 that if he became House Speaker in January, 1995, “For anybody who’s not on board now it’s going to be the two coldest years in Washington.”⁹² Gingrich additionally encouraged businesses to donate money to Republican campaigns so they could “get even with the Clinton tax increase.”⁹³ Gingrich defended this hard-ball fund-raising strategy by stating “I say, ‘Don’t come in later after trying to prop up House Democratic incumbents who oppose your values and tell us you were secretly with us.’”⁹⁴ Tom Davis (R-VA), who defeated Democratic incumbent Leslie Byrne (D-VA) in a swing seat race, applauded the new Republican tenacity in fund-raising by stating “I’ve really got to credit Gingrich. He got

⁹² Dan Balz, “Republican Leaders Play Hardball With PACs,” Washington Post, 13 October 1994, p. A 1.

⁹³ “Gingrich Comments to PACS Draw Fire,” Facts on File World News Digest, 20 October 1994, p. 770.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

these guys to give where they would want to anyway.”⁹⁵

In addition to raising money, House Republican leaders cajoled safe Republican incumbents to give money from their own campaign coffers to Republican races that could help Republicans achieve majority status. In early October, Gingrich sent a memo to Republican House colleagues in line for leadership posts or committee chairmanships, requesting them to contribute unneeded campaign money to winnable Republican races around the country.⁹⁶ Gingrich and NRCC Chairman Bill Paxon obtained the signatures of 120 GOP Members who pledged to help Republican campaigns as part of a “14 Weeks to Change the House” program.⁹⁷ Several GOP incumbents subsequently contributed money to carefully targeted close races, helping winning challengers in swing seats like Brian Bilbray (R-CA), Rick White (R-WA), Andrea Seastrand (R-CA), and Frank Creamans (R-OH).

In the 103rd Congress, House Republicans abandoned their traditional role of trying to cut legislative deals with the Democratic majority and worked to supplant the Democratic majority in the 1994 elections. Instead of focusing time and energy within the House chamber to work with the Democratic majority in the 103rd Congress, House Republicans aggressively pursued House control. A senior House Republican articulated the difference

⁹⁵ Dan Balz, “GOP Uses Hardball in Fund-Raising Pitch,” Chicago Sun-Times, 16 October 1994, p. 28.

⁹⁶ Richard Keil, “Republicans Gave Generously to Colleagues in Tight Races,” Associated Press, 18 November 1994.

⁹⁷ Timothy J. Burger, “GOP Leadership Hopefuls Dole Out Campaign Cash,” Roll Call, 3 November 1994.

in philosophy of House Republicans in the 103rd Congress and the 1994 campaign:

Nobody worked harder for the majority than Gingrich. Gingrich is the visionary who saw the Republican Majority early on and worked to obtain it. Newt provided leadership, vision, and unified the party. He didn't get any sleep the last three weeks of the 1994 campaign because he was on the red-line, visiting lots of congressional districts and being the number one booster of our party. We knew the Sunday before the election in 1994 that we were going to have a fifty-two seat pick-up. By traveling the districts, we were able to get a sense of the country.

In the fight for majority control in 1994, House Republicans employed aggressive tactics that painted House Democrats as corrupt, cajoled money out of PACs and safe Republican incumbents, and demonized the policy decisions of the Democratic majority. These more aggressive tactics had been display in the 1980s and early 1990s with the creation of the Conservative Opportunity Society, the ethics campaign that led to the resignation of Speaker Jim Wright in 1989, and use of the House Bank Scandal in the 102nd Congress to portray the Democratic majority as corrupt. But these previous efforts to fight the Democratic majority were not fully endorsed by all House Republicans. In contrast to previous Congresses, the 103rd Congress is different in that attack politics and campaigning for a majority at the expense of the governing process became acceptable for most House Republicans thirsty for a House majority.

Conclusion

The 103rd Congress witnessed an aggressive campaign for majority control by House Republicans at every level, from obstructing and attacking Democratic governance, to remolding their party culture into a majority-forming machine, to the farm team efforts and Contract With America agenda of the nationalized 1994 campaign. The Democratic majority, meanwhile, pursued a partisan governing strategy of passing an ambitious

Democratic legislative program from within the Democratic Caucus in order to present a party program for voters in the 1994 midterm election. More important than the fact that Republicans gained a House majority was how they obtained it electorally and institutionally. They did not obtain a House majority by being good institutional players or by letting individual Republican quality candidates self-select themselves and run campaigns in 1994 based on local themes. Instead, House Republicans under the leadership of Newt Gingrich selected, recruited, and trained a farm team of Republican candidates, aggressively undermined the Democratic agenda, proposed an ambitious party platform in the form of the Contract With America, and then ran a nationalized campaign on anti-Democratic themes based on their farm team candidates running on Contract With America themes.

Contemporary theories of congressional organization cannot account for the success of this nationalized effort, which mitigated against many of the electoral precepts of the House during the period of non-competition like candidate-centered elections based on local issues. The Democratic majority, which continued to operate electorally and institutionally much like it had in previous decades of non-competitive rule, was demolished by these more aggressive, unorthodox Republican strategies and tactics. House Democrats relied on individual House Democrats to run their own localized races, raise their own money, stress their own localized themes in order to win re-election. This reliance on traditional election advantages was no match, however, for the nationalized strategies employed by Republicans in the 103rd Congress. To preserve the open Democratic seats, House Democrats relied on the traditional system of quality Democratic candidates percolating up from the state and local level to hold and secure the Democratic majority. But the Republican nationalized

campaign undermined traditional Democratic incumbency advantages, and in the process provided a new election strategy for aggressive minority and majority parties to maintain or obtain House control.

In many respects, the 1994 election was a bellwether election for congressional politics. In addition to ending an unprecedented period of one-party rule, it also remade the politics of the 1990s and beyond through the introduction of a nationalized template for House elections. Few other congressional elections can compete with the 1994 election in terms of the massive institutional and political changes it imposed on the organizational matrix of the House. The 103rd Congress and the 1994 campaign served as important transformational catalysts in the new competitive era. In the 104th and 105th Congresses, these changes would dominate congressional politics as the two parties fought intense battles for majority control.

CHAPTER THREE

THE 104th CONGRESS AND THE 1996 CAMPAIGN

Armageddon: Competition for House

Control in the 1990s

The intense two-party competition of the 1994 election continued in the 104th Congress and the 1996 election. Unlike the 103rd Congress, however, both parties in the 104th Congress diverted their political resources and strategies to the goal of attaining House majorities. Like the Republican minority of the 103rd Congress, the House Democratic minority of the 104th Congress devoted itself to the goal of capturing a House majority through attack politics, scandal politics against Speaker Gingrich, and a nationalized 1996 campaign based on opposition to the budget policies of the Republican majority. The new Republican majority of the 104th Congress assumed power with an ambitious and sweeping policy agenda, including a seven-year balanced budget plan that proposed to dramatically downsize the size and scope of the federal government while providing a \$245 billion tax cut. When this agenda became unpopular after the two government shutdowns of 1995-1996, the Republican majority shifted course in the summer of 1996 and pursued a centrist strategy to focus on re-electing a Republican House majority at all cost. After the collapse of Republican majority's budget strategy following the government shutdowns, House Democrats received an opening to contest majority control in the fiercely competitive 1996 election.

The majority-forming and majority-retaining activities of the new Democratic minority and the new Republican majority consumed the politics of the 104th Congress as the two parties diverted all available legislative and political resources toward the war for House

control. House Democrats adopted many of the same tactics and strategies to achieve a House majority in 1996 that the Republican minority used in 1994. The Republican majority, meanwhile, intended to govern in the 104th Congress and move policy to the right, much like the Democratic majority of the 103rd Congress decided to govern the country and move policy to the left. Unlike the Democratic majority of the 103rd Congress, which never pulled back from its leftward governing strategy, the Republican majority of the 104th Congress pulled back from its right-leaning agenda in 1996 to pursue a new strategy of bipartisan governance with President Clinton on several legislative items. House Republican strategy and tactics in 1996 revolved around the central organizing principle of retaining Republican control of the House of Representatives in the 1996 elections. By the end of the 104th Congress, both parties had made capturing a House majority their defining purpose. In the quest for electoral victory, both parties attempted to limit their internal divisions while enhancing the differences between the parties through tough partisan appeals to their respective base voters. Both parties also conscripted the legislative process in the House, the committee system, and personal attacks against members of the opposing party in the open warfare for House control.

The new Republican House majority came to power in 1995 with the belief that its 1994 victory had launched a new period of Republican dominance in American politics.¹ Like the Democrats at the beginning of the 103rd Congress, the new House Republican majority firmly believed the previous election provided a mandate to legislate and govern the

¹ Janet Hook, "Republicans Step Up to Power In Historic 40-Year Shift," Congressional Quarterly, 7 January 1995, pp. 7-11.

country, although from the right instead of the left. For the new Republican majority, the promises made in the 1994 campaign with the nationalized appeals of the Contract With America drove the congressional agenda at the beginning of the 104th Congress. House Republicans had high hopes that they could pass their Contract With America agenda in 1995, win the presidency and an enlarged Republican House majority in the 1996 elections, and cement a long-term national Republican majority in American politics.² But after bruising fights with the Clinton White House and congressional Democrats over the Republican balanced budget plan, especially the two government shutdowns, House Republicans suffered a turn-around in public perceptions and support that continued through the remainder of the 104th Congress.³

The 1996 elections produced a mixed verdict for both parties. Democrats gained nine seats in the House, Republicans gained two seats in the Senate, and President Clinton won re-election to the presidency with 49.3% of the vote. Republicans re-elected the first Republican House majority since 1928, but emerged with a House majority of 227 in the 105th Congress. This represented the smallest House majority since the Republican majority of 221 in the 83rd Congress (1953-1955). Twenty Republican House incumbents won re-election in 1996 with 52% of the vote or less. President Clinton became the first Democrat since Franklin Roosevelt to be elected to two full successive terms, but also became the first president since Woodrow Wilson to win election and re-election with popular vote

² Donna Cassata, "Swift Progress of 'Contract' Inspires Awe and Concern," Congressional Quarterly, 1 April 1995, pp. 909-912.

³ Juliana Gruenwald and Deborah Kalb, "No Longer Ascendant, GOP Hopes to Keep Majority," Congressional Quarterly, 19 October 1996, pp. 2964-68.

pluralities. The demolition of the Democratic majority in 1994, and the mixed verdict of the 1996 elections, would each have a profound impact on the thinking of two parties and how they confronted their roles in the House in the 105th Congress. Whereas 1994 ended one era of one-party rule, the 1996 elections insured another era of one-party rule would be delayed. Representative Martin Frost (D-TX), chairman of the DCCC in the 104th and 105th Congresses, captured the new competitive era of the 1994-2000 period when he stated “We’ve entered a new era in Congressional politics where the balance of power is likely to shift back and forth between the parties, where a ten- or five- or three-seat majority is more the norm than the exception.”⁴

House Democratic leaders, in concurrence with most House Democratic members, made a decision early in the 104th Congress to oppose the Republican legislative agenda and fight for a new Democratic House majority. Much like the Republican House minority of the 103rd Congress, House Democratic leaders and a majority of rank-and-file members eschewed governing and legislating with the Republican majority. Instead, they chose to obstruct, vilify, and attack as much of the Republican legislative agenda as possible before a Democratic recapture of the House in 1996. In the 103rd Congress, House Republicans successfully stopped Democrats from passing into law universal health care reform by framing it as a big-government power grab. In the 104th Congress, House Democrats, in conjunction with President Clinton and Senate Democrats, succeeded in blocking Republicans from enacting into law their 1995 balanced budget plan by framing it and other

⁴ Benjamin Sheffner, “Two More Years, Two More Years: Republicans Hold Both Chambers,” Roll Call, 7 November 1996, p. 1.

elements of the Contract With America as an extremist victimization of the most vulnerable elements of society.⁵ Just as Republicans launched a negative campaign against President Clinton and made him the focal point of opposition in their nationalized campaign of 1994, House Democrats pursued a negative “get-Newt” strategy that made Speaker Gingrich the focal point of their nationalized campaign of 1996. The Republican effort to implement the Contract With America, the government shutdowns, the specifics of the Republican’s 1995 budget plan, and Speaker Gingrich’s ethics and personality each provided Democrats with a firm foundation to launch a nationalized campaign in 1996.

While House Democrats aggressively fought to escape their newfound minority status, House Republicans aggressively fought to save their majority status. After the failure of their shutdown strategy in 1995, House Republicans engaged in a survival strategy in 1996 to preserve their majority amidst sustained attacks from President Clinton, House Democrats, labor unions, and other interest groups of the left. Unlike the Democratic majority of the 103rd Congress, which was unprepared for the competitive demands of the 1994 campaign, the Republican majority of the 104th Congress prepared for political combat to re-elect their majority using many of the same tactics and strategies that helped them secure a House majority in the first place. The House Republican majority abandoned the Dole presidential campaign, engaged in a risky and aggressive campaign to educate the public on the Republican Medicare plan, fought Democratic negative advertising against House

⁵ George Hayer, “House GOP Pushes Budget Cuts As Political Stakes Mount,” Congressional Quarterly, 18 March 1995, pp. 794-98; Jeffrey L. Katz, “Election Year ‘Learning Curve’ Resulted in More Funding,” Congressional Quarterly, 2 November 1996, pp. 3166-67.

Republicans through an aggressive nationwide effort to fight for every vulnerable Republican House seat, utilized the committee system to lure candidates who could grab conservative districts around the country to retain the Republican House majority, and painted new partisan lines between a Republican House majority and a Democratic House majority. While engaging in this fierce political combat, House Republicans also engaged in a flurry of bipartisan deals with President Clinton in the summer of 1996 designed to provide all Republican House candidates with a positive record of achievement for the fall campaign. These bipartisan legislative accomplishments, which included raising the minimum wage, welfare reform, and health care portability, softened the edge of the Republican revolution of 1995 and provided centrist credentials to Republicans facing tough re-election campaigns against the Democratic nationalized campaign.

Much like the Democratic majority of 1993, which designed a deficit-reduction measure consistent with core Democratic principles, the Republican majority of 1995 proposed an ambitious budget plan that both reduced the deficit and moved the federal budget's priorities closer to Republican electoral objectives. The Republican budget plan of 1995 balanced the budget by 2002 through \$270 billion in Medicare savings, over \$1 trillion in domestic spending cuts, and the elimination of 284 government programs and 13 government agencies. In addition, House Republican leaders proposed a \$245 billion tax cut to permanently transfer power and money out of Washington, D.C., a top priority of Republican base voters and activists who helped elect the Republican majority in 1994. The Republican approach to cutting the deficit differed greatly to the Democratic approach to reduce the deficit. This disagreement between House Republicans and President Clinton led

to the budget showdown of the fall of 1995 and the two government shutdowns of 1995-1996, the longest government shutdowns in U.S. history. A six day shutdown began on November 14, 1995, furloughing 800,000 federal workers. A longer 21 day shutdown began on December 16, 1995, and furloughed 260,000 federal workers through the Christmas holidays. The four previous government shutdowns since 1981 had never lasted beyond one day.

As Republicans suffered political damage from the shutdowns, the gaffes and missteps of Speaker Gingrich became a liability for Republicans and a boon for House Democrats seeking advantage in the 1996 elections. Speaker Gingrich's public threats in the summer of 1995 to close down the government if Clinton did not accept Republican budget priorities, combined with his statement that the government shutdowns resulted from Clinton snubbing him on Air Force One, each laid the groundwork for the Democratic anti-Gingrich campaign of the 104th Congress. As the political momentum shifted toward the Democrats after the government shutdowns, the Democratic minority used the type of hardball political tactics used by Gingrich to obtain a House majority in a negative campaign against Republican budget cuts, especially Medicare, and against the Republican's increasingly unpopular speaker.

House Democrats nationalized the 1996 elections against the Republican balanced budget plan, especially as it curtailed spending on Medicare, Medicaid, the environment, and education (MMEE). Just as Republicans had perfected the "liberal" label to apply to all House Democrats, Democrats refined in the 104th Congress their own "extremist" label, as part of their nationalized campaign, to apply to all House Republicans, even moderate and

liberal Republicans from the Northeast.⁶ Although House Democrats did not retake the House in 1996, their negative campaign against House Republicans was very effective in framing issues and public opinion against the new Republican majority. The 1996 election was the most competitive race for House control since the 1950s. House Democrats gained nine seats in 1996, half the seats needed for a Democratic recapture of the House, and defeated 18 Republican incumbents, the largest number of GOP incumbent defeats since 1982. Republicans saved their narrow majority in the 1996 elections by defeating three Democratic incumbents and capturing a net of six open Democratic House seats.

GOVERNING

The Republican Majority: From Governing to Campaigning

The new Republican majority of the 104th Congress assumed power in 1995 with two large goals. First, they intended to govern and legislate with the majority they obtained in 1994 to move policy in a Republican direction. Second, they intended to defend and enlarge their majority in 1996. The legacy of their nationalized campaign, combined with the fact that the two previous Republican House majorities of 1946 and 1952 had lost power two years later, each played a significant role in shaping Republican governance in the 104th Congress. House Republicans had taken a loyalty oath in the 1994 campaign to bring each element of the Contract With America to a floor vote in the House within the first 100 days of the 104th Congress. This promise dominated the congressional and legislative agenda in 1995 as the new Republican majority furiously raced to keep this 1994 campaign promise

⁶ Juliana Gruenwald, "Tremors From Republican Agenda May Reverberate in Fall Races," Congressional Quarterly, 29 June 1996, pp. 1817-19.

as a new majority.⁷ House Republicans kept their Contract With America promise as they governed in 1995, but in the process laid the groundwork for the unraveling of their majority as the anti-regulatory, budget-cutting agenda of 1995 gave all House Republicans a bad “brand name” with the electorate. In the 103rd Congress, Democratic euphoria concerning the first unified Democratic government in 12 years blinded Democratic House leaders and several key members to the perils of governing from the left in pursuit of liberal votes. Likewise, Republican euphoria in the 104th Congress over the first Republican House majority in 40 years blinded Republican leaders to the perils of governing from the right in pursuit of conservative votes. A Republican staff aide described the mood in the House of Representatives as the new Republican majority raced to keep its Contract With America promises during the opening days and months of the 104th Congress:

During the first 100 days, the Republicans who had been out of power began exercising power. Gingrich was viewed as Moses and was given a lot of discretion by House Republicans. It was an unusual situation, and more a result of the GOP having power for the first time in 40 years. It also created havoc for the legislative process. Hearings were bypassed, legislation was rolled out that nobody had read, authorizing legislation was written into appropriations bills with the policy riders, lobbyists were writing legislation on the House floor, and committee chairs were subservient to Gingrich. In retrospect, Republicans played fast and loose with the normal legislative process, especially with the hearings process.

In terms of a governing platform, the Contract With America agenda both aided and hurt the new Republican majority as it took the reigns of power. The 1992 election had generated a need for “change” in a generic sense with the defeat of Bush, the election of Clinton, and the influx of 110 new House members. But Democratic leaders took the lead

⁷ For more on this subject, see: James G. Gimpel, Fulfilling the Contract: the First 100 Days, (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1996).

after the 1992 election to interpret what that change meant and how it would be implemented, especially in their decision to first tackle deficit-reduction through a Democratic budget bill. In contrast, the Contract With America dominated the 1994 elections from the top Republican House leaders to the conservative base vote in the Republican grass roots, and provided a clear agenda and a guiding light for all House Republican members as the 104th Congress began. The new Republican majority assumed power with a clear mission of passing legislation based on the principles of the Contract, from welfare reform to a balanced budget to tax cuts. But the Contract With America also contained several items popular with rock-ribbed Republicans but unpopular with the population at large, like reforming the nation's environmental laws in a decidedly pro-business direction. And while voters supported the concept of a balanced budget, the balanced-budget plan advocated by the Contract With America which cut domestic spending and entitlement spending lost its luster as the government shutdowns burnished a negative image of the new Republican majority.

Republican zeal to balance the budget through restraining federal domestic expenditures became the single most important element of the Contract With America and Republican governance in the 104th Congress. Republican leaders and House members saw passage of their balanced-budget plan, more than any other item in the Contract With America, as the best opportunity for fortifying Republican control of the House of Representatives in the short and long term. To gain the passage of their balanced-budget plan, Republican leaders adopted a shutdown strategy designed to force President Clinton

to sign the Republican balanced budget plan into law.⁸ The shutdown strategy included two tactical components: a willingness to close the government to obtain leverage over Clinton, and a threat to provoke federal default on the national debt by refusing to increase the nation's debt limit. Although Republicans grabbed the moral high-ground in their quest to end three decades of deficit spending, their shutdown strategy boomeranged against them and provided Democrats with an edge to regain a House majority. Representative Vernon Ehlers (R-MI) described the mistakes made by House Republicans as a majority party in 1995:

The majority of the 73 freshmen elected in 1994 had never served in the state legislatures. So they didn't realize what could and couldn't be done, at least if you wanted to win re-election. Republicans made two key misjudgments in their governing strategy. First, Republicans totally underestimated Clinton. They thought he was weak. I like to use the analogy of Jim Blanchard in Michigan. Blanchard was the Clinton clone. He was an amiable, handsome fellow who had no ideology other than pragmatism. His philosophy, like Clinton's, is to be as liberal as you can without angering voters. Clinton in his first two years was just like Blanchard was as governor: floundering around, the Republicans outmaneuvering him at every corner. Since Blanchard was defeated in the next election, I thought Clinton would be, too. But Clinton turned out to be much more versatile than I could possibly imagine. He hired Dick Morris, moved to the right, stood firm, and did what Nixon did in the 1972 campaign in terms of doing whatever it took to win re-election. Second, the Republicans didn't take into account that the Democrats thought 1994 was an aberration and that the natural order of things would return two years later. The anti-Newt campaign, the Medicare lies, and the Clinton fund-raising scandal each illustrate a single-minded pursuit for power.⁹

In the budget skirmishing surrounding the government shutdowns in the winter of 1995-96, House Republicans saw their public support evaporate and their new majority

⁸ For an examination of the Republican shutdown strategy and the events of 1995 leading to the two government shutdowns, see Elizabeth Drew, Showdown: The Struggle Between the Gingrich Congress and the Clinton White House (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), and David Maraniss and Michael Weisskopf, "Tell Newt to Shut Up!" (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

⁹ Interview with Congressman Vernon Ehlers (R-MI), 23 April 1998.

endangered as President Clinton and House Democrats skillfully portrayed them as extremists bent on slashing Medicare and providing a huge tax cut to the most wealthy individuals in America. Much like the Democratic majority of the 103rd Congress, the new Republican majority eschewed a center-out governing strategy in favor of governing to please its most conservative supporters both in the House and the country at large. Although both majorities addressed important issues like deficit-reduction and health care reform, they each paid a political price as determined minority parties seized these governing initiatives and used them to launch unrelenting negative attacks designed to gain majority status instead of enacting legislation. The government shutdowns radically altered the political balance of power in Washington, boosting President Clinton's anemic poll ratings and lethargic re-election campaign and threatening House Republicans with the loss of their majority status in the 1996 elections. While Democrats enjoyed a resurgence in the spring of 1996, House Republicans spent the remainder of 1996 dealing with the aftermath of their failed shutdown strategy. Unlike the Democratic majority of the 103rd Congress, however, House Republicans took corrective action in 1996 to stave off defeat in the fall elections, moving to the center in the search of the swing voter.¹⁰

The frenzied legislative pace of the Contract period of 1995, combined with the failed Republican effort to balance the budget in the summer and fall of 1995, consumed vast amounts of precious legislative time on the House floor. In addition to crowding out the

¹⁰ Richard E. Cohen, "Off Balance," National Journal, 23 March 1996, pp. 638-42; George Hager, "Republicans Throw in Towel On Seven-Year Deal," Congressional Quarterly, 27 January 1996, p. 213-16; Jackie Koszczuk, "GOP Faces Campaign Year Adrift in Roiled Waters," Congressional Quarterly, 20 January 1996, pp. 139-41.

consideration of any other legislative proposals, the failed effort to implement the Republican budget plan in 1995 pushed the normal budget and appropriations process in the House weeks behind schedule for fiscal years 1996 and 1997. From January to April of 1995, the Republican House majority passed each of the Contract items to the exclusion of any other legislative business. The negotiations over the Republican plan to balance the budget over seven years consumed the remainder of 1995 as Republican House leaders unsuccessfully negotiated a budget deal with President Clinton and the government shutdowns threw the House into political turmoil.

The budget standoff between President Clinton and the Republican majority forced a seven-month delay in passing the spending bills for fiscal year 1996, and delayed both the fiscal year 1996 and 1997 appropriations process. Normally, these must-pass appropriations bills funding federal government activities would have been finished by October of 1995. The fiscal year 1996 budget and appropriations process did not end until April 16, 1996 with the passage of a large fiscal 1996 omnibus appropriations package (PL 104-134). An unprecedented 14 temporary spending bills, or continuing resolutions, were needed to keep the federal government funded during this seven-month delay. This delay placed further pressure on the fiscal year 1997 budget and appropriations process as the 1996 elections loomed.

At the end of the 104th Congress, House Republicans desired to adjourn early to campaign to re-elect their majority and avoid another politically damaging government shutdown dominated the governing process. As the Republican majority approached the October 1, 1996 deadline for passage of the fiscal year 1997 appropriations bills, House

Republicans were eager to avoid another politically damaging government shutdown. House Republican leaders and members were also increasingly desperate to adjourn Congress early to enable Republican incumbents a chance to campaign for the 1996 elections. This desire to go home to campaign for the re-election of the Republican majority precipitated Republican capitulation in the appropriations process in the fall of 1996.¹¹ At the end of the 103rd Congress, the Democratic majority was ambushed by a minority party hungry for majority status. At the end of the 104th Congress, the Republican majority prevented a minority party ambush by surrendering early to President Clinton and providing substantial amounts of “get-out-of-town-money” to fund his domestic spending priorities. In return for timely consideration and approval of fiscal year 1997 appropriations measures, President Clinton demanded, and received, \$6.5 billion in extra domestic spending for education, the environment, and anti-terrorism initiatives.¹² Six unfinished appropriations bills were wrapped into an omnibus 1997 appropriations bill which contained appropriations for one-third of federal spending, almost \$600 billion in spending.

Unlike the sense of direction that dominated the Republican majority in 1995, 1996 witnessed House Republican leaders struggling to regain political advantage while rank-and-file Republican members increasingly grumbled about the lack of direction and strategy. A power-sharing arrangement between Speaker Gingrich and Majority Leader Arney in 1996 allowed Arney to run the day-to-day operations of the House floor, while Gingrich plotted

¹¹ “Catchall FY97 Bill Meets Deadline,” CQ Almanac 1996, p. 10-21.

¹² “Harmony Born of Pressure Speeds Spending Wrap-Up,” CQ Almanac 1996, p. 10-3.

election strategy for 1996 and only intervened to resolve disputes when necessary.¹³ The desire to both preserve their majority status and provide their incumbents with a record to campaign on in the 1996 elections spurred Republican compromise with Clinton in the summer of 1996 on raising the minimum wage, passing welfare reform, and passing health care portability legislation.¹⁴ Through these compromises, and capitulation in the appropriations process in the fall of 1996, Republican leaders reminded rank-and-file Republican members that their first priority was to retain control of the House so they could return to fight another day.

Throughout the 104th Congress, Republican desire to keep the House in 1996 and for several years beyond drove the legislative agenda and legislative process in the House. Despite the tumultuous politics of the 104th Congress, from the Contract With America high to the government shutdown low, several pieces of major legislation were enacted into law. These legislative accomplishment included a major telecommunications law, a welfare reform law that ended the federal welfare entitlement, a farm bill that ended decades of commodity subsidy programs, anti-immigration and anti-terrorism legislation, the line-item veto, a raise in the minimum wage, and health care portability legislation important to Democrats. These accomplishments illustrated the degree to which the governing process had been altered in the 104th Congress by competitive pressures. Two-party competition and the change in partisan control augmented the governing process and accelerated the passage

¹³ "As Elections Loom, GOP Ardor Gives Way to Pragmatism," CQ Almanac 1993, p. 1-3.

¹⁴ Doyle McManus, "Democrats Debate How to Take Hill," Los Angeles Times, 31 August 1996, p. A 14.

of several substantive reforms. The case study of welfare reform provides one example of the role played by the pressures of two-party competition in the 1990s in the governing process.

In the 103rd Congress, House Democratic leaders deliberately ignored welfare reform, especially the limit on benefits advocated by both President Clinton and House Republicans, due to its unpopularity with liberal base voters and with the majority of liberals within the Democratic Caucus. The two-party competition of the 1994 campaign and the change in party control placed a new Republican leadership team in power which had articulated welfare reform as a top legislative priority. The new Republican majority aggressively pursued welfare reform in the 104th Congress. President Clinton vetoed two more conservative versions of welfare reform before signing a final version in August of 1996. The change in party control in 1994 insured welfare reform would be plucked from the obscurity it received in the Democratic 103rd Congress to legislative prominence in the Republican 104th Congress. Additionally, the competitive pressures of the 1996 elections forced Republican leaders to compromise with President Clinton to produce a welfare reform measure that could be enacted prior to the elections to provide all House Republicans with an important campaign issue. In the 105th and 106th Congresses, welfare reform would be touted by members of both parties and by President Clinton as one of the most significant accomplishments of the 1990s as welfare reform rolls declined 50% and the culture of welfare changed as well. In the 103rd Congress, the inability by Democrats to pass any form of health care reform legislation denied the Democratic majority bragging rights in the 1994 elections. The welfare reform law of 1996 provided House Republicans with a campaign

issue to appeal both to conservative base voters and independent swing voters, and played the same role a Democratic victory on health care reform in the 103rd Congress would have played in the 1994 campaign.

Democrats on the Attack

House Democratic members and leaders spent their time 104th Congress recouping from their 1994 defeat, organizing against the Republican agenda, and communicating a message of opposition against the new Republican majority. As House Republicans implemented their Contract agenda in 1995, they focused on governing from within the House Republican Conference, much like the Democratic majority of the 103rd Congress focused on finding its governing votes from Democratic ranks. Deprived of any input or voice in this process, House Democratic leaders and members began to slowly regain their political footing by honing their attacks against the Republican majority, especially against proposed Republican budget cuts in federal domestic programs.¹⁵ House Democrats regained their political momentum through these attacks, especially in their attacks on the Republican Medicare reform plan and the large tax cut contained in the 1995 budget plan.

Through these attacks, House Democrats sought to terminate the Republican majority in the 1996 election rather than engage in the process of crafting and improving legislation for governing the country. In the summer of 1996, House Democrats presented the Families First agenda, which outlined 21 centrist policy proposals for a Democratic 105th Congress. The Families First agenda provided a serious outline of what a Democratic majority would

¹⁵ Burt Solomon, "At Both Ends of the Avenue...The Democrats Pander and Fall," National Journal, 7 January 1995, p. 39; Richard E. Cohen, "A Minority Without Marching Orders," National Journal, 21 January 1995, p. 187.

do in the 105th Congress if given the majority, performing the same role played by the Contract With America for the Republican minority in 1994.¹⁶ But despite these similarities, Families First differed from the Contract With America in several key aspects. Unlike the Contract With America, Families First did not trigger a nationalized effort for House control. Unlike Republicans in 1994, Democratic candidates in 1996 did not take a loyalty oath to implement the Families First agenda in a Democratic 105th Congress, and Families First did not figure prominently in the House Democratic campaign for majority control in 1996. Families First did provide a positive governing direction and agenda for House Democrats seeking to regain the majority in 1996, following in the footsteps of the Contract With America in terms of outlining unified party governing agendas.

Although dispirited at the loss of their long-held majority, House Democratic leaders and a majority of the Democratic Caucus vowed shortly after the 1994 election to oppose the Republican agenda of domestic spending cuts, tax cuts, and entitlement reforms. They also promised to invoke all procedural devices to halt the newly ascendant GOP agenda.¹⁷ In reality, there was little House Democrats could do to stop the Republican agenda in the House, where the majority party controls the levers of power. To stop the Republican agenda, House Democrats had to rely on Senate Democratic filibusters and the veto power wielded by President Clinton. But House Democrats used the power of symbolic political

¹⁶ David Broder, "Two Manifestos," Washington Post, 30 June 1996, C 7; Charles E. Cook, "The GOP 'Contract' Vs. 'Families First': Challenge Is the Same," Roll Call, 27 June 1996, p. 6.

¹⁷ Robert Pear, "Democrats Vow to Oppose Part of Gingrich's Agenda," New York Times, 18 November 1994, p. A 31.

gestures in 1995 to articulate opposition to the Republican majority, rhetorically vowing not to compromise in their defense of Medicare and Social Security.¹⁸

Although deprived of procedural power to affect the legislative agenda, House Democrats did have the power to fashion communication strategies to appeal for public support in their opposition to Republican efforts to restructure Medicare and other entitlement programs like Medicaid, food stamps, WIC, and school lunches. In the months leading up to the government shutdowns, House Democrats laid the political rationale for opposition to the Republican budget plan. When President Clinton vetoed the Republican budget plan, they eagerly rallied around his leadership in opposition to Republican budget policies during the government shutdowns. The rapid turn of events against House Republicans following the government shutdowns validated this opposition strategy and attack politics advocated by House Democrats shortly after the 1994 election.¹⁹ According to Minority Leader Gephardt, the government shutdowns caused Americans to “remember that some of government, they like. They like Medicare, they like Medicaid, they like education.”²⁰ Public reaction against Republican budget cuts in these areas provided House Democrats with their message in 1996 for House control.

The school lunch issue in the spring of 1995, during the heyday of the Republican’s

¹⁸ Morton M. Kondracke, “Gephardt Vows Fight on ‘Principle’ by House Dems,” Roll Call, 15 January 1996, p. 5.

¹⁹ Benjamin Sheffner, “Democrats Pound GOP Incumbents On Wage Hike Vote,” Roll Call Politics, 27 May 1996, p. 15.

²⁰ Morton M. Kondracke, “Gephardt Vows Fight on ‘Principle’ By House Dems,” Roll Call, 15 January 1996, p. 5.

Contract period, illustrates the efforts made by House Democratic leaders to oppose the Republican majority's legislative program through symbolic appeals in media outlets. Through the school lunch issue, House Democrats gained laid important precedents for their influential nationalized Medicare campaign in the remainder of the 104th Congress. As part of their 1995 balanced budget plan, House Republicans sought to replace the \$4.9 billion school lunch program with direct cash payments to the states. House Republicans also proposed restraining the growth of the school lunch program from its normal 5.3% increase to an increase of 4.5%. House Democratic leaders immediately seized on this restraint in the school lunch program, and attacked House Republicans by painting an image of school children being denied a plate of hot food. In media outlets and news stories, House Democrats argued that lower growth rate was a "cut" because the program would not serve the same rate of eligible children.²¹ On March 19, 1995, Minority Leader Richard Gephardt and several House Democrats held a "Lunch-In" on the Capitol Steps, where they dished out food in a makeshift school lunch line to 2,000 children. At this event, Gephardt attacked the Republican majority by stating "it is immoral to take food from the mouths of our children to pay for a tax cut for the privileged few in this country."²²

The school lunch issue served as an important political boot camp for House Democrats in the art of using effective media strategies to influence public opinion and perceptions. The important lessons of the school-lunch issue provided House Democrats

²¹ Barbara Vobejda and Ann Devroy, "Republicans Get a Full Plate of Blame on School Lunch Plan," Washington Post, 9 March 1995, p. A 20.

²² Eric Lipton, "Politicians Serve Sandwiches -- And a Pitch for School Lunches," Washington Post, 20 March 1995, p. C 1.

with a ready-made template to attack the Republican Congress in other forums on other issues like Medicare and the minimum wage. Through each of these efforts, House Democrats used sophisticated media and communication strategies to paint the House Republican leaders and members as too conservative and too eager to cater to the financial needs of the wealthy and well-connected. Much like the Republican minority of the 103rd Congress, House Democrats shifted attention away from the underlying public policy problems driving the majority party's legislative proposals, and toward the more unpopular aspects of the specific legislative proposals offered by the majority party.

For instance, both the Democratic majority of the 103rd Congress and the Republican majority of the 104th Congress tackled the issue of deficit reduction, a process that can be achieved either through tax increases or spending and entitlement cuts. House Democrats chose tax increases in 1993 while House Republicans chose spending cuts in 1995. Each of these decisions provided openings to minority party attacks. In the 103rd Congress, Republican attacks on the tax increases of the Democratic budget proposal drew attention away from the fact that the bill reduced the deficit more than inaction. Likewise, in the 104th Congress, House Democratic attacks on the specifics of proposed Republican budget cuts shifted attention away from the merits of a balanced budget and toward the negative effects of each proposed cut on an individual constituency.²³

In addition to school lunches, House Democrats used similar arguments, tactics and political symbolism against the Republican majority in the 104th Congress on Medicare,

²³ Richard E. Cohen, "Down But Not Out, Democrats Hit Back," National Journal, 1 April 1995, p. 822; Eliza Newlin Carney, "Don't Count Us Out," National Journal, 29 April 1995, pp. 1022-27.

student loans, Medicaid, the government shutdowns, and the minimum wage. Through these efforts, House Democratic leaders and members argued that every Republican spending cut was merely freeing up resources to cut taxes for the wealthy. House Democrats repeated a common refrain of saving “Medicare, Medicaid, the environment, and education” from the Republican majority during the 104th Congress, much like the Republican minority of the 103rd Congress consistently repeated their “tax-and-spend” refrain against the Democratic majority. Democratic success on the school lunch issue laid the groundwork for the Medicare campaign of 1996 and the successful effort to raise the minimum wage in 1996, both priorities of labor unions and the Democratic base.²⁴ School lunch, Medicare, and raising the minimum wage each illustrated the degree to which an aggressive minority could shape public opinion and the legislative milieu as part of a strategy for regaining majority control of the House. The goal of framing public opinion against the Republican majority in order to win control of the House in 1996 contained more relevance and importance to House Democratic leaders and members than working with the new majority to forge legislative compromises. In both the 103rd and 104th Congresses, minority parties abandoned the acquiescence of previous minority parties in the House, especially the governing attitude of Republican Minority Leader Bob Michel (R-IL) in the 1980-1993 period.

The government shutdowns emboldened House Democrats to be more bold and aggressive in their bid to capture the House in 1996, especially in terms of agenda control.²⁵

²⁴ Dan Balz, “Minimum Wage Raises Fortunes of Democrats,” Washington Post, 19 April 1996, p. A 6.

²⁵ Helen Dewar, “After GOP Missteps, Democrats Switch From Defense to Offense,” Washington Post, 31 January 1996, p. A 6.

In addition to charting their own independent policy path, House Democratic leaders also engaged in negative campaigning against Republican House leaders, especially the gaffe-prone Speaker Gingrich. Minority Leader Gephardt attacked the Republican majority in the same manner that Gingrich had attacked House Democrats in the previous decade, calling Newt Gingrich a “trickle down terrorist” and predicting that the Republican House majority was a one-term fluke because “every time they’ve taken control of the Congress, they’ve rolled out their real priorities, more tax breaks for the rich.”²⁶ These attacks by the Republican minority in the 103rd Congress and the Democratic minority in the 104th Congress successfully probed the soft underbellies of the prevailing House majority parties, and forced the marginal members of the majority party in tough re-election bids to distance themselves from their leadership. In addition to these negative attacks, House Democratic leaders also focused on constructing their own positive agenda, articulating their own priorities, and appealing to both liberal base voters and the important swing voters who would determine majority status in the House. The Families First agenda provided important clues regarding how Democrats would govern differently from the Republican majority, and Democratic House leaders used Families First to present a positive, centrist face on Democratic efforts to retake majority status. Minority Leader Gephardt, speaking about the role played by Families First, stated “our [House Democrats] agenda will come from America’s houses, not from the White House and not from anywhere else.”²⁷

²⁶ Michael Wines, “Gephardt Calls for Tax Cut For Incomes Below \$75,000,” New York Times, 14 December 1994, p. A 20.

²⁷ Ibid.

In the 103rd Congress, the Republican governing strategy evolved into opposing and even obstructing as much of the Democratic agenda as possible. Similarly, House Democratic governing strategy in the 104th Congress revolved around opposition to the Republican agenda on largely class warfare appeals. But unlike the Republican minority of 1994, the Democratic minority of 1996 could not prevent Republicans from gaining legislative accomplishments as part of a grander scheme to retake the House. Unfortunately for House Democrats, the intense re-election efforts of President Clinton in the 104th Congress prevented a replay of the legislative train-wreck at the end of the 103rd Congress. In the 104th Congress, House Democrats rallied around a resurgent President Clinton to ward off the threat of Republican budget cuts during the government shutdowns of 1995. Despite this newfound affection, however, President Clinton distanced himself from his more liberal House Democratic colleagues in order to present a "New Democrat" image to the country to boost his re-election campaign.²⁸ This strategy, called triangulation, involved finding a third way between the liberalism and class warfare politics of House Democrats and the traditional conservatism of House Republicans. Clinton political strategist Dick Morris, a chief architect of triangulation, described this new governing and electoral strategy in the following manner:

I saw triangulation as a way to change, not abandon, the Democratic party...a president can step out ahead of his party and articulate a new position. The triangle he forms between the orthodox views of the two parties at each end of the base and his views at the apex is

²⁸ Rachel Van Dongen, "This Time, Hill Hopefuls Say They Will Run With, Not From, Clinton," Roll Call, 26 August 1996, p. 3; Michael K. Frisby and Jackie Calmes, "Some Liberals Consider Clinton as Last Hope For Saving Public Programs from GOP Cuts," Wall Street Journal, 29 November 1995, p. A 16; James Carney, "Correcting His Posture," Time, 20 November 1995, p. 77.

temporary. Either he will be repudiated by the voters, and slink back into the orthodox positions, or he will attract support and, eventually, bring his party with him.²⁹

Triangulation pushed President Clinton in a centrist direction throughout the 104th Congress, pushing him to embrace Republican objectives of balancing the budget and reforming welfare, albeit softening their impact, in order to broaden his base of support in 1996. In 1972, a re-election minded President Nixon ran an independent campaign for the presidency while tacking left on domestic policy in the pursuit of the median voter. President Clinton emulated Nixon's 1972 strategy in the 1996 election, tacking to the right on public policy issues to insure that the dangers confronting all Democrats in 1994 would evaporate from him in his own re-election bid 1996. But this triangulation strategy inhibited the House Democratic strategy of recapturing the House based on opposition to the Republican majority.³⁰

The competitive politics of the 1996 presidential and House elections compelled President Clinton to triangulate a third way between House Democrats and Republicans. In the 104th Congress, Clinton articulated themes of fiscal discipline and a social values agenda to distinguish himself from traditional liberal Democrats in the House.³¹ As part of this

²⁹ Dick Morris, Behind the Oval Office (New York: Random House, 1998), pp. 80-81.

³⁰ Mark Shields, "The Lone Ranger Presidency," Washington Post, 11 November 1997, p. A 19; William F. Connelly, Jr., and John J. Pitney, Jr., "'Odd Man Out' Dems Recall Frustrated GOP Minority Under Reagan," Roll Call, 12 May 1997, p. 5.

³¹ Juan Williams, "'Morning in America' - the Sequel," Washington Post National Weekly Edition, pp. 20-26 November 1996, p. 23; Jackie Koszczuk, "Clinton Embraces GOP Rhetoric," Congressional Quarterly, 27 January 1996, p. 211; David S. Broder, "Off and Running," Washington Post National Weekly Edition, 29 January 1996, p. 11; Gerald F. Sieb, "In Social Wars, Clinton Prods GOP Soft Spot," Wall Street Journal, 3 April 1996, p. A 22; Dan Balz, "Taking Advantage of the Advantage," Washington Post

triangulation strategy, President Clinton made a balanced budget pledge in 1995, declared an end to big government in his 1996 state of the union, and signed the Republican welfare reform bill into law in the summer of 1996.³² Additionally, Clinton advocated V-chips to allow parents to block television violence, supported school uniforms, brokered a new TV ratings system, and urged a middle ground to be found on the school prayer issue. The demands of triangulation also extended to the race for the House as President Clinton never made a public case for why the public should elect a Democratic House of Representatives. In January of 1996, President Clinton stated he would not make recapturing a Democratic Congress a primary goal of his re-election campaign, stating "The American people don't think it's the president's business to tell them what ought to happen in the congressional elections."³³ In response to Clinton's triangulation, Minority Leader Gephardt (D-MO) stated "We've got to run campaigns that are run for our needs and he's got to run a campaign for his needs, and we understand that."³⁴

The bipartisan deals of 1996 culminating in welfare reform represented the apogee of the triangulation, which hurt House Democrats as they struggled to retake the House of

National Weekly Edition, 6-12 May 1996, p. 12.

³² Charles E. Cook, "Triangle Strategy: President Jettisons Hill Democrats," Roll Call, 19 June 1995, p. 6; Michael K. Frisby and Hilary Stout, "As Campaign Nears, Clinton Is Adopting More Centrist Stance," Wall Street Journal, 3 November 1995, p. A 1; Dick Morris, Behind the Oval Office, pp. 79-88; Thomas B. Edsall, "Redefining or Abandoning?," Washington Post National Weekly Edition, 26 June 1995, p. 21.

³³ Ann Devroy and John F. Harris, "Clinton Says Record Shows 'Remarkable Consistency'," Washington Post, 31 January 1996, p. A 1.

³⁴ Doyle McManus, "Democrats Debate How to Take Hill," Los Angeles Times, 31 August 1996.

Representatives on nationalized anti-Republican themes. The deals of the summer of 1996 aided the incumbent powers-that-be, President Clinton and the Republican Congress, at the expense of the Democratic minority struggling to make the case for why the public should elect a Democratic majority. In 1990, a similar situation inhibited congressional Republican campaigns in the 1990 midterm elections as President Bush broke his 1988 “no-new-taxes” campaign pledge in order to govern with the Democratic majority with the 1990 budget deal. Unified government in 1994 presented House Republicans with the perfect opportunity to unleash their obstruction strategy on the path to a House majority in the 1994 campaign. But triangulation in 1996 undermined House Democratic efforts to insure an empty-handed Republican Congress confronted voters in the fall campaigns. House Republicans even used triangulation to their benefit in arguing for another term as the House majority in 1996, arguing that only a Republican Congress could deliver on Clinton’s election promises to both balance the budget and provide a middle-class tax cut.³⁵

PARTY CULTURE

Governing as a Team, Running as a Team: House Republicans in the 104th Congress

In the 103rd Congress, House Republican leaders under the tutelage of Newt Gingrich constructed new tenets of House Republican party culture of thinking and working as a team to achieve majority status in the nationalized campaign of 1994. In the 104th Congress, House Republican leaders further molded the party culture of House Republicans to their vision of a unified Republican legislative team that focused on passing domestic reforms to change the course of American government and electing a Republican House of

³⁵ Elizabeth Drew, Whatever It Takes (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), pp. 215-27.

Representatives. To achieve each of these goals, Republican leaders continued to nurture a distinct House Republican party culture committed to the goals of party-building and electing a Republican majority. This change in culture within Republican ranks in the House, driven primarily by the competitive pressures of the fight for majority control in the 1990s, represents a significant change in thinking by a congressional party in terms of its goals, missions, and internal governing structure.

In the 104th Congress, the new Republican majority imparted some of these new cultural imperatives on the House institutionally through a series of congressional reforms enacted on the first day of the Congress. These reforms centralized power in the speaker's office, making congressional leaders stronger, while diminishing the power of the committees and committee chairs. The Republican reform package enacted on the first day of the 104th Congress slashed committee staff by a third, enacted a six-year term limit on all committee chairs, clipped many of the powers enjoyed by committee chairs in the Democratic House, and centralized power in the Speaker's office through the elimination of proxy voting and other prerogatives enjoyed by Democratic committee chairmen. In addition, Speaker Gingrich formed a Speaker's Advisory Group (SAG) consisting of the same House Republican leaders involved in planning the 1994 takeover: Gingrich, Armey, DeLay, Boehner, Paxon, and Walker. These changes altered the power structure of the House. They also sent powerful signals that the demands of protecting the new Republican majority animated House Republican culture. Instead of Republican members solely pursuing their independent political objectives and careers, they would in addition be confronted with the needs of re-electing their majority in 1996 and beyond. Throughout

1995 and 1996, the Republicans first governed as a team and then campaigned as a team to re-elect a Republican House majority. This change in thinking from focusing exclusively on individual careers and individual advancement by members, to additionally thinking collectively as a team to govern and campaign as a majority party, represents a significant difference from the party cultures of the two parties in the previous era of non-competition.

In addition to reforming the way the House and the committees operate, Republican leaders also enlisted the resources of the various committees, especially choice committee assignments, in their battle to preserve and enlarge their majority. On the first day of the 104th Congress, House Republicans kept their Contract With America promise to reshape the committee system in the House. During the 1994 campaign, House Republicans nationwide had campaigned against long-serving Democratic committee barons like John Dingell (D-MI) of the Energy and Commerce Committee and Dan Rostenkowski (D-IL) of the Ways and Means Committee, arguing that these committee chairs had created personal empires and fiefdoms at the expense of collective needs and accountability. After the 1994 elections, Speaker-elect Gingrich skipped over several senior Republicans to promote three junior committee members as committee chairmen.³⁶

House Republicans placed further curbs on the powers of committee chairs. They abolished three standing committees and several sub-committees, renamed several others to

³⁶ Speaker Gingrich appointed Representative Robert Livingston (R-LA) as Chairman of the Appropriations Committee over four more senior Republicans on the Appropriations Committee; Representative Thomas Bliley (R-VA) was appointed chairman of the Energy and Commerce Committee over “Old Bull” Carlos Moorhead (R-CA), considered to be too conciliatory to become chairman; Carlos Moorhead was once again denied a committee chairmanship when Gingrich appointed Representative Henry Hyde chairman of the Judiciary Committee despite Moorhead’s more senior status on the committee.

bring them in line with Republican priorities, eliminated proxy voting (which allowed a chairman to cast an absent committee member's vote in committee), placed a three term limit on all committee chairs, and ended the exemption of Congress from federal labor and anti-discrimination laws. Each of these actions significantly limited the power of committee chairmen that previous Democratic chairs enjoyed.³⁷ Additionally, Republican freshmen received nine of the ten open seats on the Commerce Committee, seven of the 11 open seats on Appropriations Committee, and three of the 10 open seats on the Ways and Means Committees. Doling out these choice committee assignments to Republican freshmen facing tough re-election races in 1996 further illustrated the cultural shift within Republican ranks from individual career advancement to protecting the party's majority status collectively. Speaker Gingrich also demanded loyalty letters from each of the 13 Appropriations subcommittee chairmen to the Republican budget-balancing agenda.

The committee reforms enacted by House Republicans sent a powerful signal that the previous era of the large and decentralized Democratic committee system had come to an end. In an effort to further bypass committee power, House Republican leaders increasingly utilized leadership task forces to draft and enact legislation that was deemed essential to re-electing the Republican House majority in 1996 and beyond, like the Republican Medicare reform plan. Speaker Gingrich appointed 15 task forces in 1995 to address different policy areas, which further centralized power in the Speaker's office.³⁸ From the centralization of

³⁷ "New Congress Oks Internal Changes," CQ Almanac 1995, pp. 23-28.

³⁸ Gabriel Kahn, "Gingrich Plan: End to Panels?," Roll Call, 9 October 1995, p. 22; Newt Gingrich, "Leadership Task Forces: The 'Third Wave' Way To Consider Legislation," Roll Call, 16 November 1995, p. 5.

power in the Republican leadership faction of Gingrich to congressional reform, House Republicans stamped their new majority-forming party culture on the House itself. Leadership task forces, in conjunction with the Contract With America, insured that the agenda of the new Republican House majority would be set by Speaker Gingrich and his leadership team. On Medicare reform policy in 1995, Speaker Gingrich personally took charge and overruled committee chairmen on several occasions to insure that the new Republican majority delivered on its balanced budget and tax cut promises.³⁹ To pass legislation affecting the party's fortunes in 1996, like the balanced budget and Medicare reform proposals, all House Republicans were expected to be good soldiers and vote to pass and implement the new majority's legislative program. House Republicans, even the committee chairs, applauded this centralized arrangement and its mission in the 104th Congress. Ways and Means Chairman Bill Archer (R-TX), for instance, stated "In the end, you have to be part of the process. You don't run out there like the Lone Ranger and do whatever you want to do."⁴⁰

The six-year term limit on committee chairmen, combined with the term limits pledges taken by individual Republican representatives in the 1992 and 1994 campaigns, provide important examples of how cultural changes in Republican thinking in the House affected the race for majority control in the 1990s. As the Republican minority fought for majority status in 1994, the anti-incumbent arguments of the term limits movement played

³⁹ Jackie Koszczuk, "Gingrich Puts More Power Into Speaker's Hands," Congressional Quarterly, 7 October 1995, pp. 3049-53.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 3049.

a powerful role in Republican attack campaigns. Fully 39 of the 73 House Republicans elected in 1994 pledged themselves to serving only a fixed number of terms.⁴¹ In their campaign for majority control, House Republicans argued for the necessity of term limits to prevent the abuses emanating from the “institutional corruption” of the Democratic majority, like the House Bank Scandal, the scandal surrounding Ways and Means Chairman Dan Rostenkowski (D-IL). In an interview, a House Republican described the importance of term limits in House Republican party culture in the 103rd and 104th Congresses:

40 years of uninterrupted rule made the Democrats arrogant. They thought they were ruling by divine right. The 1994 election was a rude reminder that any majority status is temporary. I like to argue that beyond term limits for members, we ought to have term limits for parties. That would prevent the arrogance of power that we saw after 40 years of one-party rule. I think 40 years is way too long. 20 years is way too long. After a while, you lose focus that majority status is dependent on the people’s wishes.

The six-year term limits on all committee chairs, for instance, required the new Republican committee chairmen of 1995 to relinquish their posts in 2000 at the end of the 106th Congress. The self-term limit pledges of Republican House candidates helped the Republicans appeal to conservative base voters animated by term limits in order to capture the House in 1994. But these same pledges hurt the ability of the Republicans to hold a House majority in 2000 and beyond as those term limit pledges became due. The potential retirements of the term-limited committee chairmen in 2000, many of whom expressed little desire to stay in the House after losing a committee chairmanship, combined with the open seat vacancies created by the self-term limited Republican House members elected in 1992 and 1994, provided the Republican majority with its own “Y2K” problem in the 2000

⁴¹ Benjamin Sheffner, “Self-Imposed Term Limits Affect Nearly Half of House Freshmen,” Roll Call, 15 June 1995.

election. Several Republicans who promised to serve only three or four terms in the 1992 and 1994 elections, like “giant killer” George Nethercutt (R-WA), began to rethink their pledges as the 2000 election approached when the Republicans would hold only a slim five-seat majority in the 106th Congress (1999-2000).⁴² The term limits and congressional reform elements of Republican party culture served as powerful tools for Republicans to appeal to their base voters and the Perot voters in 1992 and 1994. But the culture of term limits within the Republican Conference in the 1990s would impede Republican efforts to hold the House in 2000 as members like Tom Coburn (R-OK) and Jack Metcalf (R-WA) stood by their self-term limit promises to vacate their Democratic-leaning seats in 2000.

In addition to clipping the power of the committees, House Republican leaders further bended the committee system to the goal of enlarging and protecting their majority in the 104th Congress. In addition to the bypassing of senior members in the appointment of the Appropriations Committee, Republican leaders also insured that every committee resource was utilized to help enlarge and save the Republican House majority in the 104th Congress. In 1995, House Republican leaders used choice committee assignments to help lure party-switching conservative House Democratic incumbents into the Republican majority. In 1995, five conservative House Democrats switched to the GOP, the largest number of party-switchers since 1934. Each of these Democrats switched to the GOP out of frustration with the liberalism and class warfare of the leadership and membership of the Democratic Caucus, including Nathan Deal (GA), Greg Laughlin (TX), Billy Tauzin (LA), Mike Parker (MS),

⁴² Edward Walsh, “Coming to Terms With Term Limits,” Washington Post National Weekly Edition, 22 March 1999, p. 11.

and Jimmy Hayes (LA).⁴³

Republican leaders enlisted their power to appoint members to prime committee slots in an effort to lure these party switching Democrats to Republican ranks, illustrating the degree to which the war for House control did not formally end with the 1994 election. To sweeten the pot for potential Democratic party switchers, the House Republican leadership launched a campaign to offer prime committee slots on Ways and Means, Appropriations, and Commerce to the first three switchers.⁴⁴ Each of the five House Democrats who switched to the GOP in 1995 were awarded with better committee assignments: Nathan Deal received a Commerce Committee appointment, Greg Laughlin received a Ways and Means assignment, Mike Parker received a coveted slot on the Appropriations Committee, and Commerce Committee member Billy Tauzin became the second-ranking Republican on the Commerce Committee and received the chairmanship of the Telecommunications, Trade, and Consumer Protection subcommittee. House Republicans extended this hospitality to the party-switchers in their first re-election campaigns as Republicans. House Republican leaders, for instance, intervened heavily to help party-switcher Greg Laughlin (R-TX) in his unsuccessful primary bid against Republican challenger and former Libertarian presidential

⁴³ Nathan Deal switched on 10 April 1995; Greg Laughlin switched on 26 June 1995; Billy Tauzin switched on 6 August 1995; Mike Parker switched on 10 November 1995; and Jimmy Hayes on 1 December 1995. See: "Majority Party Continues to Grow," CQ Almanac 1995, p. I-29; Juliana Gruenwald, "Deal's Switch to GOP Exposes Erosion in Once Solid South," Congressional Quarterly, 15 April 1995, p. 1084; "Tauzin Makes It Official: He's Now a Republican," Congressional Quarterly, 12 August 1995, p. 2458; Jeffrey H. Birnbaum, "Honey, I Shrunk the Party," Time, 3 July 1995, p. 25;.

⁴⁴ Gabriel Kahn, "A Switcher's Market Now," Roll Call, 29 June 1995, p. 1; Gabriel Kahn, "Laughlin to Switch Parties Today," 26 June 1995, p. 1; "Laughlin's Switch and Ensuing Reward," Congressional Quarterly, 1 July 1995, p. 1894

candidate Ron Paul.⁴⁵ By using these prime committee slots as bait to lure Democrats to the Republican fold, other Republicans had to either wait in line for these positions or give them up for the good of the party.

Loyalty to the new Republican majority by all House Republicans, and helping the party extend its rule in the House beyond the 1996 election, became a hallmark of Republican party culture in the 104th Congress, especially with the 73 member freshman class. Many of the Republican freshmen elected in 1994 earned staunchly conservative reputations during the 104th Congress and exhibited unwavering loyalty to the cause of balancing the budget and reforming the federal government.⁴⁶ The new Republican House majority and the large class of Republican freshmen were each a product of the confrontational politics of the 103rd Congress and the 1994 nationalized campaign. Thirty-four of the new freshmen had defeated Democratic incumbents, and the influx of 73 conservative House members had radically moved the legislative agenda away from expanding the size of the federal government and toward cutting it back in the 104th Congress. Speaker Gingrich commented on the cultural changes brought by this change of events, and thinking, especially by the influx of the new freshmen into Republican ranks in the House:

They don't regard being defeated as the end of their life, just as a change in jobs. Their skepticism, their toughness, their idealism, their willingness to question and to change are

⁴⁵ Tim Curran, "Speaker's Punishment of Renegade Republicans Stirs Up a New Storm," Roll Call, 15 January 1996, p. 1.

⁴⁶ Philip D. Duncan, "Are GOP Hard-liners Endangered Species?," Congressional Quarterly, 3 August 1996, p. 2234; Jeffrey Goldberg, "Adventures of a Republican Revolutionary," New York Times Magazine, 3 November 1996, p. 42.

useful traits, and a few years of that would be good for the House to go through. I am trying to acculturate the House to the freshmen more than acculturate the freshmen to the House.⁴⁷

Further, Speaker Gingrich had called the new Republican members of the House “not so much politicians as dedicated reformers full of moral certainty,” and further described House Republicans in the following manner:

We are a movement, a group engaged in an effort do nothing less than change the country’s habits of governance so that they more truly reflect the manners and morals of the vast majority of the American people.⁴⁸

This loyalty to the Republican cause in the House, a multi-Congress project to remake the federal government in the image of House Republicans, had direct ramifications on the politics and policy of the House in the 1990s. House Republicans ran as a team in their 1994 nationalized campaign, governed as a Republican legislative party in the 104th Congress, and ran as a team for re-election in 1996 against the nationalized Democratic campaign of Medicare and anti-Gingrich themes.⁴⁹ Through each of these efforts, House Republicans displayed tenacity to team efforts to re-elect their majority and internal cohesion as they defended themselves against Democratic attacks. Despite the fiasco of the failed shutdown strategies, the unpopularity of the Contract With America and Republican leaders in 1996, and the collapse of the Republican balanced-budget plan, Speaker Gingrich still retained the loyalty of the Republican freshmen although House Republicans running in swing seats

⁴⁷ Adam Clymer, “Firebrand Who Got Singed Says Being Speaker Suffices,” New York Times, 22 January 1996, p. A 1.

⁴⁸ Newt Gingrich, Lessons Learned the Hard Way (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998), pp. 61, 75.

⁴⁹ Rich Lowry, “Who’s Shrinking Whom?,” National Review, 25 December 1995, pp. 34-38.

suffered the effect of Gingrich's unpopularity.

Former Representative Bill Gradison (R-OH) explained this loyalty to Gingrich by the 1994 freshmen by stating "There is a personal loyalty to him that is without precedent in recent history. I don't think anyone ever felt they owed their seat to Jim Wright, Tom Foley, or Tip O'Neill."⁵⁰ Democratic Minority Leader Gephardt (D-MO) commented on this loyalty by stating "When you've been in the desert for 40 years, your instinct is to help Moses."⁵¹ In an interview, a senior House Republican described why most House Republicans remained united by Gingrich despite his ethics problems and national unpopularity in the 104th Congress:

The Bonior strategy of going after Gingrich is an old tactic of the left: lie. The left cannot get what it wants at the ballot box. So it resorts to personal ad hominem attacks against Republicans. Look what happened to Hutchison when she won her Senate seat in 1993. She was indicted and had to spend \$800,000 to defend herself. Coverdell was sued in 1992 after his victory in Georgia and had to spend \$180,000 to defend himself. Chris Cox was sued and had to spend thousands to defend himself against a frivolous lawsuit. Bonior filed 75 ethics complaints against Gingrich, and 74 were thrown out. He abused the ethics process to try to get what he can't get at the ballot box: a Democratic majority. There is a tension between what happens in the home towns and what happens in D.C. The Left, comprised of the academic and governing classes, comes to Washington, D.C. to get protection for policies it could never get enacted in the small towns and which Middle America rebels against whenever enacted. To silence conservative opposition, the left strikes back with everything it has. Milton Friedman stated that when he spoke out against the Great Society, he was criticizing the results of the policy, not the judgment of those who created it. But anyone who criticizes the vision of the left, like we did with our 1994 campaign and the way we governed in 1995, is attacked in an ugly, personal manner.

⁵⁰ Jackie Koszczuk, "Gingrich Puts More Power Into Speaker's Hands," Congressional Quarterly, 7 October 1995, p. 3053.

⁵¹ Jason DeParle, "Newt's Fiercest Fight," New York Times Magazine, 28 January 1996, Section 6, p. 39.

Another House Republican articulated this theme in an interview in regards to Republican party culture and the Gingrich ethics case:

Every time we cut back the welfare state, the lifestyle and livelihood of the Left is threatened and placed in jeopardy. The trial lawyers, labor unions, the black civil rights leadership (but not blacks, most of whom are conservative), gay groups, and public bureaucracy employees are all threatened by the dismantling of the welfare state. They respond by personal attacks against Republicans.

In 1989, House Democrats abandoned Speaker Jim Wright (D-TX) when he became embroiled in ethics problems. In 1996, House Republicans remained united behind Speaker Gingrich despite his ethics problems, in order to maintain surface unity and hold the House in the fall elections. To many House Republicans, the cause of balancing the budget, reforming the federal government, and cutting taxes became a messianic quest. This quest would have been undermined by the loss of Speaker Gingrich, jeopardizing the entire Republican agenda and the long-term project of House Republicans to control the House. In 1998 and 1999, House Democrats remained united behind President Clinton despite the Monica Lewinsky scandal and impeachment for similar majority-forming reasons. In each instance, the fight for majority control, and the power majority status in the House brings, became paramount in the political calculations of members.

The distinct Republican party culture created by Gingrich in the 1994 campaign and the 104th Congress accounts for much of the difference between the Republican majority of the 104th Congress in the Gingrich ethics case and the Democratic majority of the 101st Congress in the Wright ethics case. It also accounts for the differences between the Democratic majorities in the non-competitive and the attitudes and cultures of the two parties since 1994. The Republican takeover of the House after 40 years of Democratic rule

provided a unique opportunity for Gingrich to remake the culture of the House of Representatives in his own image, breaking down the old committee fiefdoms and replacing them with a disciplined team of Republican legislators dedicated to pursuing leadership goals of bringing sweeping changes in the direction of American government, as illustrated by the welfare reform law.⁵²

The Republican Medicare education effort in the 104th Congress illustrates the degree to which House Republican party culture had become attuned toward the need of protecting the Republican majority in a competitive electoral era, and the degree to which a distinct House Republican party culture had emerged as a result of the events of the 103rd and 104th Congresses. In the spring of 1995, the Federal Hospital Insurance Trust Fund issued its annual report on Medicare predicting the program would be bankrupt by 2001 unless costs were lowered or revenues increased. The Republican Medicare reform plan, which proposed \$270 billion in Medicare savings over seven years, became ground zero in the war for House control in 1996. As House Democrats seized the Medicare issue and used it as a political weapon to regain control of the House, House Republican leaders and members adopted the risky political strategy of taking their case for Medicare cuts directly to the voters.⁵³ House Republicans, instead of abandoning the Medicare effort after the public relations disaster of the government shutdowns, instead banded together as a team to argue on a nationwide basis

⁵² David Rogers, "GOP's Rare Year Owes Much to How Gingrich Disciplined the House," Wall Street Journal, 18 December 1995, p. A 1.

⁵³ David Wessel, "In Medicare Battle, Republicans Display Skill At Making Words Mean Just What They Choose," Wall Street Journal, 22 September 1995, p. A 14; Haley Barbour, "Why Republicans Ultimately Will Win the Medicare Issue," Roll Call, 3 June 1996, p. 5.

for the Republican balanced-budget and Medicare plans.⁵⁴ A RNCC staffer involved in the Republican Medicare education effort described the intense efforts conducted by Republicans to argue their position that they were “slowing the growth of the program” instead of “cutting Medicare” in order to save the Republican House majority:

The Democratic Medicare tactics of 1996, combined with the Clinton and labor ads, was open trench warfare. But Republicans won the debate on Medicare. In May of 1995, the Medicare trustee’s report came out showing the system was going broke and Republicans came out with a budget resolution to cut the rate of growth in the program. Through the 104th Congress, there was a daily effort by Republican communications staff at all levels. We contacted reporters doing Medicare stories to educate them on the facts. This was an important thing to do. RNC staffers went through line-by-line and corrected inaccuracies in reporting by journalists. We won that debate - we won the terminology war.

Despite this distinct team-mentality that permeated House Republican party culture, the cumulative weight of the negative fallout from the Gingrich speakership weighed heavily on House Republicans, especially for Republicans running in swing seats. The lack of a vision and agenda after the Contract With America troubled many House Republican conservatives, while the conservatism of the Republican agenda and its primarily southern Republican leadership team in the House created electoral worries for marginal Republican members. The effective Democratic effort to paint the entire Republican agenda, and leadership, as too extreme for American politics became an albatross to House Republicans seeking re-election in the Northeast and in swing seats. Representative Peter King (R-NY), representing a swing seat in New York, criticized the GOP leadership’s “southern, anti-union

⁵⁴ Adam Clymer, “Both Political Parties Wage Medicare Debate on the Air,” New York Times, 16 August 1995, p. A 13; Christopher Georges, “GOP Adopts Risky Strategy on Medicare, Taking Case for Cuts Openly to Voters to Blunt Attack Ads,” Wall Street Journal, 23 April 1996, p. A 20; Jonathan Weisman, “Republicans Battle Unions on Hill and on Airwaves,” Congressional Quarterly, 10 August 1996, p. 2250-52.

attitude that appeals to the mentality of hillbillies at revival meetings.”⁵⁵ King further openly opposed Gingrich’s re-election as Speaker due the negative effect it would have on the Republican majority in the short and long term, stating: “There’s no doubt that at least half the Republican members of the House believe Newt is a problem. Why do we want to reelect the guy we spent the last six months running away from?”⁵⁶ After the 1996 elections and in preparation for the 105th Congress, Representatives Chris Shays (R-CT) and Steve Largent (R-OK) joined Peter King in publicly urging Speaker Gingrich to step down for the good of the party before the 105th Congress convened. Other House Republicans loyal to Speaker Gingrich defended the role he played in the Republican victories of 1994 and 1996.

One House Republican stated in an interview:

Gingrich is the best Speaker the Republicans could have. He is intelligent, an excellent fundraiser, appeals to the base, and sets direction for the policy. He is focused, and is able to drive policy. The balanced budget would not have happened without a Republican Congress and Gingrich as Speaker driving the issue. Getting people off the dole with welfare reform would not have occurred without Gingrich pushing the issue. In comparison, Tom Foley was a weak speaker who couldn’t drive policy and who was a captive of the committee chairman. Gingrich really drives policy in the Republican House.

Throughout the 104th Congress, House Republican party culture articulated the need to work and act as a team in order to re-elect the Republican majority in 1996 and beyond. In 1996, 101 Republican incumbents members contributed \$6 million for generic Republican advertising to counter the \$35 million in labor union ads attacking marginal Republican members. In addition, House Republicans banded together as a cohesive team to defend the

⁵⁵ Richard E. Cohen, “Making the Rounds,” National Journal, 6 July 1996, p. 1475.

⁵⁶ Jim Dwyer, “GOP Views Speaker as a Newtron Bomb,” New York Daily News, 12 November 1996, p. 7.

Medicare plan of 1995 and fight the nationalized Democratic campaign against Republican budget policies. In contrast, the Democratic majority of the 103rd Congress and the 1994 campaign splintered as House Democrats ran away from the legislative initiatives of the Democratic majority and ran their own localized election campaigns. This difference between the cohesiveness of House Republicans as a majority in the 104th Congress and the splintered nature of House Democrats as a majority in the 103rd Congress drove the dynamics of the two majorities as they faced the competitive politics and nationalized campaigns of the 1994 and 1996 elections.

Toward Teamwork: Democratic Party Culture in the 104th Congress

Before Democrats lost their majority in 1994, House Democratic culture remained a creature of extended one-party rule, decentralization, and individualism. Members focused on their own committee work and candidate-centered re-election campaigns while Democratic leaders managed a diverse Democratic Caucus through coalition management. As a newly minted minority party in the 104th Congress, House Democrats were forced to examine the causes of their 1994 defeat. In order to win back the majority in 1996, House Democratic leaders increasingly exhorted House Democrats to think and act as a cohesive legislative and political team in order to win back majority control in 1996. Through these efforts, House Democratic leaders stressed the same themes of cultural change in order to retake the majority that animated House Republican culture in the 103rd and 104th Congresses.

Unlike the Republican minority of the 103rd Congress or the Republican majority of the 104th Congress, House Democrats confronted different challenges as they examined many

of the tenets of House Democratic culture in preparation for building a new Democratic majority. Before the change in party control in 1994, a relatively stable party culture characterized the House Democratic Caucus based on the tenets of a decentralized House and a large, independent committee system. Deprived of majority status, House Democrats watched Republicans centralize power in the speaker's office and clip the power of the committees. Republican party culture in the early 1990s, especially in the 103rd Congress, had increasingly become more attached to party, more ideological, less wedded to the committee system, and more willing to gloss over internal party divisions on ideology and submit to a more hierarchical leadership structure under the direction of Newt Gingrich. House Democratic culture, on the other hand, remained pluralistic, organized by identity groups (especially on race), and more heterogeneous ideologically and politically. These fundamental principles of Democratic party culture did not easily lend themselves to the new centralizing impulses of Republican party culture in the 1990s. As a result, House Democratic leaders introduced concepts of teamwork and electoral cooperation in House Democratic thinking to lay the groundwork for a new Democratic majority in 1996. Through these efforts, House Democratic leaders slowly nudged the members of their caucus toward the goals of thinking and acting as a unified minority to fight for majority status in 1996, although not quite to the extent of House Republicans in the 103rd and 104th Congresses.

To recapture the majority, House Democratic culture became infected with many of the same cultural attributes of the majority-seeking party culture instigated by Newt Gingrich in Republican ranks. House Democratic leaders Richard Gephardt (D-MO) and Martin Frost (D-TX) worked closely to instill greater internal unity on election tactics and strategies,

encourage House Democrats to put a centrist face on the party to improve the party's fortunes and brand name in the pivotal swing districts, and re-think concepts like committee seniority. House Democratic culture did not fully embrace the party-led culture of House Republicans hostile to committee power. But the demands of two-party competition in the 104th Congress did instill new changes in House Democratic culture more suited to the needs of obtaining a House majority through greater party efforts and nationalized campaigns, much like House Republicans in the 103rd-105th Congresses.

The most important changes regarded a change in outlook by House Democratic leaders regarding their role to regain the majority. Like House Republicans in the 103rd Congress, House Democratic leaders laid clear partisan markers between the parties. Much like the Republican minority of the 103rd Congress, Democratic leaders in the House pursued a more aggressive and partisan stance for ideological and political combat for majority control. This new strategy of maximizing party differences required the minimization of internal Democratic feuding on policy, strategy, and tactics. Finding surface unity within House Democratic ranks against the most draconian elements of the Republican agenda was easy. But on more fundamental issues involving party philosophy and ideology, especially on the size and scope of the federal government, finding unity among the Democratic minority was harder. This internal fissure for the direction of the soul and direction of the Democratic party, between the Clinton "New Democrats" and the traditionally liberal "Old Democrats" who dominated House Democratic ranks, would persist into the 105th Congress.

After the devastation of the 1994 election and the loss of majority control, House

Democrats exhibited a wide range of responses, ranging from confusion to anger.⁵⁷ Representative John Dingell (D-MI), for instance, lost not only the chairmanship of the Commerce Committee, but also had to let go of 90 staff aides.⁵⁸ Losing the majority forced several House Democrats to re-examine the events contributing to the loss of their majority in 1994. Representative Anthony Beilenson (D-CA), a 16-year veteran of the House, commented on the 1994 election by stating “It wasn’t healthy for one party to be in charge for so long. You get insensitive and you don’t feel the need to act.”⁵⁹ From the 1970s to the early 1990s, House Democrats had increasingly become more liberal, especially as conservative Southern Democrats were replaced by conservative Republicans or more liberal Southern Democrats.⁶⁰ After the 1994 elections, the Democratic Caucus that remained was far more liberal than even the Democratic Caucus of 1974, and the ranks of conservative House Democrats had dwindled considerably as southern Democrats were replaced by

⁵⁷ Richard E. Cohen, “A Minority Without Marching Orders,” National Journal, 21 January 1995, p. 187; Katharine Q. Seelye, “Congress’s Lame Ducks Sing Their Swan Songs,” New York Times, 30 November 1994; Richard E. Cohen, “Preparing For A Role They Don’t Want,” National Journal, 3 December 1994, p. 2856; Jennifer Babson, “Already Down, Democrats Face More Punches,” Congressional Quarterly, 14 January 1995, pp. 171-174.

⁵⁸ Carroll J. Doherty and Jeffrey L. Katz, “Bucking Up: Many Democrats Thrive After Shock of ‘94,” Congressional Quarterly, 4 July 1998, p. 1819.

⁵⁹ Richard E. Cohen, “Are the Democrats Ready to Reign?,” National Journal, 21 September 1996, p. 2025.

⁶⁰ David W. Rohde, Parties and Leaders in the Postreform House (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 45-58.

conservative Republicans.⁶¹

The remaining moderate Democrats in the House advocated that House Democrats reconnect with the middle class through welfare reform, the fiscal discipline of a balanced budget, and the New Democratic path of President Clinton. Liberal Democrats, on the other hand, believed that there was nothing wrong with the liberal message, just in the way it had been communicated in the 103rd Congress and the 1994 campaign.⁶² Representative Sam Gibbons (D-FL), for instance, gained attention in the 104th Congress through his populist defense of the sick, the poor, and the elderly, and attacked Republican budget priorities as a “pure railroad.”⁶³ Liberal Democrats eschewed the ideological soul-searching affecting moderate Democrats, and instead employed class warfare themes to tarnish the Republican majority and regain majority status.

House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt straddled both sides of this internal ideological feud within the Democratic Caucus, using class warfare rhetoric to assail the Republican majority while simultaneously trying to shed the “tax-and-spend” image that

⁶¹ “As the Political Parties Polarize, Conservatives Have All But Disappeared From Democratic Ranks,” National Review, 28 October 1996, p. 54.

⁶² Steven V. Roberts, “Liberals on the Defensive,” U.S. News & World Report, 9 January 1995, p. 24; Edward M. Kennedy, “Advice to Democrats: Why Sticking to Basic Principles is The Best Politics,” Campaigns & Elections, March 1995, p. 33; James M. Perry, “Mikulski Prescribes Meat and Potatoes as Diet To Nurse the Democratic Party Back to Health,” Wall Street Journal, 1 November 1995, p. A 20.

⁶³ Francis X. Clines, “Democrat Who’s Not Docile in Defeat,” New York Times, 26 October 1995, p. A 10.

haunted Democrats in the 103rd Congress and the 1994 election.⁶⁴ Gephardt spearheaded an effort to refurbish the image of House Democrats from the negative liberal “tax-and-spend” image of the 103rd Congress to the new image of Democrats in the 104th Congress as centrist pragmatists dedicated to commonsense solutions to governing.⁶⁵ In an effort to display centrist Democratic credentials in preparation for the 1996 elections, Gephardt stated “We have made our share of mistakes in the past...We’re asking for a second chance. We’re all ‘New Democrats’ now...we have to be. Times change.”⁶⁶ Gephardt pledged that if Democrats regained the majority, they would curb their liberal instincts in order to retain their majority, stating:

Losing the place after 40 years was a watershed event. People are not dumb. This was a big deal. There wasn’t a Republican incumbent who lost. This was a rejection of the Democratic party. And we spent a year and a half listening to people about what it is that went wrong and what we need to do to respond to their concerns.⁶⁷

In a speech before the National Press Club, Gephardt outlined the Families First agenda and the change that had taken place among House Democrats during their two-year hiatus from the majority:

Democrats must resist the temptation to swerve from one extreme to another -- to replace the GOP revolution with our own counter-revolution, born of the frustrations of our own

⁶⁴ Jackie Koszczuk, “Democrats’ Resurgence Fueled by Pragmatism,” Congressional Quarterly, 4 May 1996, p. 1205.

⁶⁵ Jerelyn Eddings and David Fischer, “Can the Democrats Recapture the Hill?,” U.S. News & World Report, 9 September 1996, p. 28.

⁶⁶ Dan Balz, “The New ‘New Democrats’,” Washington Post National Weekly Edition, 23-29 September 1996, p. 6.

⁶⁷ Robin Toner, “Middle of Road Beckons in Drive to Overtake G.O.P.,” New York Times, 20 September 1996, p. A 29.

political wilderness. That would only confirm suspicions that Congress is permanently out of touch with people's lives. And quite frankly, Democrats have been guilty of that in the past.⁶⁸

Through each of these efforts, Gephardt encouraged House Democrats to think about not only how they would regain majority status collectively, but also how they would govern collectively as a newly minted majority. A veteran House Democrat described the changes that developed within House Democratic ranks in the 104th Congress:

Our leadership has gotten a lot better. It will be a different Democratic House when we take back the majority. But 1994 had to happen for House Democratic liberals to get the message. They became cocky and arrogant when they ran the place. They un-apologetically pursued their agenda. But this killed us in the South and West. We saw what occurs when you foist a left-of-center agenda on a population that is moving the other way.

The Families First agenda played an important cultural role for House Democrats in 1996 in preparation for the 1996 fight for House control. Families First proposed no expansive federal programs, and promised a Democratic House of Representatives would balance the budget without raising taxes. House Democratic leaders used the Families First agenda to shed the Democratic "tax-and-spend" image and project a new image of Democratic moderation and pragmatism.⁶⁹ DCCC Chairman Martin Frost explained the public relations work Democrats needed to do in order to take back the House, stating "Democrats understand that if we are to have a chance at winning the House back, we need to be somewhere in the middle politically. And if we do win it back, we need to stay in the

⁶⁸ "Remarks by House Democratic Leader Richard A. Gephardt "The Families First Agenda: Toward a New Practical Politics," National Press Club, Washington, D.C., 28 June 1996.

⁶⁹ John E. Yang, "Hill Democrats Borrow a Few Themes for Center-Looking 'Families First' Legislation," Washington Post, 23 June 1996, p. A 19.

middle to keep it.”⁷⁰

Democrats did not commit themselves to enacting Families First proposals in a Democratically-controlled 105th Congress, illustrating the degree to which Democratic culture in the House remained wedded to its pragmatic, governing roots. Unlike the Contract With America, which was unveiled by hundreds of House Republicans on the Capitol Steps in 1994, Families First was unveiled by top Democratic leaders at a press conference in the Old Town Hall in Fairfax, Virginia.⁷¹ In these respects, Families First complied with many fundamental elements of Democratic party culture which remain unchanged in the 104th Congress despite the pressures of two-party competition. The more ideological and homogeneous Republican party culture engendered by House Republicans in the 103rd Congress and the 1994 campaign demanded a highly programmatic and ideological governing platform in the form of the Contract With America. The diverse and heterogeneous Democratic party culture eschewed strong programmatic promises on policy that could ham-string a future Democratic Congress. These more independent Democratic committee chairs relished strong committee power, and the prerogative of using this power to address legislative needs was more important than party platforms from the last election. Representative Charles Rangel (D-NY), for instance, referred to it as “the Family whatever-you-call-it program.”

Like Families First, the re-thinking of the liberalism that characterized and dominated

⁷⁰ Robin Toner, “Middle of Road Beckons in Drive to Overtake G.O.P.”

⁷¹ John E. Yang, “Democrats’ Agenda Aims for the Middle,” Washington Post, 24 June 1996, p. A 1.

House Democratic ranks became important as House Democratic culture changed in reaction to the demands of a competitive era. The moderation of the 42-member Democratic freshmen class of 1996 further altered Democratic party culture, moving it away from strict liberal orthodoxy and toward the effort by President Clinton to remake the Democratic party in a moderate image.⁷² Twenty-five of the 42 Democratic freshmen elected in 1996 were DLC-styled moderates or fiscal conservatives identifying with President Clinton's New Democratic philosophy.⁷³ Only one of the 42 Democratic freshmen of 1996 would be defeated in 1998, as opposed to 14 of the 73 GOP freshmen elected in 1994 and 17 of the 63 Democratic freshmen elected in 1992. Democratic Caucus Chairman Vic Fazio (D-CA) praised the centrist influence of the 1996 Democratic freshmen class, stating "They have invested in moving our Caucus to the center. They are showing us the way to the majority. We need more like them."⁷⁴ Many of these new Democratic freshmen sought to emulate Clinton's "New Democratic" triangulation strategy as a credible path to a new Democratic House majority. Freshmen Representative Jim Turner (D-TX), stated "It's difficult to convince a Member from Harlem to take a more moderate position. But that's what we need to do if the Democratic Party is going to be the majority in the House."⁷⁵

⁷² Graeme Browning, "Seasoned Freshmen," National Journal, 16 November 1996, pp. 2494-96.

⁷³ John B. Judis, "Middle March: the post-liberal Democrats," The New Republic, 21 October 1996, p. 18.

⁷⁴ Richard E. Cohen, "The Frosh Move Front and Center," National Journal, 2 August 1997, p. 1563.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

The liberalism of House Democratic ranking committee chairmen and leaders became a large issue in the 1996 campaign for House control, and contributed to Democratic leaders flirting with abandoning the concept of committee seniority if they regained a House majority. A Democratic takeover in 1996 would have elevated the party's most liberal members like William Clay (D-MO), John Dingell (D-MI), George Miller (D-CA), and Charlie Rangel (D-NY) to committee chairmen. Representative James Moran (D-VA), chairman of the moderate Mainstream Forum, commented on this development by stating:

The problem is a disproportionate number of our committees would be chaired by members of the liberal Democratic wing, and that wing is becoming the least representative of where America is at. If we came up with the traditional, predictable, liberal agenda, I think '98 would be such a tidal wave it would make '94 look like a ripple.⁷⁶

The more liberal Democratic committee chairs in a future Democratic House had spent their entire public careers seeking a larger and more activist government. Many questioned the need to balance the budget, and opposed the balanced budget pledges made both by President Clinton and by Gephardt in the Families First proposal.⁷⁷ Representative Charles Rangel (D-NY), poised to become chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee in a Democratic House of Representatives, questioned the Families First commitment to a balanced budget by stating "Voters may find a priority that is more important than eliminating the federal deficit in six years." A Democratic takeover of the House resulting from the influx of more centrist, New Democratic House candidates, for

⁷⁶ Dana Milbank, "Ideological Gulf: Two Michigan Races For U.S. House Show Democrat's Dilemma," Wall Street Journal, 27 August 1996, p. A 1.

⁷⁷ David S. Broder, "As Committee Chairmen, the Liberal Wing is Ready to Fly," Washington Post National Weekly Edition, 23-29 September 1996, p. 6.

instance, would have elevated Representative John Conyers (D-MI) to the chairmanship of the House Judiciary Committee, despite Conyers' firmly held liberal beliefs like the 32 hour work week, depopulation of U.S. prisons, and reparations for descendants of U.S. slaves.⁷⁸ Gephardt flirted with the possibility of deviating from the principle of seniority if the Democrats retook the majority in the House:

If we win, which is hard to do, you don't want to squander this opportunity. They've learned to work as a team. This is not just an aggregation of individuals who can do what's best for their district or their state. Being in a group means you give up some individuality, you give up some personal goals to help the group perform as a group.⁷⁹

In response to this effort to rethink Democratic allegiance to committee seniority, Representative John Conyers (D-MI) stated "Gephardt never has and never would tell me what to do in my committee."⁸⁰ In interviews with House Democrats, none believed House Democrats would follow the example of the Republican majorities of the 1990s in terms of abandoning the seniority system, skipping members for committee chairmanships, or enacting term limits for committee chairs. But House Democratic leaders did feel compelled to flirt with these concepts amidst Republican attacks that electing a moderate House Democrat in a swing seat would simultaneously elevate a liberal committee chairman to power in a key committee like Ways and Means. The flirtation with merit selection of committee chairmen by House Democratic leaders was thus not a serious proposal, but

⁷⁸ Dana Milbank, "Ideological Gulf: Two Michigan Races For U.S. House Show Democrats' Dilemma," Wall Street Journal, 27 August 1996, p. A 1.

⁷⁹ Dan Balz, "The New 'New Democrats'," Washington Post National Weekly Edition, 23-29 September 1996, p. 6.

⁸⁰ James Carney and Karen Tumulty, "Newt's Nightmare," Time, 30 September 1996, p. 24.

merely a response to the competitive pressures of the 1996 campaign. Although the culture of House Democrats would have prohibited a Democratic House majority from actually implementing these committee changes, it is significant that competitive pressures to obtain a House majority compelled House Democratic leaders to openly think and discuss this possibility.

House Democratic leaders had more success in the 104th Congress in promoting a new spirit of working as a team for majority control within House Democratic ranks. In the 103rd Congress, the Republican minority worked as a team by pooling fund-raising resources and money from safe incumbents, and by coercing safe incumbents to raise money for needy challengers in order to obtain majority control. House Democratic leaders emulated the strategies and tactics of Gingrich, DeLay, Arme y, and Paxon in the 104th Congress to force House Democrats to think and act as a team in the fight for majority control in 1996. Gephardt and Frost urged safe Democratic incumbents to look beyond their own races to work for the party's common goal of retaking the House. They also urged over 100 Democratic incumbents from safe seats to raise at least \$20,000 each for Democratic challengers or vulnerable colleagues, and coerced each House Democrat to pay annual dues of \$5,000 to the DCCC.⁸¹ This new Democratic emphasis on teamwork and collective fund-raising mirrored the successful Republican efforts to pool resources together for the good of the party in capturing the House. Minority Leader Gephardt stated "It's a lot harder to win the place back than to hold it. It's absolutely necessary for us to come together to work at

⁸¹ Amy Keller, "Congressional Democrats Heed the Call for Help," Roll Call, 26 August 1996.

this. This is a team effort.”⁸² At meetings of House Democrats, Gephardt urged team-work to raise and share funds for vulnerable Democratic incumbents and promising Democratic House candidates. Gephardt even invoked the Olympian self-sacrifice of U.S. gymnastic heroine Kerri Strug, who sacrificed for her team despite a personal injury in order to secure victory.⁸³

In addition to encouraging House Democrats to think and work as a team for raising funds, House Democratic leaders also attempted to use choice committee assignments to bolster the campaigns of vulnerable Democratic incumbents in 1996, just like the Republican majority of the 104th Congress. For Democrats to recapture the House in 1996, they had to keep their own incumbent defeats to a bare minimum. During 1996, Gephardt engaged in a behind-the scenes effort to persuade retiring Democratic veterans of key committees to leave their committee assignments early to make room for vulnerable Democratic incumbents, urging them to vacate their positions early for the good of party efforts to retake the House. First, Gephardt tried to persuade each of the retiring Democratic members of the Ways and Means Committee to leave the committee early to open an assignment for Representative Bill Orton (D-UT), a third-term member in a tough re-election fight.⁸⁴ Gephardt also tried to persuade four retiring Democratic members of the Commerce

⁸² John E. Yang, “Democrats Espousing One for All and All for One in Drive to Reclaim the House,” Washington Post, 28 July 1996, p. A 10.

⁸³ Ed Henry and Timothy J. Burger, “Gephardt Hits Up His Democrats for Cash to Take Back the House,” Roll Call, 29 July 1996, p. 1.

⁸⁴ Ed Henry, “Democrats Open Panel Slot to Help a Vulnerable Rep. Harman Get Seat On Intelligence in Session’s Last Days,” Roll Call, 7 October 1996.

Committee - Representatives Cardiss Collins (D-Ill), John Bryant (D-TX), Gerry Studds (D-MA), and Blanche Lambert Lincoln (D-AR) - to resign from the committee early to create positions for two vulnerable freshmen Democrats - Representatives Mike Ward (D-KY), who received 44% of the vote in 1994, and Bill Luther (D-MN), who won election to a Republican open seat by 550 votes in 1994.⁸⁵ Traditionally, members of the Commerce Committee and the Ways and Means Committee attract large corporate campaign contributions, and Democratic leaders reasoned that stocking these power committees with vulnerable Democrats would provide them with valuable opportunities to raise money for their tough re-election races.⁸⁶

Although the retiring members of the Commerce and Ways and Means Committee refused to leave their assignments early, Gephardt did convince Representative Bill Richardson (D-NM), a seven-term member running for re-election in 1996, to resign his position on the House Intelligence Committee. This resignation made room for an Intelligence Committee slot for Representative Jane Harman (D-CA), a sophomore Democrat who won re-election to her swing seat in 1994 by 812 votes.⁸⁷ Democratic leaders also told corporate contributors that both Ward and Luther were next in line for the next available Commerce Committee slots, providing important signals about where their contributions

⁸⁵ Ed Henry, "Leaders Seek to Boot Retirees Off Commerce for Freshmen," Roll Call, 29 August 1996.

⁸⁶ Ed Henry, "Dems Continue efforts to Stock Commerce," Roll Call, 9 September 1996.

⁸⁷ Before the 104th Congress adjourned sine die, retiring Representative Ronald Coleman (D-TX) stepped down from the House Intelligence Committee and Richardson was immediately put back on the committee.

should go.⁸⁸ Like the Republican majority, the Democratic minority of the 104th Congress used the committee system as an important campaign tool, and encouraged its members to place party goals of majority control above individual ambition regarding prime committee slots. The party culture of both parties converged in this increasing willingness to think and act as a team for the greater good of majority status.

Despite these efforts to persuade House Democrats to think and act as a team, House Democrats were not successful in securing the level of internal cohesiveness and teamwork that characterized House Republicans in the 103rd and 104th Congresses. This difference is illustrated most clearly by the creation of the Blue Dog Coalition by conservative House Democrats in the 104th Congress. Early in 1995, 23 moderate and conservative House Democrats upset with the liberalism of Democratic leaders and the Democratic Caucus, formed The Coalition (also known as the Blue Dog Democrats).⁸⁹ Conservative, southern Democrats had traditionally played a strong role in the Democratic Caucus in the House, from the Conservative Coalition of the 1930s-1960s to the Boll Weevil Democrats of the 1980s who helped pass the Reagan Administration's tax and budget plans.⁹⁰ The 1994 election purged the Democratic Caucus of several conservatives and moderate New

⁸⁸ Ward lost his re-election bid in 1996 to Anne Northrup (R-KY). Luther received 56% of the vote in 1996, and after an unsuccessful bid for the Commerce Committee received a committee assignment on the International Relations Committee.

⁸⁹ David S. Cloud, "Conservative Democrats Band Together...To Try to Maximize Their Influence," Congressional Quarterly, 18 February 1995, pp. 496-97.

⁹⁰ Eliza Newlin Carney, "Pesky Critters," National Journal, 29 October 1994, pp. 2507-11; Viveca Novak, "After the Boll Weevils," National Journal, 26 June 1993, pp. 1630-34.

Democrats; Representative Charlie Stenholm's (D-TX) 54 member Conservative Democratic Forum, for instance, lost 21 of its conservative Democratic members in the 1994 election through defeat or attrition.⁹¹ Those moderate and conservative Democrats who survived the 1994 onslaught believed the liberalism of House Democratic leaders, especially in the 103rd Congress, had not only deprived the Democrats of majority status in 1994, but also endangered their own electoral viability in swing seats or conservative districts. Five of the Blue Dogs eventually switched to the GOP in 1995 due to frustrations of House Democratic opposition to environmental reform, welfare reform, unfunded mandates reform, and balancing the budget. Representative Gary Condit (D-CA), co-chair of The Coalition, stated "In The Coalition, there is a high frustration level with the Caucus, the leadership. When the hostility gets so high, some people just leave."⁹²

The Blue Dog Democrats represented districts on the firing lines of two-party competition for House control. Blue Dog Bill Orton (D-UT), one of the three House Democrat incumbents defeated in 1996, commented on the competitiveness of the Blue Dog districts by stating, "If the Republicans are going to increase their margin, it has to come from our seats. If the Democrats are to regain control, it would be with moderate-to-conservative Democrats who can win in swing districts."⁹³ Eleven of the 23 original Blue Dog seats of 1995 would become Republican by 1999 through party-switching, open seat

⁹¹ Karen Foerstel, "Democratic Leaders Seek Support," Congressional Quarterly, 12 November 1994, p. 3224.

⁹² Gabriel Kahn, "A Switcher's Market Now," Roll Call, 29 June 1995, p. 1.

⁹³ Deborah Kalb, "Endangered Blue Dogs Envision Their Species Restored," Congressional Quarterly, 1 June 1996, pp. 1550-52.

gains, or incumbent defeat. Despite these losses, the Blue Dogs added new members in the 105th and 106th Congresses as it searched for a middle ground between House Democratic liberalism and Republican conservatism.⁹⁴

Most importantly in terms of internal Democratic cohesiveness, the Blue Dogs divorced themselves politically from the Democratic Caucus and pursued an independent course designed to enact centrist policy proposals into law. The Blue Dog Democrats formed their own PAC which raised \$180,000 and provided only to Blue Dog House candidates, supported many of the items of the Contract With America, and provided the legislative grease for the bipartisan deals on welfare reform and the balanced budget in the 104th and 105th Congresses. Blue Dogs also sought to make their party electable as a House majority, especially in the most competitive districts, by moving it to the center. The Blue Dogs, in addition to establishing their political and policy independence, also structured themselves culturally in a different fashion from the Democratic Caucus. Blue Dog members did not want their organization to become yet another “redneck caucus” of conservative Democrats seeking a forum to vent their frustrations about liberal Democratic leaders. They also did want to be “DLC-ed,” providing moderate and conservative political cover for endangered liberal Democrats in competitive races. A Blue Dog member stated in an interview

The DLC became diluted over the years until it was used only as cover for liberal Democrats. Liberals would join the DLC so they could call themselves moderates. It was a total sham. That is not going to happen to the Blue Dogs. We just don’t let everybody in. We are very selective. Only those members who have supported and voted on our issues are let in. Initially, Blue Dogs were reviled and even hated in the Democratic Caucus. It didn’t help that five Blue Dogs became Republicans. But because of what we did, laying the

⁹⁴ Jeff Shear, “The Tale of the Dogs,” National Journal, 6 January 1996, pp. 18-22; Lisa Leiter, “The Blue Dogs Have Their Day,” Insight on the News, 5 June 1995, p. 22.

groundwork for a centrist Democratic policy agenda, the Democratic Caucus as a whole is ready to take power. Now, Democrats have repented. They saw what happen in 1994 when you let the liberals control the place.

The Blue Dogs worked to create a distinct cultural identity for themselves within House Democratic ranks. These efforts did not correspond to the immediate political goals of House Democratic leaders hoping to achieve a quick recapture of the House in 1996 through nationalized appeals against the Republicans on Medicare and the mishaps of Speaker Gingrich. This Blue Dog independence contrasts with the unified and homogenous Republican party culture of the 103rd and 104th Congresses, which eschewed internal divisions on culture and party matters in order to obtain a Republican House majority. In the 104th and 105th Congresses, the Blue Dogs eschewed obstruction strategies in favor of working with the Republican majority to pass Blue Dog policy goals like a balanced budget, unfunded mandates reform, and environmental policy reform. The Blue Dogs also operated differently than other member outfits on the Hill. Blue Dog members had to actually attend Blue Dog meetings and could not send a staffer as a liaison. A Blue Dog member commented on this strict requirement of actual member attendance to Blue Dog functions by stating:

There still is a need for a Jim Wright and the old committee chairs. They kept this place running right. There is a need for more workhorses and less show-horses. That is why the Blue Dogs are good. We don't allow staff in meetings. If a member doesn't show, then tough - they are out. As a party, House Democrats have a Sheila Jackson Lee problem: loudmouth Democrats who spout off on the House floor on every subject under the sun on topics they know absolutely nothing about. These Democrats give the rest of us a bad name.

In the 103rd Congress and previous Democratic Congresses, House Democratic leaders succeeded due to their coalition management skills and governing a decentralized

House of Representatives dominated by the heterogeneous culture of a diverse Democratic Caucus. In the 104th Congress, the House Democratic leadership team remained stable amidst the chaos of the 1994 election and the transition from a majority of 258 in the 103rd Congress to a minority of 204 in the 104th Congress. Both Richard Gephardt (D-MO) and David Bonior (D-MI) were seasoned political veterans who had helped run the Democratic House in the 1990s. Unlike the Republican minority in the 103rd Congress, the Democratic minority in the 104th Congress did not endure any internal leadership changes in light of the loss of majority control. Additionally, both Gephardt and Bonior adapted to the needs of a competitive era fairly quickly, articulating different agendas and carving unique leadership roles for themselves in the fight to retake the House in 1996. David Bonior emerged as the leader of an anti-Gingrich strategy, and carved a role for himself as an advocate of aggressive attack politics against both Gingrich and the Republican majority.

ELECTIONS

Republicans Protecting Their Majority

Despite bold predictions by House Republicans in early 1995 that they would gain 30 to 40 House seats in 1996, House Republicans barely managed to hold onto their majority.⁹⁵ House Republicans were hit from several fronts during the 1996 campaign. House Democrats, in conjunction with attacks by President Clinton and labor unions, placed the Republican majority on the defensive regarding its budget priorities, especially its

⁹⁵ Deborah Kalb, "GOP Plans To Extend Its Romp, Focusing on Vulnerable Foes," Congressional Quarterly, 18 May 1996, pp. 1405-7.

Medicare reform plan.⁹⁶ Labor unions, especially the AFL-CIO, launched an aggressive \$35 million campaign to terminate the Republican majority. Republicans were also hit hard by the early television advertising from the Clinton-Gore campaign attacking Republican budget priorities, especially the Medicare reform plan, and attacking the “Dole-Gingrich Congress.” In the final week of the 1996 campaign, House Republicans launched an intensive nationalized counter-attack to save their majority, asking voters to re-elect a Republican Congress to deprive President Clinton a “blank check” in his increasingly inevitable second term. Unlike the Democratic majority of the 1994 campaign, which splintered as each member ran their own localized campaign, the Republican majority of the 1996 campaign used nationalized appeals to protect their majority status in the elections.

At the beginning of 1996, a bruised and battered Republican majority faced a short tenure in the midst of the failed shutdown strategy, unfavorable public approval ratings, and sustained Democratic attacks on the record of the Republican majority emanating from the Contract period of 1995. Much like the Democratic majority of 1994, the Republican majority was in serious electoral trouble. But unlike the Democratic majority of the 103rd Congress, the Republican majority of the 104th Congress engaged in a full-scale effort to maintain majority control in the 1996 election. The Republican majority shrewdly used the legislative process to fashion legislation for a record for the 1996 campaign, used the committee system to lure the best candidates to grab conservative seats, raised and spent enormous sums of money to defend their majority, and grabbed several open Democratic

⁹⁶ “Despite Push, Democrats Fail To Topple GOP,” Congressional Quarterly, 9 November 1996, pp. 3225-32.

House seats (especially in the South) critical to Republican success.⁹⁷ House Republican leaders slowed down the legislative pace of the second session of the 104th Congress and abandoned the frenzied Monday-through-Friday schedule of 1995. By slowing down the legislative process in 1996, House Republican leaders were able to keep rank-and-file House Republicans in their districts campaigning for re-election and fending off Democratic attacks.

House Republicans engaged in several actions in 1996 designed to maintain their House majority in the face of negative public opinion polls, Democratic resurgence, and the increasing inevitability of President Clinton's re-election. In the summer and fall of 1996, House Republicans moved to the political center and cut several legislative deals with President Clinton on welfare reform, health care portability, and raising the minimum wage designed to save the Republican majority by providing a record to campaign on.⁹⁸ Each of these bipartisan accomplishments provided Republicans with important political cover for the 1996 elections. In 1994, House Democrats were denied political cover as the Republican obstruction strategy took its toll on the Democratic agenda at the end of the 103rd Congress. In 1996, House Republicans worked with a re-election minded President Clinton to cut the legislative deals needed to re-elect the Republican majority. In the fall campaign, House Republican incumbents used the legislative accomplishments of welfare reform, health care

⁹⁷ Richard E. Cohen, "New Dogs, New Tricks," National Journal, 10 August 1996, pp. 1701-5.

⁹⁸ Charles Cook, "New Republican Image Produces Slight Uptick in Congressional Polls," Roll Call, 29 July 1996, p. 8; Helen Dewar and Eric Pianin, "Choosing Pragmatism Over Partisanship," Washington Post National Weekly Edition, 12-18 August 1996, p. 12; David Rogers and Dennis Farney, "Week in the Sun Gives the GOP a Whole New Attitude," Wall Street Journal, 16 August 1996, p. A 10.

portability reform, telecommunications reform, and agricultural subsidy reform to argue that the Republican Congress had been productive and deserved to be re-elected to finish the job of balancing the budget and cutting taxes. Unlike the Democratic majority of the 103rd Congress, which confronted the electorate in 1994 empty-handed on the biggest Democratic legislative priority of health care reform, the Republican majority made an important policy down payment in the summer of 1996 with their bipartisan legislative deals with President Clinton, and then used this down payment in the fall elections to appeal to the electorate to further extend Republican control of the House in the 105th Congress.

House Republicans, in addition to touting their legislative achievements from the 104th Congress, also pursued an electoral strategy designed to spur the conservative base to the polls based on advertised fears of a liberal Democratic House majority in the 105th Congress. House Republicans dumped their ties to the losing Dole presidential campaign, and pleaded with the electorate for the re-election of a Republican House majority as a check against a re-elected President Clinton.⁹⁹ As part of this strategy, Speaker Gingrich pursued a stealth campaign in safe Republican districts in the South and West to raise money for Republican incumbents and to urge Republican base voters to work for the re-election of the

⁹⁹ Morton M. Kondracke, "GOP May Soon 'Dump Dole,' Try to Save Congress," Roll Call, 17 October 1996, p. 6; Dana Milbank, "No Newt Is Good News: GOP Congressmen Sprint To Set Their Distance From Unpopular Speaker," Wall Street Journal, 14 June 1996, p. A 14; Michael Weisskopf, "'Not a Newtoid' Says It All,," Robin Toner, "Put Survival Before Dole, Gingrich Says," New York Times, 3 October 1996; William Schneider, "The Conservative's Worst Nightmare," 3 August 1996, p. 1674; Tim Curran, "Hill GOPers Ponder: What About Bob's Effect on Race for Congress?," Roll Call, 16 September 1996, p. 1.

Republican House majority.¹⁰⁰ Republicans also mounted a vigorous effort to energize their conservative base in the final days of the 1996 campaign, including an 11th-hour spending spree designed to preserve the Republican majority and energizing the religious conservative base of the Republican party.¹⁰¹ This “save Congress” strategy encouraged Republican congressional candidates to acknowledge that Republican presidential candidate Bob Dole, lagging behind President Clinton in the polls throughout 1996, would probably lose. Instead of focusing on Dole’s losing campaign, House Republicans focused on warning voters of the consequences of a re-elected Clinton teamed with a liberal Democratic Congress.¹⁰²

As part of this aggressive Republican effort to save their House majority at the expense of the presidential campaign, the NRCC and RNC launched an aggressive direct-mail campaign to Republican base voters warning of the dangers a re-elected President Clinton teamed with a Democratic Congress and its presumed liberal chairmen like Charles Rangel (D-NY) of the Ways and Means Committee, John Conyers (D-MI) of the Judiciary

¹⁰⁰ Richard E. Cohen, “Making the Rounds,” National Journal, 6 July 1996, pp. 1473-77; Stephen Labaton, “Defying Polls, Gingrich Raises Big Money,” New York Times, 12 April 1996, p. A 1; Damon Chappie, “GOPAC’s Big Givers Still Love Speaker Gingrich,” Roll Call: Republican Convention Issue, 12 August 1996, p. 46.

¹⁰¹ Christopher Georges and David Rogers, “Big Mailing by GOP Aims to Turn Out Conservatives, Keep a Hold on Congress,” Wall Street Journal, 31 October 1996, p. A 24.

¹⁰² Adriel Bettelheim, “GOP Hopes to Keep Control, National Fears Spread to Locals,” Denver Post, 29 October 1996, p. A 1; Craig Crawford, “New Focus: Who Will Control Congress?,” Orlando Sentinel, 27 October 1996, p. A 1; “Wall Street Gets Edgy Over Runaway Democrat Victory,” Financial Times, 31 October 1996, p. 3.

Committee, and John Dingell (D-MI) of the Commerce Committee.¹⁰³ The Republican National Committee issued a flyer warning of the threat of a Democratic Congress which stated “What would a Democrat Congress look like? Look Left.” Included in the flyer were pictures of Representative Richard Gephardt (D-MO), Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA), and Representative Charles Rangel (D-NY).¹⁰⁴ The NRCC stressed this same theme with its “Radical Roster” press releases and direct-mailings warning of the dangers of a liberal Democratic Congress, and warned of the dangers of a Ways and Means Committee controlled not by “Representative Charles Rangel of New York,” but “Representative Charles Rangel of Harlem.”

House Republicans also launched negative attacks against President Clinton for the DNC fund-raising scandal that erupted in October, 1996, with Speaker Gingrich predicting that a Democratic Congress would devote itself to “paying off the unions, paying off the trial lawyers, paying off the foreign influences, raising taxes, building government bureaucracies, and covering up Clinton Administration conspiracies.”¹⁰⁵ Through these efforts, House Republicans argued that re-electing the Republican House majority in 1996 for the 105th Congress would prevent Clinton from returning to his liberal governance of the 103rd Congress in terms of raising taxes and spending, ignoring tax cuts, undoing the welfare

¹⁰³ Juliet Eilperin, “Both Parties Put Spin On Democratic House,” Roll Call, 17 October 1996, p. 1.

¹⁰⁴ Adam Clymer, “G.O.P. Pushes Congress Strategy That Shuns Dole,” New York Times, 23 October 1996, p. A 1.

¹⁰⁵ Karen Hosler, “Leading Liberals Would Rule if Democrats Win Congress,” Baltimore Sun, 2 November 1996, p. A 1.

reform law of 1996, and lowering national defense spending. Representative David Dreier (R-CA), summed up the Republican campaign in October, 1996 by stating “We’re the only thing that stands between Clinton and devastation.”¹⁰⁶

As part of their aggressive campaign to defend their narrow majority, House Republican leaders used their institutional powers, and persuasion skills, to enlist the best candidates to grab or defend seats necessary for the continuance of the Republican majority.¹⁰⁷ Several Republican incumbents were in serious electoral jeopardy in 1996, and many of the 18 defeated Republican incumbents were beyond political repair. In North Carolina’s Fourth district, with a median household income of \$34,569, Republican freshman Fred Heineman stated his \$133,600 congressional salary and \$50,000 police pension made him “lower middle class”; he was defeated by the incumbent he ousted in 1994, Democrat David Price.¹⁰⁸ In Oregon’s Fifth district, Republican freshman Jim Bunn had divorced his wife and married his 31-year-old chief of staff whom he was paying \$97,500; the negative fallout from this issue allowed Democrat Darlene Hooley to defeat Bunn 51%-46%.¹⁰⁹ Michael Flanagan, the Republican insurgent who upset scandal-plagued Ways and Means Chairman Dan Rostenkowski in 1994, lost in a landslide to Democrat Rod Blagojevich as

¹⁰⁶ James Carney and Karen Tumulty, “Newt’s Nightmare: His Rival Dick Gephardt Is Eyeing to Take Over the House,” Time, 30 September 1986, p. 24.

¹⁰⁷ David Rogers, “Gingrich Demands Campaign-Proof Spending Bills,” Wall Street Journal, 4 June 1996, p. A 20.

¹⁰⁸ Michael Barone and Grant Ujifusa, The Almanac of American Politics 1998 (Washington, D.C.: National Journal, 1997, p. 1067.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., pp. 1192-93.

the district returned to its traditional, Democratic roots. Most of the 18 defeated House Republican incumbents in 1996 represented swing districts lacked important political skills or were vulnerable due to scandal. Fourteen of the House Republicans defeated in 1996 represented swing seats, and three more were GOP freshmen elected as flukes to solidly Democratic seats in the 1994 tsunami. Democrats managed to recapture only one of the 21 GOP-leaning seats they lost in 1994 by defeating Representative David Funderburk (R-N.C.) of North Carolina's fourth district, who faced a personal scandal in his re-election bid.

To stave off further incumbent losses, House Republican leaders engaged in a policy of selective intervention to keep endangered seats in Republican ranks. Republican freshman Wes Cooley (R-OR), elected to Oregon's Second district in 1994, ran into trouble in the spring of 1996 after it was discovered he had lied about serving in the Korean War, concealed his marriage so his wife could continue to collect benefits as the widow of a Marine, and threatened physical violence against a pregnant reporter.¹¹⁰ House Republican leaders put extreme pressure on Cooley to resign after polls showed he would lose his Republican-leaning district to his Democratic opponent in the 1996 election.¹¹¹ Republican leaders then lured former Representative Bob Smith (R-OR), who represented Oregon's Second district from 1982 until 1994, to run for his old seat again. Republican leaders

¹¹⁰ John E. Yang, "Rep. Cooley's Mountain of Miscues," Washington Post, 2 May 1996, p. A 1; John E. Yang, "Cooley's Predecessor: 'Step Aside,'" Washington Post, 10 June 1996, p. A 10.

¹¹¹ Benjamin Sheffner, "Own Party Puts Up Pressure On Cooley to Quit," Roll Call, 6 June 1996, p. 1; "Cooley Takes Himself Out Before Democrats Get a Chance," Roll Call, 8 August 1996, p. 1; Michael Wines, "Bowling to Party Pressure, A Republican Drops Out," New York Times, 7 August 1996, p. A 8.

offered Smith the chairmanship of the Agriculture Committee in the 105th Congress as compensation for keeping Oregon's second district seat in Republican ranks.¹¹² Smith retained the seat for the GOP in 1996, while a grand jury later convicted Cooley of lying to voters.

House Republican leaders also encouraged scandal-plagued freshman Enid Greene Waldholtz (R-UT), whose husband embezzled \$1.6 million from her campaign treasury, to step aside.¹¹³ Republican Merrill Cook retained this seat for Republicans in 1996. In Oklahoma's traditionally Democratic Third District, House Republican leaders recruited former Democratic Representative Wes Watkins to run for his old seat as a Republican. The entire House Republican leadership even promised in writing to assign Watkins to the Ways and Means Committee if he won his old congressional seat as a Republican in 1996.¹¹⁴ Watkins won the open seat race in the Third District as a Republican, bringing a conservative Democratic seat into ranks of the Republican House majority. Through each of these interventions, Republicans protected their majority by trying to find the most electable Republican candidate to either retain or grab conservative seats.

This effort to defend and capture conservative seats to augment the Republican House

¹¹² Robert Marshall Wells, "Smith May Try To Reclaim 2nd As Cooley Ends His Bid," Congressional Quarterly, 10 August 1996, p. 2271; Benjamin Sheffner, "GOP Leaders Seek To Lure Ex-Rep. Bob Smith With Promise of Agriculture Committee Chair," Roll Call, 1 August 1996, p. 1.

¹¹³ Michael Barone and Grant Ujifisa, The Almanac of American Politics 1998 (Washington, D.C.: National Journal, 1997), pp. 1422-23.

¹¹⁴ Michael Weisskopf, "Recruiting for the Revolution," Washington Post National Weekly Edition, 6-12 May 1996, p. 11.

majority also extended to Republican House incumbents. House Republican leaders began an informal policy that Republican members should not work against other sitting members in primary elections, and threatened Republican members who violated these policy with the inability to offer amendments or bills on the House floor, a ban on travel that must be approved by the Speaker, the possible loss of subcommittee chairmanships, and the inability to be appointed to conference committees. The first test of this policy came with a primary challenge to incumbent Representative Sue Kelly (R-NY), a moderate pro-choice member. In the summer of 1996, Kelly faced a stiff primary race from former Representative Joseph DioGuardi (R-NY), an ardent opponent of abortion. The House Republican leadership sent a letter to DioGuardi demanding he withdraw his candidacy, and demanded pro-life Representatives Bob Dornan (R-CA) and Chris Smith (R-NJ) cease their active campaign efforts for DioGuardi in the primary election after they attended a DioGuardi fund-raiser.¹¹⁵ When Dornan and Smith refused to cease their efforts on behalf of DioGuardi's candidacy, the House Republican leadership attempted to punish the two prodigal members by removing them from conference committees, banning their official overseas travel for the House, and using the Rules Committee to block any amendments or bills the two members offered.¹¹⁶ Although Republican leaders later retreated from actually implementing these punitive measures, Speaker Gingrich blocked Representative Smith (R-NJ) from being an election observer in Bosnia while Dornan, the chairman of the National Security military personnel

¹¹⁵ Damon Chappie, "GOP Leaders Try to Quash Primary Challenge to Kelly," Roll Call, 1 July 1996, p. 7.

¹¹⁶ Damon Chappie, "Two Republican Rebels Say Gingrich Backs Off On Their Punishment," Roll Call, 1 August 1996, p. A 1.

subcommittee, was kept off the defense authorization conference committee.¹¹⁷ Each of the punishments, except for the travel ban, were lifted after both members announced they had become “inactive” in the DioGuardi campaign.

House Republicans also used their new majority status to raise the money needed to defend their majority in 1996, raising enormous sums of money that previously had been off-limits to them as a House minority.¹¹⁸ GOP House members raised a cumulative war chest of \$58 million in 1995 to defend their new majority. Gingrich, Paxon, and Arney urged Republican lawmakers to share their wealth to maintain majority status by donating \$10 million to counterattack organized labor’s multimillion dollar, anti-GOP advertising effort. This money funded a last-minute spending blitz coordinated by the RNCC and RNC at the end of the 1996 campaign, which helped save the Republican House majority by attacking the Clinton foreign money scandal in October, 1996. This last-minute advertising campaign, conducted by the NRCC on a nationwide effort to help the most embattled and vulnerable Republican incumbents, stated that a Democratic Congress would allow President Clinton free reign to push through a liberal agenda in the 105th Congress.¹¹⁹ In addition, key Republican allies like the Christian Coalition used phone banks and voter guides on a nationwide basis to help protect the Republican House majority, playing the same role as

¹¹⁷ Damon Chappie, “Leadership Lifts Sanctions on Dornan, But Plans to Codify Rule He Violated,” Roll Call, 5 August 1996, p. 6.

¹¹⁸ Benjamin Sheffner, “House Republican Campaign Arm Rakes In Three Times Cash of Dems,” Roll Call Politics, 22 April 1996, p. 1; Benjamin Sheffner, “GOP Shatters Money Records For 1996,” Roll Call, 14 March 1996, p. A 1.

¹¹⁹ James Grimaldi, “GOP Hits Sanchez With Radio Ad,” Orange County Register, 1 November 1996, p. B 4.

interest groups on the left did to fight for a Democratic House majority in 1996.¹²⁰

As part of a strategy to boost GOP fund-raising while denying Democratic donations, Republican Majority Whip Tom DeLay (R-TX) maintained records showing which lobbying groups had given to the GOP, and which had given to Democrats. Adopting a successful tactic employed by DCCC chairman Tony Coelho in the 1980s, DeLay bluntly told lobbying groups that if they wanted access to the new Republican majority, they had to boost their GOP contributions and deny funds to Democrats.¹²¹ DeLay defended his reputation as “The Hammer” by stating “There are liberal Democrats in this town who are trying to destroy the revolution, and I’m not going to be their friend. I’m their enemy, their most deadly enemy.”¹²² Additionally, the 73-member Republican freshman class of 1994 quickly learned the fund-raising tactics previously mastered by the Democratic House majority.¹²³

Republican fund-raising advantages, however, could not save the 18 Republican incumbents defeated in 1996. The overall political environment, the Medicare and “get Newt” nationalized campaigns of Democrats, and Republican missteps in the 104th Congress produced an inhospitable political environment for several vulnerable Republican incumbents running in swing seats and strongly Democratic districts. In addition, no amount

¹²⁰ Mike Dorning and James Warren, “Labor Regains Relevance; Conservative Christians Flex Their Muscle,” Chicago Tribune, 7 November 1996, p. 20.

¹²¹ David Maraniss and Michael Weisskopf, “Cashing In,” Washington Post National Weekly Edition, 4-10 December 1995, p. 6.

¹²² Nancy Gibbs, “Where Power Goes...,” Time, 17 July 1996, p. 21.

¹²³ Jonathan D. Salant, “Freshmen Embrace Capitol Ways As They Go for PAC Donations,” Congressional Quarterly, 20 April 1996, pp. 1068-69; “Freshman’s War Chest Deters Challengers,” Congressional Quarterly, 24 August 1996, pp. 2663-66.

of money could “de-energize” the energized Democratic base vote, illustrating the limits of money in a period of intense, two-party competition. Unlike the Democratic majority of the 103rd Congress, the Republican majority of the 104th Congress was well aware of the threat facing its majority status and defended itself against a nationalized campaign by an aggressive minority. Republicans engineered the rules of this new form of congressional politics in 1994 with their nationalized campaign and attacks on the Democratic majority; in 1996, they used similar tactics at the 11th hour of the battle for the House to keep their majority status.

The Democratic Nationalized Campaign for House Control

To recapture the House in 1996, Democrats nationalized the congressional elections on the twin themes of the excessive and extreme Republican budget cuts of the 104th Congress and Speaker Newt Gingrich’s unpopularity and ethics troubles.¹²⁴ Although House Democrats failed to retake control of the House, they managed to defeat 18 Republican incumbents, gain a net of nine House seats, and shrink the Republican House majority from 236 to 227. Through coordinated attacks with labor unions, senior-citizens groups, teachers unions, trial lawyers, and environmental groups, House Democrats embarked on an ambitious, nationalized campaign to terminate the Republican majority using any tactics necessary.¹²⁵ These attacks allowed Democrats nationwide to regain their political footing,

¹²⁴ Jerelyn Eddings and David Fischer, “Can the Democrats Recapture the Hill?,” U.S. News & World Report, 9 September 1996, p. 28; “The House in the Balance,” The Economist, 26 October 1996, pp. 29-30.

¹²⁵ Howard Fineman, “Crashing to Earth,” Newsweek, 30 September 1996, p. 28; James Bennett, “Liberal Use of ‘Extremist’ Is the Winning Strategy,” New York Times, 7 November 1996, p. B 1.

energize their base voters, and put the once-triumphant Republicans on the defensive in 1996. The budget battle of 1995-96, resulting in two extended government shutdowns, became the foundation for Democratic strategies to retake the House.¹²⁶ House Democrats attacked Republican budget policies as too extreme, attacked the ethical troubles and rhetorical gaffes of Gingrich, and amplified this anti-GOP, anti-Gingrich message through the campaign messages of other Democratic candidates and the campaign efforts of liberal interest groups comprising the Democratic base.

To regain the majority, House Democrats targeted the 73 member Republican freshmen class of 1994, especially the 47 freshmen Republicans elected with 55% of the vote or less. Former Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn (D-TX) once stated “Anyone can be elected once by accident, but beginning with the second term, it’s worth paying attention.”¹²⁷ Preventing the re-election of these Republican freshmen in 1996, before they could “tame” their districts, became pivotal for House Democratic hopes to regain the House in the 1990s. House Democratic efforts to capture the House in 1996 were aided by massive expenditures by labor unions and the 1996 Clinton-Gore re-election campaign. Organized labor spent over \$35 million in the 1996 election on television advertising attacking House Republicans, and sent over 300 union operatives to the districts of 75 vulnerable GOP incumbents to increase voter turnout among Democratic base voters. In addition, the AFL-CIO targeted the districts of 29 vulnerable GOP freshmen who won by fewer than 5,000 votes in 1994, attacking them

¹²⁶ Juliana Gruenwald and Deborah Kalb, “Quick Democratic Comeback in House Faces Obstacles,” Congressional Quarterly, 24 February 1996, pp. 454-58.

¹²⁷ Guy Gugliotta, “GOP Freshmen Top House Democrat’s Hit List,” Washington Post, 1 April 1996, p. A 1.

throughout the 104th Congress with paid campaign ads on television.¹²⁸ Of the 73 Republican freshmen elected in 1994, only three grabbed truly Democratic districts: Michael Flanagan (Illinois 5), Steve Stockman (Texas 9), and Greg Ganske (Iowa 4); an additional 35 Republican freshmen elected in 1994 represented swing seats. The remaining 35 GOP freshmen either held an open GOP seat or grabbed a Republican-trending seat from a retiring Democratic incumbent that would be difficult for Democrats to regain.

The Democratic Medicare campaign against Republicans became the chief weapon in the arsenal of the nationalized Democratic campaign, attracting and recruiting Democratic candidates to challenge Republican incumbents, and playing the same role as the Clinton Health Care plan did for House Republicans in the 103rd Congress. The cuts in domestic spending required to achieve a balanced budget by 2002, in particular the restraint in growth of the Medicare and Medicaid programs, provided Democrats with important rhetorical tools in their fight for majority control in 1996.¹²⁹ In the 103rd Congress, House Republicans attacked the Clinton Health care plan both because they thought it was bad policy and because it helped elect scores of Republican freshmen. In the 104th Congress, Democrats attacked the Republican Medicare plan for precisely the same reasons. House Democrats

¹²⁸ Paul Gigot, "For Unions, 1996 Is Armageddon," Wall Street Journal, 29 March 1996; Glenn Burkins, "AFL-CIO Sets Drive to Back Labor," Wall Street Journal, 22 February 1996, p. A 2; Peter T. Kilborn, "With New Militancy, Nation's Unions Hope to Drive Republicans From Congress," New York Times, 19 February 1996, p. A 8; Juliana Greunwald and Robert Marshall Wells, "At Odds With Some Workers, AFL-CIO Takes Aim at GOP," Congressional Quarterly, 13 April 1996, p. 933; "Labor Mounts Big Get-Out-the-Vote Push For Democratic Congressional Hopefuls," Wall Street Journal, 28 October 1996, p. A 16.

¹²⁹ Jackie Calmes, "Fight Over Balanced Budget Could Prove to Be Defining Moment for Gingrich and His Agenda," Wall Street Journal, 6 November 1995, p. A 20.

quickly attacked the Republican budget plan as “extreme,” arguing that it cut too deeply into entitlement and domestic programs in order to provide a large tax cut for the rich.¹³⁰

As part of their campaign to regain House control, House Democrats linked the restraint in growth in the Medicare program advocated by Republicans to the \$245 billion tax cut plan offered by Republicans. House Democrats linked the two Republican policies into one, arguing the Republicans were cutting Medicare to give a tax break to the rich. This line of attack became the core of the Democratic nationalized campaign of 1996.¹³¹ Democratic Minority Leader Richard Gephardt called the Republican House members who voted for the Republican Medicare reform plan, which trimmed \$270 billion from Medicare over seven years, “231 Hemlock drinkers,” and urged Democratic House candidates to seize the Medicare vote in the fight for the House.¹³² House Democratic candidates all over the country ran ads linking Medicare cutbacks to Republican plans to use budget savings to offer tax cuts for the wealthy.¹³³ In an interview, a House Democrat involved in the Democratic Medicare campaign stated:

We demagoged the hell out of Medicare against the GOP. We’ll admit it now. We had to do it if we were going to win the majority. Of course, the Republicans demagoged the hell out of us in the 103rd Congress on tax and budget issues. And don’t forget what they did to

¹³⁰ John M. Goshko, “Bipartisanship on Budgeting Fades Quickly,” Washington Post, 9 January 1995, p. A 6.

¹³¹ Tim Curran, “Geren and Hall Still Democrats, For Now,” Roll Call, 30 October 1995.

¹³² Tim Curran and Timothy J. Burger, “Medicare Renegades Face GOP Retaliation,” Roll Call, 23 October 1995, p. 1.

¹³³ Morton M. Kondracke, “‘New Paradigmer’ On Where the GOP is Really Headed,” Roll Call, 6 November 1995, p. 8; Eric Schmitt, “In House Races, Democrats Play to Fears on Medicare,” New York Times, 10 September 1996, p. A 17.

us on guns and the Clinton health care plan. We both did it - both sides are guilty as charged.

In addition to attacking proposed Republican budget cuts, several House Democrats under the leadership of Democratic Minority Whip David Bonior (D-MI) engaged in an “anti-Newt” strategy designed to demonize the new House Speaker and turn him into a political liability for all Republicans.¹³⁴ The Democratic “get-Newt” strategy entailed transforming both Gingrich and Republican budget policies into a single, unattractive package.¹³⁵ Early in the 104th Congress, House Democrats realized that if they wanted to derail the new Republican majority they had to personally attack Speaker Gingrich and turn him into an electoral albatross for House Republicans. Gingrich was an easy target for demonization and attack. A Pew poll conducted in the summer of 1994 discovered that 65% of Americans had never heard of Gingrich.¹³⁶ Speaker Gingrich’s public visibility level increased dramatically in 1995 as the speaker temporarily eclipsed President Clinton as the center and focus of political attention, culminating in Gingrich’s nationally televised “state of the union” address at the conclusion of the first 100 days of the 104th Congress.¹³⁷ House Democrats believed that repeatedly reciting Gingrich’s name in a negative manner was one

¹³⁴ Richard E. Cohen, “Will the Anti-Newt Strategy Succeed?,” National Journal, 24 August 1996, p. 1814.

¹³⁵ Robin Toner, “Be Less of a Target, House Republicans Urge Gingrich,” New York Times, 23 November 1995, B 18.

¹³⁶ Jackie Koszczuk, “Unpopular, Yet Still Powerful, Gingrich Faces Critical Pass,” Congressional Quarterly, 14 September 1996, p. 2573.

¹³⁷ David S. Cloud, “Speaker Wants his Platform to Rival the Presidency,” Congressional Quarterly, 4 February 1995, pp. 331-35; Norman J. Ornstein and Amy L. Schenkenberg, “The 1995 Congress: The First Hundred Days and Beyond,” Political Science Quarterly 110 (2), 1995, pp. 183-206.

of their most potent weapons in the war for House control. California Democrat George Miller described the rationale behind the “get-Newt” strategy:

Newt is the nerve center and the energy source. Going after him is like trying to take out command and control. Newt Gingrich is neither here nor there. He’s the intellectual basis, the architect, and the moving force behind the things that will hurt the groups and people I represent.¹³⁸

House Minority Whip David Bonior (D-MI) led the “get-Newt” effort, and began his attacks on Gingrich two weeks after the 1994 election. Bonior’s “get-Newt” strategy was simple: undermine Gingrich’s credibility, make his political life miserable, and drive him from the speakership.¹³⁹ In a series of press conferences in 1994 and 1995, Bonior attacked Gingrich’s ethics and called for the appointment of an independent counsel to investigate the ethics charges leveled against Gingrich. Bonior’s congressional office became a clearinghouse for negative information on Speaker Gingrich. Through numerous press conferences, multiple ethics complaints, and numerous attacks both in the House and on the campaign trail, Bonior succeeded in raising scrutiny of Gingrich both in and out of the House chamber.¹⁴⁰

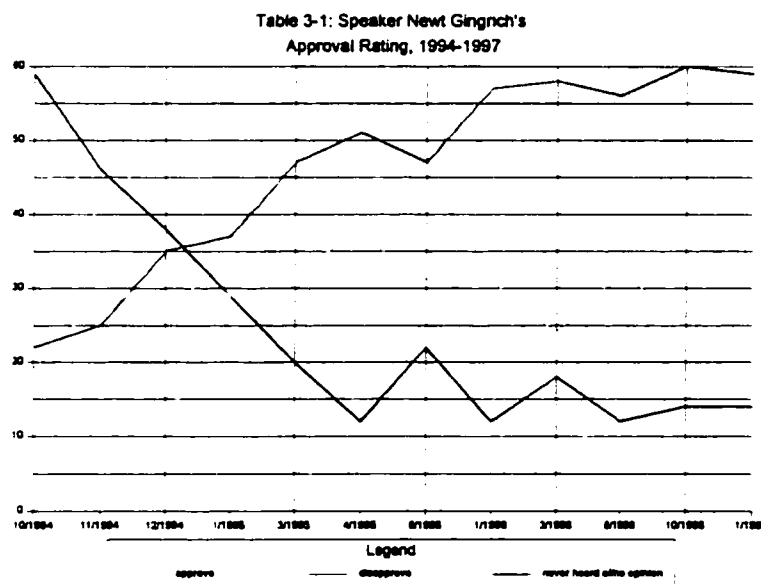
The “get-Newt” strategy succeeded in weakening Gingrich’s political position in the House as speaker. As illustrated in Table 3-1, Speaker Gingrich’s approval ratings plummeted in the 104th Congress as Democrats relentlessly attacked him politically and

¹³⁸ Elizabeth Drew, Showdown (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), p. 76.

¹³⁹ Lloyd Grove, “The Whip Lashes Out,” Washington Post, 26 December 1995, C 1; Paul Gigot, “The King of Crash and Burn,” Wall Street Journal, 12 January 1996, p. A 14.

¹⁴⁰ Mark R. Levin, “The Bitter Bit?,” National Review, 6 November 1995, p. 24.

personally. After an investigation by a special counsel in 1996, the House Ethics Committee in January of 1997 reprimanded Gingrich and fined him \$300,000. Much like Gingrich during the early 1990s, Bonior used ethics as a political weapon, vigorously attacked the majority party for its ethical and political lapses, and assailed the majority party's budget priorities in order to draw clear partisan lines in the electoral sands. Representative John Lewis (D-GA), a key ally in Bonior's anti-Gingrich effort, defended Bonior's attacks on Gingrich by stating "I think all of us remember when it became Newt's business, day in and day out, to bring down Jim Wright...We were all affected by it. But I don't think this is any kind of 'get you' payback time."¹⁴¹



¹⁴¹ Lloyd Grove, "The Whip Lashes Out," p. C 1.

Many House Democrats joined Bonior's anti-Gingrich campaign, including John Lewis (D-GA), George Miller (D-CA), Rosa DeLauro (D-CT), Cynthia McKinney (D-GA), Harrold Volkmer (D-MO), and Patricia Schroeder (D-CO). Through numerous news conferences, television talk-show appearances, and town hall meetings, House Democrats continually raised questions about Gingrich's character and ethics.¹⁴² These members also coordinated their one-minute speeches on the House floors to launch attacks on Speaker Gingrich, often in violation of House rules. Representative Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) appeared on the House floor 370 times to attack the Republican majority and Speaker Gingrich. Through these aggressive attacks, House Democrats succeeded in transforming Gingrich into a liability for House Republicans, especially in the Northeast and in swing districts.¹⁴³ Each of the ethics charges were designed to supersede the particulars of the ethics case against Gingrich in order to affix a larger public stigma against the Republican House majority.¹⁴⁴ House Democrats rallied behind the anti-Gingrich strategy in the 104th Congress as the key to retake the House in 1996. The "get-Newt" strategy provided struggling House Democrats with a common purpose and a common target for attack, much like the role played by Bill Clinton for House Republicans in the 103rd Congress. Democratic candidates nationwide aired ads "morphing" their Republican opponent's face into that of Newt Gingrich, utilizing the same

¹⁴² Kevin Merida, "Speaker Has Faced Determined Attack; Democratic Pressure Grew From '94 Defeat," Washington Post, 6 January 1997, p. A 1.

¹⁴³ Robin Toner, "Be Less Of a Target, House Republicans Urge Gingrich," New York Times, 23 November 1995, p. B 18; Richard Morin, "Newt Gingrich's Negatives," Washington Post National Weekly Edition, 19-25 June 1995, p. 37.

¹⁴⁴ Weston Kosova, "Jam Session," The New Republic, 12 June 1995, pp. 20-21.

tactic Republicans had used with success in their morphing of Clinton in 1994.¹⁴⁵ DCCC Chairman Martin Frost (D-TX) told 70 potential Democratic House candidates “Your opponent’s middle name is Gingrich.”¹⁴⁶ Additionally, a DCCC fund-raising letter referred to Gingrich as a “political terrorist.”¹⁴⁷ Like the Republican minority of the 103rd Congress, House Democrats discovered that opposing the agenda of the majority party and labeling it in a negative fashion served the needs of obtaining a majority better than any other electoral device. In particular, the Families First proposal of House Democrats drew only lukewarm response from Democratic House candidates, while the nationalized Medicare and “get-Newt” strategies produced immediate political gains for Democrats in the 1996 campaign.¹⁴⁸

House Democrats almost took back the House in 1996. Several vulnerable Republican incumbents in swing and Democratic seats were positioned to lose their races in 1996, especially weak Republican incumbents in swing seats or Democratic-leaning districts.¹⁴⁹ In October of 1996, revelations the Democratic National Committee (DNC) had

¹⁴⁵ “Mighty Morphing - Democratic Style,” Campaigns & Elections, September 1995, pp. 8-9.

¹⁴⁶ Tim Curran, “Seize the Medicare Vote, DCCC Tells Recruits,” Roll Call, 16 October 1995, p. 26.

¹⁴⁷ Kenneth J. Cooper, “Democrat Offers Gingrich Apology for Harsh Words,” Washington Post, 6 May 1995, p. A 8.

¹⁴⁸ Christopher Georges, “Democrats’ ‘Families First’ Agenda Gets Tepid Support From Candidates,” Wall Street Journal, 24 June 1996, p. A 24; Benjamin Sheffner, “Dems ‘Agenda’ Takes Back Seat to Bashing Newt,” Roll Call Politics, 27 June 1996, p. 15; Annys Shin, “Families First: Still First?,” National Journal, 16 November 1996, p. 2503.

¹⁴⁹ Charles E. Cook, “Democratic Recipe for House Control Includes Much Hope,” Roll Call, 22 July 1996, p. 6.

solicited over \$2.8 million in illegal foreign contributions from Indonesian and Chinese sources hurt House Democrats in close open seat races or challenging Republican incumbents. These revelations depressed Democratic momentum to take control of the House in the last month of the 1996 campaign. Additionally, the anti-Gingrich and Medicare strategies lost resonance the closer the election came, especially in the South.¹⁵⁰ A Democratic House leader described the impact of the DNC fund-raising scandal on House Democratic campaigns in 1996:

The campaign finance scandal in the last weeks of the campaign prevented the Democratic takeover. There is no doubt about that. Until the campaign finance scandal broke, Democrats were trending well in about 15-20 moderate swing districts. People in those districts were ready to vote for the Democratic candidate. But then the Clinton fund-raising scandal hit and a lot of voters in these districts thought "Well, wait a minute. Can we really trust giving all the power back to the Democrats?" So in these districts, Republicans won just enough to keep their majority. But it was a very narrow victory. If 12,000 votes had switched, then Democrats would have won a majority.

The drive to win the House required House Democratic leaders to spend a large amount of time recruiting the candidates capable of beating vulnerable Republican incumbents and retaining Democratic open seats. Before the 104th Congress, previous Democratic majorities did not invest much effort into the recruitment process compared to the massive farm team efforts by House Republicans in the late 1980s and early 1990s, especially in candidate recruitment and training. The Democratic majority traditionally relied on lop-sided Democratic majorities at the state and local level to produce a steady stream of

¹⁵⁰ Gerald F. Seib and Christopher Georges, "Democrats Can Regain the House, but Don't Bet on It," Wall Street Journal, 20 September 1996, p. A 16.

quality Democratic House candidates.¹⁵¹ This political calculus, however, did not work in the newly minted Democratic minority's favor in the 104th Congress. The Democratic strategy to retake the House in 1996 required Democrats to keep their incumbent losses to a minimum, hold as many of the 30 open Democratic seats as possible, and defeat at least two dozen Republican incumbents. From the vantage of minority status, this strategy for capturing the House presented numerous challenges for House Democratic leaders to overcome.

The large number of Democratic retirements from the House in the 104th Congress, prompted by the unappealing nature of minority status, presented the biggest challenge to Democratic efforts to retake the House in 1996.¹⁵² In early 1995, Minority Leader Richard Gephardt and DCCC chairman Martin Frost met with senior Democratic House members contemplating retirement and urged them to serve at least two more years.¹⁵³ Although several Democratic veterans eventually retired in the 104th Congress, the 104th Congress represented the first lobbying campaign against large-scale retirements by Democratic leaders. Twenty-nine House Democrats eventually retired, resigned or ran for the Senate in 1996, continuing a trend of high Democratic House retirements in the 1990s. In the 1992-1996 election cycles, 98 House Democrats retired, as opposed to 65 House Republicans.

¹⁵¹ For an examination of candidate quality, see Alan Ehrenhalt, The United States of Ambition (New York: Times Books, 1992); Thomas A. Kazee, ed., Who Runs for Congress? (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, 1994).

¹⁵² Eliza Newlin Carney, "Exodus," National Journal, 20 January 1996, pp. 108-13.

¹⁵³ Juliana Gruenwald, "Democrats Look for Candidates Who Don't Mind Tough Odds," Congressional Quarterly, 17 June 1995, p. 1768; Richard L. Berke, "Losing Hope of Regaining Senate, Democrats Focus on House," New York Times, 3 April 1995, p. B 6.

Nineteen of the 29 Democrats who retired in the 104th Congress vacated districts in the South vulnerable to Republican capture, and Republicans captured seven of these open southern Democratic seats. In 1996, House Democrats were forced to defend a larger number of open seats than Republicans, as in 1992 and 1994. In the 1992-1996 election cycles, House Democrats lost a total of 27 open seats to Republicans. This bleeding of open seats cost Democrats their majority in 1994, inhibited takeover in 1996, and forced Democratic leaders to spend their time and resources on the time-consuming process of candidate recruitment.

Democratic leaders not only had to discourage Democratic retirements, but also had to recruit quality candidates who could defeat vulnerable House Republicans and win critical open seat contests, especially the Republican freshmen representing swing seats. In their ascent to the majority in the early 1990s, House Republicans enjoyed the luxury of time in building a farm team of Republican candidates in the 1990-1994 election cycles. The new Democratic minority did not have this luxury of time as it prepared for a Democratic capture of the House in 1996. Instead, House Democrats relied on a patchwork recruitment process of former members defeated in 1994, candidates with extensive local government experience, and wealthy candidates willing to invest their own resources into House campaigns. House Democratic leaders recognized that Democrats could not win back the House in the 1990s without finding the candidates best suited ideologically and politically for their districts. In response, Democratic leaders launched a “fit-the-district” strategy of encouraging moderate and conservative Democrats with connection to the business community to run for swing

seats or in Republican-leaning districts.¹⁵⁴ This recruitment process, though time-consuming, did yield some successes in 1996 in the form of winning challengers Darlene Hooley (D-OR), Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), Ellen Tauscher (D-CA), Nick Lampson (D-TX), Tom Allen (D-ME), and Dennis Kucinich (D-OH).¹⁵⁵

The loss of their majority in 1994 deprived House Democrats of their traditional fund-raising advantages. Previously, House Democrats monopolized labor campaign contributions and held a firm majority from business PACS. After the 1994 election, fund-raising advantages tilted toward the new Republican majority as the GOP raked in enormous sums of campaign cash. Despite the Republican fund-raising advantage as the new House majority, House Democratic leaders embarked on a serious campaign to instill teamwork among House Democrats as they approached the goal of capturing a House majority. Democratic leaders adopted many of the same tactics of the Republican minority in the 103rd Congress to raise funds, especially in urging House Democrats to think and work as a team for the purposes of achieving a House majority. Unity and fealty to the cause of achieving a House majority became the key organizing principle of House Democrats, transforming fund-raising activities from individual pursuits to collective causes.

In addition to the \$5,000 in annual dues from each Democratic incumbent, Democratic members from safe seats were required to contribute \$20,000 so the DCCC could provide the maximum \$65,000 into 120 winnable races. The leadership also shamed

¹⁵⁴ Richard L. Berke, "Skipping the Race: Run for Congress? Parties Find Rising Starts Are Just Saying No," New York Times, 15 March 1998, Section 1, p. 1.

¹⁵⁵ Stuart Rothernberg, "Former Members Top Democrat's Recruitment List," Roll Call, 26 August 1996, p. 31.

the “deadbeat” Democrats who did not contribute to this collective fund-raising cause, much like the efforts of House Republican in the 103rd Congress. House Democrats also adopted the same hardball fund-raising techniques Republicans put to good use in the 1994 campaign: pressing incumbents to contribute to winnable races, leaning on businesses with legislation pending before committees to get money flowing to promising challengers, and targeting resources on those races that would tip the balance of power in the House.¹⁵⁶

Through these fund-raising tactics, Democrats were able to provide the resources to Democratic candidates in winnable races. In the new race for the House, funding every election was not necessary; instead, targeting the handful of races that could tip the balance was the best use of limited financial resources. House Democrats focused their resources on those challengers who could actually win seats in 1996, not futile challengers against safe Republican incumbents. Although Republicans out-raised Democrats \$63 million to \$21 million by June, 1996, Democrats were competitive in those races that made the difference in the 1996 campaign. For instance, the average House Democratic challenger spent \$319,472 in the 1996 campaign. But the 18 Democratic challengers who defeated Republican incumbents in 1996 spent an average of \$1,063,039. Democrats made gains in 1996 by focusing resources on those races they won instead of allowing them to be spent unwisely on unwinnable races or on incumbents from safe seats.

Conclusion

The events of the 104th Congress illustrated the extent to which House changed

¹⁵⁶ John E. Yang, “Democrats Espousing One for All and All for One in Drive to Reclaim the House,” Washington Post, 28 July 1996, p. A 10.

institutionally and electorally in the midst of extreme two-party competition. Both parties sought to alter their electoral strategies, governing strategies, and party cultures toward the goals of capturing a House majority in a competitive era. Although both parties failed in their fundamental political strategies, with Republicans failing to cement a long-term control of the House Democrats unsuccessful in their campaign to retake the majority, their strategies and actions in the 104th Congress and 1996 campaign illustrated the degree to which majority-forming precepts organized congressional action and behavior. A distinct Republican culture as a majority party emerged which pushed for a very ideological agenda in the House. House Democrats, meanwhile, confronted challenges and internal divisions as it attempted to attune its coalitional and heterogeneous characteristics to the centralized rhythm set by the Republican majority in the 1994 campaign and 104th Congress. House Democrats encountered great success in nationalizing the 1996 election on their Medicare and anti-Gingrich themes, emulating the Republican nationalization strategy of the 1994 campaign. Both parties, meanwhile, exhibited greater unity of purpose in terms of coordinating their efforts on the nuts and bolts of candidate recruitment and fund-raising.

Much like the Republican minority of the 103rd Congress, the Democratic minority of the 104th Congress focused efforts on opposing the majority party's legislative agenda and seeking to terminate it in the election through attack politics and the drawing of sharp partisan distinctions. House Republicans, meanwhile, placed a premium on remaining unified as a Republican legislative party in the 104th Congress to maintain their majority status. Additionally, Republican leaders used the committee system to lure candidates to boost the Republican majority, either through party switching or recruiting the best

candidates to win conservative seats. Through each of these actions and activities, the two parties became more distinct from one another as they attempted to become more united internally. The House as an institution continued to shift in the 104th Congress to the contours of two-party competition and majority-seeking activities by the two parties. In 1994, the Democratic legislative agenda became a train-wreck amidst Republican obstruction and opposition. In 1995 and 1996, the appropriations process in the House became a train wreck amidst both aggressive Democratic attack politics and Republican majority-retention efforts. Although both the 103rd and 104th Congresses produced several tangible legislative accomplishments, like NAFTA, deficit reduction, national service legislation, welfare reform, and farm policy overhaul, these achievements were overshadowed by the more partisan and aggressive fights for House control.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE 105th CONGRESS AND THE 1998 CAMPAIGN

The Triumph of the Race for the House, Institutionally and Electorally

The 105th Congress and the 1998 election witnessed continued dueling by the two parties for majority control. The war for House majorities continue to dominate congressional action, and witnessed both parties crafting legislative and electoral strategies designed to secure a House majority in the 1998 elections. In many respects, the 105th Congress was a bifurcated Congress between the bipartisan governance of 1997 and the extreme partisan caviling of 1998. In 1997, the Republican majority and the Clinton Administration negotiated a bipartisan deal to balance the budget by 2002 and provide the largest tax cut since 1981. In 1998, the two parties squared off in partisan confrontation as a sex and perjury scandal culminated in President Clinton's impeachment by the House of Representatives. Throughout 1998, the Republican majority focused its political and legislative resources on expanding its narrow majority in the 1998 midterm elections, while House Democrats focused their efforts on closing the ten-seat deficit that separated them from majority status. As the drive for House control by the two parties reached a crescendo in the 1998 election and the quagmire of impeachment, the competitive demands of the fight for majority control dominated the legislative and political contours of the House.

Nationalized campaigns by determined minority parties drove the dynamics of the 1994 and 1996 elections in the 103rd and 104th Congresses. In the 105th Congress, however, no large scale issues involving the budget, the economy, or health care emerged to provide either party with a strategic edge. An improving economy and a contented electorate

characterized the 105th Congress, and the nation at large remained tranquil politically and economically despite the storm of impeachment. The good economy flooded the Treasury with tax revenues. These new tax receipts, in conjunction with the tight spending caps of the budget deal of 1997, produced a balanced budget in 1998 that ended 29 years of deficit spending. The deficit fell to \$22 billion in fiscal year 1997, and a budget surplus of \$70 billion emerged in fiscal year 1998.¹ In addition, the Congressional Budget Office predicted surpluses surpassing \$1.6 trillion dollars over the next ten years.

Improving economic conditions and a balanced budget abated many of the social and economic problems that had plagued the United States for the previous 30 years.² Interest rates, the unemployment rate, and violent crime rates fell to their lowest levels in 25 years, while the number of welfare recipients dropped by 25%. Each of these improvements benefitted incumbents of both parties, and presented new challenges and opportunities as the legislative agenda in Washington shifted away from cutting the deficit and toward dealing with budget surpluses.³ In addition, the anti-incumbent sentiment of the 1990-1994 elections waned. President Clinton's approval ratings remained high throughout the 105th Congress, and Congress' approval rating even reached an unprecedented high of 68% in February,

¹ Andrew Taylor, "Hill Warms to Idea of Budget Surplus," Congressional Quarterly, 13 December 1997, p. 3058-59; David E. Sanger, "A Booming Economy Made It All Much Easier," New York Times, 2 May 1997, p. A 12.

² Clay Chandler, "After Decades of Deficits, Expectations of Surplus," Washington Post, 1 January 1998, p. A 1; Clay Chandler and John M. Berry, "What to Do With a Budget Surplus?," Washington Post, 17 March 1998, p. C 1.

³ "Much Ado About Nothing," The New Republic, 25 May 1998, p. 7.

1998.⁴

Despite this contentment in the country at large, the drive for majority control continued unabated by the two parties after the 1996 elections and throughout the 105th Congress.⁵ The Republican majority, which emerged with a narrow 10-seat majority in the 1996 elections, became obsessed with enlarging its slim majority in 1998. The Democratic minority, meanwhile, followed in the path of determined and aggressive attack politics it first launched in the 104th Congress with the Medicare and anti-Gingrich strategies. Minority House Democrats further emulated the tactics and strategies of minority House Republicans in the 103rd Congress, where obstruction of the majority party's rule and governance in the House became a virtue in itself. This jockeying for House control determined the fate of the 105th Congress, as the Republican majority played it safe in the hope of midterm gains and the Democratic minority aggressively pursued closing its own ten-seat deficit for majority control.

The two parties continued to move farther apart on political and policy issues throughout the 105th Congress as they increasingly played to their bases of support and sought to brighten party distinctions for strategic or tactical benefits in the 1998 election. In the 1998 elections, House Democrats defied history and gained five House seats in the second midterm of a Democratic presidency, pushing the already narrow Republican House majority of 228 down to 223. This Democratic gain emboldened House Democrats for a

⁴ Alison Mitchell, "House G.O.P. Content to Make Ripples," New York Times, 11 March 1998, p. A 14.

⁵ Charles E. Cook, "Partisan Frustrations Endanger Congress's Ability to Legislate," Roll Call, 23 June 1997, p. 10.

2000 takeover of the House, and forced House Republicans into an all-out-effort to save their decaying majority in the 106th Congress. As the 1990s came to an end, both parties focused their political and legislative resources on the fight for majority control, ensuring that the war for House control that began in 1994 would continue beyond the year 2000.

Intensely partisan national warfare for House control dominated the 1998 campaign, much like it had in the 1994 and 1996 nationalized elections for House control. The Republican majority launched an unified national advertising campaign for House seats, focused on a one-chamber strategy in the House to appeal to conservative base voters, and adopted a “recess strategy” to prevent controversy in the 1998 elections. House Democrats, meanwhile, eschewed the legislative process and governing with the Republican majority in order to sharpen party differences, attack the Republican majority, and focus campaign efforts on appealing to Democratic base voters. In addition, House Democratic leaders concentrated their electoral strategy on winning the critical open swing seats that would determine House control in 1998.⁶

Through this fight for majority control, both parties placed a premium on internal party cohesion, preferred conflict over compromise and governance between the two parties in the House, and focused political and legislative efforts on winning the critical swing and open seats. These trends, evident in the 103rd and 104th Congresses, became the defining features of the House of Representatives in 1998. The bipartisan compromise and

⁶ Rachel Van Dongen and John Mercurio, “Everything You Always Wanted to Know About House Open Seats,” Roll Call, 15 September 1997, p. A27-34; Charles E. Cook, “With No National Wave, Open Seats Will Decide Who Runs the House,” Roll Call, 22 September 1997, p. 6; Ceci Connolly, “Parties Look to Open Races for Their Greatest House Gains,” Washington Post, 25 October 1998, p. A 20.

governance that did occur in the 105th Congress, primarily the 1997 budget agreement, was a product of bipartisan negotiation between Republican congressional leaders and a legacy-minded Clinton White House. Much like the bipartisan legislative deals of 1996 between President Clinton and House Republicans, the 1997 budget deal provided gains to a Democratic presidency and Republican Congress while cutting out House Democrats, especially House Democratic liberals like Minority Leader Richard Gephardt (D-MO).

Throughout the 105th Congress, the narrow Republican majority was caught in the cross-hairs of two-party competition as it attempted to reconcile the needs of governing as a majority party while appealing to its conservative base itching for a partisan fight with Democrats. The Republican majority suffered several fractures as it searched for the best strategy to cement its tenuous House majority of 228 members. House Republicans encountered problems in governance throughout the 105th Congress, from their disastrous handling of the disaster relief bill in 1997, to a failed coup attempt against Speaker Gingrich by disgruntled conservative lawmakers, and finally to the breakdown of the budgetary process in 1998. Speaker Gingrich's resignation following the Republican loss of House seats in the midterm election, coupled with the negative fallout to Republicans emanating from their impeachment of President Clinton, created further cleavages and challenges as the razor thin Republican majority of 223 entered the 106th Congress. Following Gingrich's resignation, Appropriations Chairman Bob Livingston (R-LA) emerged as the Republican nominee for the speakership in the 106th Congress. After allegations of adultery surfaced in the midst of the impeachment process of December, 1998, Livingston abruptly resigned and House Republicans quickly rallied behind Chief Deputy Whip Dennis Hastert (R-IL) as the

new Republican nominee for speaker.

House Democratic leaders, like their Republican counterparts, pursued a course of action designed to produce a House majority in the 1998 elections. But the relative contentment of the electorate in the 105th Congress mitigated against employing a vigorous nationalized campaign. Instead, House Democrats pursued a seat-by-seat strategy designed to capture the most competitive open Republican seats. In the 104th Congress, House Democrats were disorganized after losing their majority in 1994, and confronted further setbacks in 1996 with the large number of Democratic retirements. In the 105th Congress, House Democrats enjoyed the victory of gaining nine House seats in the 1996 election and the further narrowing of the Republican majority. In the 104th Congress, House Democrats pursued a nationalized campaign strategy based on Medicare and anti-Gingrich themes. Unlike the 104th Congress, however, the Democratic minority of the 105th Congress pursued a localized strategy which focused on targeting and winning the critical open competitive seats that would determine majority control in 1998. This seat-by-seat strategy required the investment of time by Democratic leaders in recruiting quality candidates and teaching these candidates how to raise the funds needed to win their elections. This focus on individual seats coincided with Democratic efforts to silently motivate the Democratic base and boost the turnout of key Democratic constituencies.⁷ In the 1998 election, a Republican air war encountered a Democratic ground campaign, and the Democratic ground war won.

The Democratic gain of five seats in 1998 marked the first time since 1934 that a

⁷ Stuart Rothenberg, "The Interest Groups' Game Plan: How They Plan to Mobilize the Base in 1998," Roll Call Politics, 13 November 1997, p. 13.

president's party picked up seats in a midterm election, and the first time since 1822 that a president's party picked up seats in the second midterm election of a presidency. As illustrated in Table 4-1, between 1946 and 1994 the party controlling the White House lost House seats in every midterm election. The largest losses for a president's party has occurred in the second midterm election as part of a "six-year-itch" scenario, although the Democratic loss of 52 House seats in the first midterm election of the Clinton presidency represents the largest loss of House seats in a midterm election since 1942. The historical legacy of midterm elections figured prominently in the campaign strategies of the two parties in the 105th Congress.

Table 4-1: Midterm Election Results, 1946-1998

Year	President	Party	House Seats
1946	Truman	Democrat	-45
1950	Truman	Democrat	-29
1954	Eisenhower	Republican	-18
1958	Eisenhower	Republican	-48
1962	Kennedy	Democrat	-4
1966	Johnson	Democrat	-47
1970	Nixon	Republican	-12
1974	Ford	Republican	-48
1978	Carter	Democrat	-15
1982	Reagan	Republican	-26
1986	Reagan	Republican	-5
1990	Bush	Republican	-8
1994	Clinton	Democrat	-52
1998	Clinton	Democrat	+5

Both parties pursued radically different strategies to minimize or capitalize on the history of the “six-year-itch,” and formulated strategies designed to secure a majority in 1998. But a key divergence from history provided both parties with a new political dynamic. Unlike previous presidencies, Clinton had lived a “reverse” presidency, beginning his presidency with low popularity, and progressively becoming more popular. As Clinton became more popular in the 104th and 105th Congresses, House Democratic incumbents and candidates performed progressively better in their own elections. House Republican leaders, meanwhile, banked on the “inevitable” six-year itch in their electoral strategy to boost their majority in 1998, especially in the midst of the Monica Lewinsky sex and perjury scandal.

Although important from a political and historical viewpoint, the Democratic gain of House seats in the 1998 midterm obscures the larger and more important development of the diversion of party efforts in the House away from the governing process and towards an intense focus on gaining a House majority in a competitive two-party environment. During the 103rd-105th Congresses, the fight for majority status became the defining motivator of congressional action. The Democratic minority of the 105th Congress conducted itself as a successful minority party seeking the majority, much like the Republican minority of the 103rd Congress and the Democratic minority of the 104th Congress. Like the Republican minority of the 103rd Congress, the Democratic minority of the 105th focused its efforts on electing Democrats to the House and undermining the political and legislative strategies of the majority party. But unlike the Republican minority of 1994 and the Democratic minority of 1996, each of which pursued nationalized strategies to gain House seats, the Democratic minority of 1998 pursued a different strategy which eschewed a nationalization strategy in

lieu of grabbing open Republican seats and defeating marginal Republican incumbents.

Through these actions, Democrats hoped to cobble together a narrow Democratic majority in the 106th Congress. Although Democratic strategy deviated in 1998 from the nationalized norms of 1994 and 1996, the permanent campaigning for House majorities by both parties continued to dominate the House politically. This unceasing war for House majorities conducted by both parties in the 103rd-105th Congresses illustrated the triumph of majority-seeking behavior by the two parties as the driving force in House politics in the 1990s. The House Democratic focus on campaigning for a House majority in the 105th Congress at the expense of governing and legislating paid off. House Democrats defeated five Republican incumbents and captured six open Republican seats, while House Republicans defeated only one Democratic incumbent and captured five open Democratic seats. 1998 represented the first Democratic net gain of open seats since 1990, and the lowest number of Democratic incumbent defeats since 1986. Eight of the 11 previously Republican House seats gained by Democrats in 1998 were competitive swing seats. The Democratic gains of 1998 placed House Democrats within six seats of majority control for the 2000 campaign.

House Republicans, meanwhile, were presented with ominous signs that their fragile House majority would become non-existent in 2000, only six years after their historic victory in 1994. In 1992 and 1994, Republican attack politics and farm team efforts defeated a net 42 Democratic incumbents and provided a net gain of 21 open seats, as illustrated in Table 4-2.

Table 4-2: House Seats That Changed Party, 1990-1998

Year	Total Changes	Incumbent Defeated: D→R	Incumbent Defeated: R→D	Open Seat: D→R	Open Seat: R→D	Party Seat Gain
1990	21	6	9	0	6	+9 D
1992	43	16	8	11	8	+10 R
1994	60	34	0	22	4	+52 R
1996	35	3	18	10	4	+9 D
1998	17	1	5	5	6	+5 D
Total	176	60	40	48	28	+39 R

These large gains fueled the Republican surge to majority status in 1994. In the 1994-1998 period, however, House Republicans only defeated four Democratic incumbents and gained a net of five open seats. In that same period, House Democratic attack politics defeated 23 Republican incumbents and produced a net gain of one open seat in 1998. In the 104th and 105th Congresses, House Democrats honed their message, tactics, and strategies to the goal of capturing the House, primarily through focusing resources on capturing open Republican seats and the competitive swing seats while minimizing Democratic incumbent defeats. The Republican majority, meanwhile, vigorously defended its majority status by bending the political and legislative resources of the House to the goal of increased Republican gains in the 1998 election.

GOVERNING

The Republican Recess Strategy

Republican House leaders crafted a governing agenda for 1997, and then focused on campaigning to increase the Republican House majority in 1998. In the 104th Congress,

House Republicans confronted President Clinton in 1995 and then cooperated with him in 1996. In the 105th Congress, just the opposite occurred. House Republican leaders initially governed in a bipartisan fashion with President Clinton to negotiate the Balanced Budget Act and the Taxpayer Relief Act in 1997. They then engaged in a partisan strategy in 1998 to gain Republican House seats by attacking President Clinton on a wide variety of administration scandals, from the Monica Lewinsky affair to the campaign finance abuses of the 1996 campaign to allegations of Chinese espionage. House Republican leaders launched the impeachment process against Clinton, and attacked House Democrats for their collusion in defending Clinton Administration scandals.

In 1997, the Republican majority joined the Clinton Administration in brokering two pieces of legislation to both balance the budget by 2002 while simultaneously providing \$95 billion in tax relief. The Taxpayer Relief Act of 1997 (TRA) provided \$275 billion in tax relief over a ten-year period through \$500-per child tax credit, expansion of IRA opportunities, and the lowering of estate and capital gains taxes. The Balanced Budget Act of 1997 (BBA) balanced the budget over five years by placing strict caps on federal domestic spending between 1997 and 2002, which trimmed \$263 billion in domestic spending including \$115 in Medicare reductions.⁸ The BBA and TRA, dubbed “The Incumbent Protection Acts,” allowed the Clinton Administration and the Republican Congress to both govern together and take credit for the good economy and budget surpluses of the late 1990s.

Despite the pro-incumbent mood of the 105th Congress, however, the narrow

⁸ Alison Mitchell, “Return of Partisanship to Capitol Hill,” New York Times, 14 November 1997, p. A 1.

Republican majority confronted several problems in governing as it became squeezed between the duties of governing with a slim majority while protecting its small majority of 228 in the upcoming competitive midterm election.⁹ The Republican majority faced a quandary in governing throughout the 105th Congress as it attempted to govern in a manner that satisfied the more confrontational conservatives in the Republican Conference while also attracting enough moderate Republican and Democratic support to pass bills on the House floor.¹⁰ Frequently, these competing demands overloaded the capabilities of the Republican's ten-seat majority. Confronted with this situation, Republican House leaders in 1998 crafted a recess strategy designed to keep House Republicans in their districts to campaign for re-election, thus helping to keep incumbent defeats low, and to avoid the messy consequences of governing with a ten-seat majority whose moderate and social conservative wings often collided on process, policy, and politics.¹¹ Republican leaders kept Congress in session only 89 days in 1998, one-third fewer than usual and down from the previous low of 119 days in 1956. After the passage of the balanced budget agreement in August of 1997, Republican House leaders believed that no further legislative accomplishments were really necessary to improve Republican electoral fortunes in 1998. They also believed that further

⁹ House Republicans won 227 seats in the 1996 elections. In May of 1997, the Republican majority added an additional seat when Republican Bill Redmond captured the Third District of New Mexico in a special election, after incumbent Representative Bill Richardson (D-NM) was named Ambassador to the United Nations.

¹⁰ Jeffrey L. Katz, "DeLay: A Pugilist Discovers the Demands of Governing," Congressional Quarterly, 4 July 1998, pp. 1827-30.

¹¹ Richard E. Cohen and Alexis Simendinger, "Gone Fishin'," National Journal, 7 March 1998, pp. 500-504; "Inactive Congress Just Playing It Safe," USA Today, 6 July 1998, p. A 9.

attempts to pass large ticket legislative items would divide the tenuous Republican majority and only provide House Democrats with an angle to launch negative attacks.¹²

These fears were justified. At the end of the 103rd Congress, the ambitious Democratic proposal to pass universal health care reform floundered amidst a divided Democratic Caucus in the House. This defeat splintered the even larger Democratic majority of 256 and provided the Republican minority with a perfect opportunity to attack all House Democratic House candidates in the 1994 midterm election. To prevent the nightmare precedent of the health care reform fight of 1994, the Republican recess strategy insured no major legislation would pass in 1998 beyond must-pass appropriations legislation. Instead of legislating, Republicans would campaign. Instead of risking their majority on a potential legislative minefield on the House floor in 1998, Republicans chose to take their fight into the country and battle for an even larger Republican majority for future legislative victories in the 106th or 107th Congresses.¹³

House Republican leaders believed that the Balanced Budget Act and Taxpayer Relief Act of 1997, in conjunction with the welfare reform law of 1996, would be sufficient to satisfy their conservative base voters and thereby expand the Republican House majority in 1998.¹⁴ One senior House Republican defined the Republican governing strategy of 1998

¹² Paul Gigot, "GOP Heaven: No Agenda, No Problem!," Wall Street Journal, 13 March 1998, p. A 16.

¹³ Helen Dewar and Juliet Eilperin, "105th Congress Runs in Place in Pursuit of Campaign Goals," Washington Post, 9 August 1998, p. A 4.

¹⁴ "GOP to Define Itself for Voters," Washington Post, 15 July 1998, p. A8; Charles E. Cook, "Balanced Budget May Be Incumbent's Hero for the 1998 Election," Roll Call, 11 December 1997, p. 6.

by stating:

Our plan is to pass a balanced budget that sticks to the spending caps, vote on the key bills in our agenda, draw a few lines in the sand to sharpen our differences with the Democrats, but to do as little as possible beyond that. Then we go home early to campaign, and pick up more seats in the fall so we can come back in a stronger position to fight for bigger reforms next year.

Not every House Republican was convinced of the wisdom of the recess strategy. Representative Mark Foley (R-FL), for instance, derided the recess strategy by stating “I don’t want to be a part-time U.S. Airways attendant --which I feel like going back and forth to come up for two or three votes.”¹⁵ But the allure of the recess strategy increased among House Republicans as the 105th Congress progressed. Public approval of the Congress improved whenever it was out of session in the 105th Congress. The booming economy played a large role in the public’s appetite for limited government action and even more limited action by Congress in the 105th Congress, mirroring the era of President Calvin Coolidge in the 1920s and President Dwight Eisenhower in the 1950s.¹⁶ Representative Joe Scarborough (R-FL) captured the increasing success of the Republican recess strategy when he stated, “You look at the polls and you can’t really argue. We’ve decided to sit on our lead.”¹⁷

The Republican recess strategy and drive for re-election in 1998 insured few

¹⁵ Jeffrey Katz, “Productivity Likely to be Low as GOP Sets Slow Pace,” Congressional Quarterly, 7 March 1998, p. 531.

¹⁶ “105th Congress May be Stuck with ‘Do-Nothing’ Tag,” Roll Call, 9 July 1998, p. 1; George F. Will, “In Praise of Inactivity,” Newsweek, 22 June 1998, p. 90.

¹⁷ Helen Dewar and Guy Gugliotta, “Recess Strategy Working for Congress,” Washington Post 16 March 1998, p. A 19.

legislative accomplishments in the 105th Congress beyond the bipartisan budget deal with President Clinton in 1997. The meager legislative accomplishments of 1998 included renaming Washington National Airport after former President Ronald Reagan and enacting a massive six-year \$217 billion highway re-authorization bill that increased highway spending by 40%. The six-year highway bill (BESTEA) contained a record 1,467 “demonstration projects” - pure pork for incumbents - compared to 539 similar projects in the 1991 highway bill passed by the Democratic House majority. Republicans also passed into law legislation to reform the unpopular Internal Revenue Service, which had been plagued with stories of mis-management and bureaucratic mis-rule throughout 1997 and 1998.

As Republican leaders ran out the clock waiting for an enlarged Republican House majority in the 1998 midterm election, they turned off the legislative process in the House in terms of trying to pass major pieces of legislation into law. This strategy not only minimized the likelihood of legislative accomplishments in 1998, but also hampered the mandatory appropriations process. The inability to deal effectively with the budget and appropriations process in 1998 later undermined the Republican majority during budget negotiations in the fall as the midterm election loomed. In the 103rd Congress, Democratic House leaders shut down the legislative process to conservative policy proposals pushed by the Republican minority and conservative House Democrats. In the 105th Congress, Republican House leaders pursued a similar strategy to prevent the passage of any agenda, Democratic or Republican. Re-electing the Republican House majority, not passing legislation, became the driving passion of Republican leaders in 1998.

While Republican House leaders turned off the spigot of legislation in 1998, they simultaneously turned up their legislative and political efforts to appeal to their conservative base. Republican leaders and members adopted a more confrontational stance with the Clinton Administration on the campaign finance scandal and the sex and perjury accusations of the Monica Lewinsky scandal, unleashing ten House committees and subcommittees to pursue various Clinton Administration scandals.¹⁸ Republican leaders also devoted their efforts on the House floor to passing legislation that appealed to social conservatives and the business community, but would never overcome Democratic filibusters in the Senate or President Clinton's veto. As the Monica Lewinsky scandal further eroded Clinton's credibility with Republican House members, Republican House leaders killed the ambitious Democratic domestic agenda for 1998 through inaction, delay, or outright defeat on the House floor.¹⁹

While partisan caviling between the two parties dominated each legislative day in 1998, no clear Republican agenda emerged to capture public attention. Instead, public attention focused on the issues being actively pushed by President Clinton and House Democrats in the country at large, including managed care reform, campaign finance reform, a \$516 billion anti-tobacco bill, and the numerous expansions of federal domestic programs

¹⁸ Jackie Koszczuk, "House GOP Casts a Wide Net In Renewed Scandal Hunt," Congressional Quarterly, 17 January 1998, pp. 111-114.

¹⁹ Jeffrey L. Katz and Dan Carney, "Clinton's Latest, Worst Troubles Put His Whole Agenda on Hold," Congressional Quarterly, 24 January 1998, pp. 164-65; Paul A. Gigot, "Win a Case, But Lose a Presidency," Wall Street Journal, 3 April 1998; Paul A. Gigot, "Scandal's Price: GOP Chops Up Bill's Agenda," Wall Street Journal, 1 May 1998, p. A 14.

proposed by the Clinton budget. Republican House leaders firmly believed that enactment of any of these agenda items would harm the Republican majority's hold on power. In the 103rd Congress, Democratic House leaders similarly blocked term limits, congressional reform, and domestic spending cuts on the House floor for fear of its deleterious effect on the Democratic majority's grasp on power in the short and long term.

The efforts by the Republican leadership to kill campaign finance reform in the 105th Congress illustrates the degree to which the Republican majority exercised procedural prerogatives on the House floor in order to protect their slim majority in the 1998 elections and in future elections. House Republican leaders believed that the soft money ban contained in the campaign finance reform proposal of Representatives Chris Shays (R-CT) and Martin Meehan (D-MA) would kill the Republican party's grip on power, especially its majority status in the House.²⁰ In 1996, Democratic soft money advertising from the labor unions and the Clinton-Gore campaign almost hammered the Republican majority into extinction, contributing to the defeat of 18 Republican incumbents. Republicans swept every major office in the 1997 off-year elections using their soft money advantages, which allowed the party to unleash unlimited advertising on behalf of its gubernatorial and House candidates. Republican leaders planned to use overwhelming soft money advantages in 1998 to increase their narrow majority and regain some of the seats they lost in the 1996 election.

But first, they had to prevent the passage of the soft money ban of the Shays-Meehan

²⁰ "The Plot to Bury Reform," New York Times, 30 March 1998, p. A 16; Amy Keller, "Campaign Finance Reformers Frustrated," Roll Call, 18 June 1998, p. 1.

campaign finance reform bill or any other campaign finance legislation. Republican leaders used their procedural powers both on the House floor and in the House Rules Committee to stall and delay not only the Shays-Meehan proposal, but any campaign finance reform proposal. On March 30, 1998, Republican leaders sabotaged the Shays-Meehan proposal by bringing to the House floor, under suspension of the rules, a comprehensive campaign finance reform bill unacceptable to campaign finance reformers.²¹ Only non-controversial legislation can pass on the House floor under suspension, since it requires a two-thirds vote for passage, prohibits any amendments, and limits floor debate.²² Predictably, this campaign finance overhaul legislation failed, 74-337.

Following this defeat, 12 moderate Republicans joined a unified House Democratic Caucus to bring the Shays-Meehan proposal to floor using a discharge petition. This discharge petition effort by House Democrats in the 105th Congress mirrored similar tactics used by House Republicans and conservative Democrats in the 103rd Congress to bypass Democratic House leaders and enact stricter deficit reduction through the “A-to-Z” proposal. As Republican leaders faced the very real prospect of losing control of the floor debate on campaign finance reform due to growing support within the House for a discharge petition for campaign finance reform, Speaker Gingrich relented and agreed to a wide-open debate on campaign finance reform. But Republican leaders once again structured the process to prevent any substantive change in campaign finance reform laws in the 105th Congress by

²¹ Amy Keller and Jim VandeHei, “Shays Rebellion Irks Gingrich, Sparks Campaign Reform War,” Roll Call, 30 March 1998, p. 1.

²² Jeffrey L. Katz, “All-But-Doomed Overhaul Bill Meets Its Expected End,” Congressional Quarterly, 4 April 1998, p. 863.

granting an open rule for campaign finance reform debate, and forcing the Shays-Meehan legislation to compete with ten additional substitute proposals.²³ Majority Whip Tom DeLay (R-TX), meanwhile, formed a “free speech coalition” of Republican members opposed to campaign finance reform, and spearheaded efforts on the House floor to undermine Shays-Meehan through an endless amending procedure in the summer of 1998. An unprecedented 600 amendments were filed to the competing 11 substitutes, forcing endless debate on each amendment throughout the summer and insuring no major campaign finance reform would be enacted into law in the 105th Congress.²⁴

Although not focused on legislative accomplishments in 1998, Republican leaders passed several items of legislation in the House designed to energize the Republican base for the 1998 elections.²⁵ The Republican base became de-energized in 1998, with prominent social conservative leaders like Dr. James Dobson expressing public disappointment with the lack of progress on conservative policy priorities by the Republican Congress since the zenith of the Contract With America in 1995.²⁶ To gin up apathetic social conservatives and

²³ Jeffrey L. Katz, “Dueling Campaign Finance Bills Threaten Overhaul’s Chances,” Congressional Quarterly, 16 May 1998, pp. 1283-89.

²⁴ Jeffrey L. Katz, “Supporters of Campaign Finance Overhaul Grow Wary as House GOP Leaders Signal a Summer of Protracted Debate,” Congressional Quarterly, 23 May 1998, p. 1379.

²⁵ Jerry Gray, “Gingrich Tries to Deflect Charges, But Christian Coalition Attacks,” New York Times, 7 March 1997, p. A 1; Norah M. O’Donnell, “Dobson’s Choice,” Roll Call, 14 May 1998, pp. 17-28; Thomas B. Edsall and Ceci Connolly, “A Gaping GOP Rift,” Washington Post, 27 March 1998, p. A 1.

²⁶ John Harwood, “Control of the House Rests on Local Fights, Not Big Themes,” Wall Street Journal, 9 June 1998, p. A 20; Peter Stone, “Family Feud,” National Journal, 2 May 1998, p. 986; Charles E. Cook, “Both Parties Are Missing ‘Bold Colors to Appeal

spur the corporate community to flood Republican campaign coffers with contributions, Republican leaders used their control of the House floor to pass conservative legislative priorities in the House in order to draw the sharp distinctions with Democrats.²⁷ For instance, conservative policy riders were once again attached to the annual appropriations bills, as in the 104th Congress, despite the fact that these riders drew immediate White House veto threats and threatened another government shutdown in the fall.²⁸

The Republican majority also passed several bills in the House they knew would never be enacted into law, but which provided important cues to their base, including a partial-birth abortion ban, termination of the Internal Revenue Code, education savings accounts, bankruptcy reform, and the elimination of the marriage penalty tax.²⁹ Additionally, Speaker Gingrich proposed using part of the budget surplus for a \$1 trillion tax cut over ten

to Their Base in 1998," Roll Call, 17 November 1997, p. 8; William Schneider, "What Else Do They Want?," National Journal, 16 May 1998, p. 1150.

²⁷ Alison Mitchell, "Fretting Over Grip on House, G.O.P. Courts Conservatives," New York Times, 9 May 1998, p. A 1; Dan Balz and Juliet Eilperin, "Gingrich Attacks Energize the GOP, But Worry It, Too," Washington Post, 10 May 1998, p. A 1; Charles Cook, "Gingrich Serves Up Red Meat as Recipe For November Votes," Roll Call, 7 May 1998, p. 8; Jim VandeHei, "GOP Leaders Rev Up Campaign: Concern About Majority Prompts House Actions," Roll Call, 4 May 1998, p. 1; David Hosansky, "The GOP's House Divided: Social Activists vs. Business," Congressional Quarterly, 30 May 1998, pp. 1447-48.

²⁸ Carroll J. Doherty, "Lots of Inertia, Little Lawmaking as Election '98 Approaches," Congressional Quarterly, 18 July 1998, p. 1925; Andrew Taylor, "Despite the Ominous Rumbles, Another Train Wreck Looks Unlikely," Congressional Quarterly, 22 August 1998, p. 2271.

²⁹ Thomas B. Edsall, "GOP's Agenda Pleases Backers," Washington Post, 19 July 1998, p. A 6; Carroll J. Doherty, "Lots of Inertia, Little Lawmaking as Election '98 Approaches," Congressional Quarterly, 18 July 1998, pp. 1925-27.

years to further cut the capital gains rate to 15%, phase out the marriage penalty tax, and repeal the 1993 Clinton tax increase on Social Security beneficiaries.³⁰ Through these actions, House Republican leaders pursued a one-chamber strategy designed to energize conservative voters and make them excited about what an enlarged Republican House majority could enact in the 106th Congress, rather than focusing on producing legislation that both chambers of Congress could pass and send to the president to be enacted into law in the 105th Congress. Representative Charles Canady (R-FL) reflected on the Republican base voter strategy by stating “There’s no question that we’ll sometimes bring up proposals we know are unlikely to succeed but that reflect the principles to which we’re committed.”³¹ Representative John Linder (R-GA) justified this strategy by stating “We’ve got to energize our base by going back to the issues that define our party. We don’t have to have the win, but let’s have the fight.”³²

The fiscal year 1999 House budget resolution is a perfect example of this Republican strategy of bringing up proposals that would never survive Senate filibuster or Clinton’s veto pen, but which defined the party in a positive manner for conservative base voters. House Republican leaders and Republican conservatives used the budget resolution, normally used to provide important signals to House and Senate appropriators regarding spending priorities

³⁰ Andrew Taylor, “Republicans Set Their Sights on Further Reduction in Capital Gains Tax Rate,” Congressional Quarterly, 27 June 1998, p. 1750; Gerald F. Seib, “Trillion Dollars: Enough to Start a Great Debate,” Wall Street Journal, 22 July 1998.

³¹ Edwin Chen, “Lawmakers Target Core Supporters With Pre-Election Agendas,” Los Angeles Times, 19 May 1998, p. A 5.

³² Helen Dewar, “GOP Turns to Confrontation to Rally Party Faithful for 1998 Vote,” Washington Post, 17 May 1998, p. A 4.

for the next fiscal year, as a campaign document to sharpen party distinctions in the same manner as the Contract With America in 1994. Several House Republican conservatives, most prominently the 40-member Conservative Action Team (CATS), warned that Republicans could not win in the 1998 elections running solely on the coattails of the 1997 budget agreement. Representative David McIntosh (R-IN), leader of the CATS, repeatedly urged the Republican House leadership and the Republican Conference to advocate a more aggressive agenda that pushed the issues driving conservative base voters, including additional tax cuts, cutting federal discretionary spending further, and eliminating several federal agencies like the Departments of Commerce and Education.³³ In 1994, House Republicans gained 52 seats pushing similar anti-tax and anti-government spending themes, which energized the Republican base. To many House Republican conservatives, the recess strategy of the 105th Congress, itself a product of the government shutdowns and the failed effort to enact the 1995 Republican budget plan, laid the groundwork for disaster in 1998.

Responding to these concerns, House Budget Committee Chairman John Kasich (R-OH) developed a fiscal year 1999 budget resolution that cut spending and taxes far deeper than the 1997 budget accord. This budget proposal contained \$154 billion in additional domestic spending reductions over five years, while eliminating the marriage penalty tax at a cost of \$100 billion over five years. Prominent social conservatives, especially Focus on the Family President James Dobson, had demanded the elimination of the marriage penalty

³³ Alison Mitchell, "House Republicans Battle Over Beliefs and What They Mean to Budget," New York Times, 17 May 1998, p. A 23; Ethan Wallison and John Bresnahan, "Conservatives: GOP Can Win Shutdown Fight," Roll Call, 10 August 1998, p. 1.

tax in return for their support of Republican candidates in the 1998 elections.³⁴ The Kasich budget attempted to revive the aggressive strategies that brought the GOP to majority status in the House in 1994, especially the anti-tax and anti-deficit themes of the 1994 nationalized campaign and the Contract With America.³⁵

To pay for the marriage penalty tax cut, the Kasich budget proposed billions of dollars in politically unfeasible domestic cuts, including the elimination of the Departments of Commerce and Energy and cuts in Amtrack, Medicare, job training, public broadcasting, food stamps, and entitlement programs for the poor.³⁶ House Republican leaders and members knew the austere Kasich budget proposal could never be enacted into law over the objections of President Clinton, Senate Democrats, and Senate Republican moderates.³⁷ House Appropriations Committee Chairman Bob Livingston (R-LA) called the Kasich budget “la-la land,” while the Republican Senate ignored the Kasich budget plan and passed a fiscal year 1999 budget resolution based on the 1997 budget agreement.³⁸ Similar proposals to cut spending and eliminate government agencies in 1995 sparked the two

³⁴ Michael J. Gerson, “A Righteous Indignation,” U.S. News & World Report, 4 May 1998, pp. 20-29. The marriage penalty caused over 20 million married couples to pay an average of \$1,400 in federal income taxes than if they were single and living together.

³⁵ “What’s a Majority For?,” Wall Street Journal, 28 April 1998, p. A 18.

³⁶ Andrew Taylor, “Kasich Drops Specific Cuts After Appropriators, Senate Flay His \$100 Billion Plan,” Congressional Quarterly, 16 May 1998, pp. 1292-93.

³⁷ Richard W. Stevenson, “House Approves Budget With Deeper Cuts In Spending and Taxes Than in 1997 Deal,” New York Times, 6 June 1998.

³⁸ Jonathan Weisman, “Budget Conflict in the House Cold Split GOP,” Baltimore Sun, 18 May 1998; Andrew Taylor, “Authorizers Balk at Herculean Task Of Finding Kasich His Savings,” Congressional Quarterly, 6 June 1998, p. 1516.

government shutdowns and laid the groundwork for the Democratic nationalized campaign on Medicare, Medicaid, the environment, and education. These fierce Democratic “MMEE” attacks almost cost the Republicans their House majority in 1996 as public opinion swayed against the “Republican Revolution” of 1995.

Despite these potential pitfalls, however, House Republican leaders used their procedural and political powers in the House to pass the Kasich budget resolution to give a taste to conservative base voters of what an expanded Republican majority in the 106th Congress (1999-2000) could pass into law. Passing the conservative Kasich budget resolution, over moderate House Republican and Democratic objections, became a key battle for House Republican leaders in the fight for the House in 1998. If passed, the Kasich budget resolution could be used as an important prop for Republican House candidates to appeal to conservative base voters in the Republican coalition. A defeat, on the other hand, would be extremely embarrassing, provide Democrats an avenue for attack, and illustrate to conservative base voters that the Republican majority elected in 1994 on clear conservative principles had become indistinguishable from the liberal Democratic majority it replaced.

House Republicans not only used their procedural powers to score political points against the Democratic budget proposal, but also undercut its usefulness on the House floor and on the campaign trail as a viable alternative to Republican budget policies. To insure the victory of their budget resolution on the House floor, Republican leaders stacked the procedural deck against the competing budget resolutions. They did not permit the Blue Dog budget resolution as a competing substitute, which closely followed the 1997 budget agreement, for fear it might pass. They also undermined the Democratic budget resolution,

based on President Clinton's proposed 1999 budget, by first forcing all House members to approve its 36 new user fees and taxes in a separate vote. The Democratic budget relied heavily on the \$128 billion in new revenue emanating from these proposed taxes and fees to both pay for new domestic spending and keep the budget in balance. When the House unanimously rejected these new taxes and user fees, the Democratic budget substitute suddenly "unbalanced" the balanced budget and quickly lost support from deficit-conscious House Democrats. Through heavy pressure on the floor, House Republicans passed their fiscal year 1999 budget resolution on June 5, 1998 by a vote of 216-204. Despite this victory, a House-Senate conference budget resolution never materialized in 1998 and the fiscal 1999 House budget resolution became a campaign document for conservative Republicans in the 1998 campaign instead of actually driving budget policy in a new era of budget surpluses.³⁹

The recess strategy, combined with the inability to pass a conference budget resolution to a budget blueprint for appropriators, delayed the start of the appropriations process in the summer of 1998. This delayed passage of the 13 must-pass appropriations bills as a new fiscal year, and the threat of a government shutdown, loomed in the fall of 1998. The Republican Congress raced toward the October 1st deadline for the new fiscal year, and the November 3rd midterm election, bereft of a compelling and winning agenda for the budget and legislative process, much less for the campaign trail. To avoid another politically damaging government shutdown, Republican leaders negotiated a major omnibus

³⁹ Andrew Taylor, "House Budget Resolution Wins Passage But No Real Vote of GOP Confidence," Congressional Quarterly, 6 June 1998, p. 1515.

spending bill with President Clinton and congressional Democratic leaders at the end of the 105th Congress. The omnibus bill gave President Clinton all of the leverage in the budget negotiations, because his signature was needed not only to pass the bill but also to avoid another government shutdowns as the Congress limped from one temporary spending measure to another. As in the 104th Congress with the government shutdowns and the “get-out-of-town-money,” Republican leaders relented in budget negotiations and provided President Clinton and congressional Democrats much of what they asked for in order to wrap up budget talks and adjourn Congress for the fall campaign.

House Republican leaders capitulated on nearly every item in the omnibus bill important to its conservative base. The \$500 billion omnibus appropriations bill provided funding for nearly half the federal government, including 10 Cabinet departments and several federal agencies whose fiscal 1999 appropriations bills were never enacted in 1998.⁴⁰ House Republican leaders abandoned the \$80 billion tax cut passed by the House in September, funded President Clinton’s request of \$18 billion to replenish the International Monetary Fund, provided \$1.1 billion in new education spending demanded by Democrats, and provided \$6 billion in aid to farmers proposed by congressional Democrats.⁴¹ The budget agreement tapped \$20 billion of the federal budget surplus for “emergency” defense and

⁴⁰ Carroll J. Doherty, “Riding the Omnibus Off Into the Sunset,” Congressional Quarterly, 17 October 1998, pp. 2794-96; Andrew Taylor, “Congress Wraps Up and Heads Home on a Trail of Broken Budget Caps,” Congressional Quarterly, 24 October 1998, pp. 2885-89; George Hager and Charles R. Babcock, “President Signs Budget Bill,” Washington Post, 22 October 1998, p. A 1.

⁴¹ Andrew Taylor, “Clinton Gains Ground in Struggle Over Catchall Spending Bill,” Congressional Quarterly, 10 October 1998, pp. 2723-26.

domestic spending, undermined the tight budget caps of the 1997 budget deal, and unleashed a bipartisan orgy of pork-barrel spending.⁴²

Each of these developments further depressed an already listless conservative Republican base, and successfully shifted the legislative agenda away from the looming impeachment process confronting President Clinton and toward the problems and divisions confronting the Republican majority. The omnibus budget of 1998, which provided important victories to Democrats while few tangible victories for Republicans, became an electoral albatross to Republican campaigns in 1998 and became one of several of a long litany of complaints against the Republican Congress by the Republican base. Much like the Democratic majority of the 103rd Congress and the Republican majority of the 104th Congress, the Republican majority ended the 105th Congress without controlling the debate or agenda driving the fall campaigns. Like the majorities of the 103rd and 104th Congresses, the Republican majority of the 105th Congress also lost House seats in the fall elections.

Democrats on the Attack

Throughout the 105th Congress, House Democrats focused their efforts on attacking the Republican majority and honing their own message and agenda for the 1998 election. Through these efforts, the Democratic minority successfully employed the strategy of the Republican minority of the 103rd Congress, eschewing the governing process in order to concentrate its appeals to the Democratic base. House Democratic leaders focused their efforts on painting the Republican majority as too extreme for the pivotal swing districts and

⁴² Robert Novak, "Clinton Wins Big as GOP Caves In," Chicago Sun-Times, 15 October 1998.

sharpening partisan differences for the liberal Democratic base.⁴³ On key issues that worked to the advantage of House Democrats, like education, House Democratic leaders did not want legislation passed that would undermine Democratic attacks on Republicans in the fall campaign. Inaction on the Democratic issue agenda served House Democratic purposes of retaking the House in 1998, much like it had for the Republican majority at the end of the 103rd Congress.

House Democrats once again confronted divided government and the triangulation strategy of the Clinton presidency in the 105th Congress, just as they did in the 104th Congress. In 1998, however, the governing strategies of House Democrats to retake the House became intricately linked with the political strategies of President Clinton, unlike the 103rd and 104th Congresses where determined minority parties battled for a House majority without the benefit of the presidency. In 1997, Democrats were often at odds with the Clinton Administration on the balanced budget, tax cuts, and fast-track trade authority. The Republican recess strategy of 1998, combined with the swirl of impeachment hounding President Clinton, united House Democrats and President Clinton around their unified agenda of 1998. This agenda involved “quality of life” issues of managed care reform, protecting Social Security, boosting federal spending on education, and environmental protection.⁴⁴

Through this agenda, House Democrats appealed to both their liberal base, and

⁴³ Charles E. Cook, “Partisan Frustrations Endanger Congress’s Ability to Legislate,” Roll Call, 23 June 1997, p. 10.

⁴⁴ John Harwood and Jackie Calmes, “Election Politics 101: Impeachment Isn’t a Winning Agenda,” Wall Street Journal, 5 November 1998, p. A 1.

wooed critical swing suburban voters, by attacking House Republicans for ignoring issues of concern to ordinary Americans, like managed care reform. In the 103rd Congress, the Republican minority used tax and budget issues both to attack House Democrats and rile the conservative Republican base. In the 104th Congress, House Democrats energized their liberal base through defense of the welfare state and attacks on Gingrich. In the 105th Congress, the Democratic minority adopted a similar strategy of appealing to their liberal base through attacks on the policy and political decisions of the Republican majority. The Democratic issue agenda of 1998 and attacks on the Republican impeachment effort against President Clinton mirrored the successful Republican effort to highlight the House Bank scandal in the 102nd Congress, the Republican attacks on the Democratic budget and health proposals in the 103rd Congress, and the Democratic “get-Newt” strategy of the 104th Congress. In each instance, the minority party in the House successfully defined the terms of debate in the fall election, undermining the governing and electoral strategies of the majority party. Although the minority party in each Congress did not control the House floor to formally structure the agenda, they bypassed this impediment by focusing on the informal channels of media attacks, campaign attacks, and base-voter appeals.

At the beginning of 1998, President Clinton and House Democrats unveiled an ambitious Democratic domestic policy agenda designed to energize liberal Democratic base voters and paint clear partisan divisions between the two parties in the fight for House control.⁴⁵ In the low turnout election cycle of 1998, appealing to liberal Democratic base

⁴⁵ Richard A. Gephardt, “Gephardt Lays Out the 1998 Democratic Agenda,” The Hill, 28 January 1998, p. 21; A.B. Stoddard, “Democrats Wait Out Scandal, Focus on Legislation,” The Hill, 28 January 1998, p. 2.

voters became crucial to Democratic efforts to retake the House, just as the Republican majority appealed to conservative base voters.⁴⁶ The 1998 Democratic agenda included legislative proposals to expand health insurance for uninsured children, raise the minimum wage, pass a “patient’s bill of rights” that played to voter concerns about problems in the managed care industry, expand Medicare to people under age 65, enact a \$21 billion child care proposal, and expand the Peace Corps.⁴⁷ Democrats also sharpened party differences on the education issue, as President Clinton proposed a \$17.4 billion plan to hire 100,000 new teachers and renovate inner city public schools.⁴⁸ In addition, President Clinton’s State-of-the-Union call to “Save Social Security First” successfully undermined Republican efforts to cut taxes in 1998, and provided Democrats with an important rhetorical weapon to energize liberal constituency groups, especially labor unions, against the dangers of Republican budget priorities.⁴⁹ In addition, the Clinton Administration submitted a fiscal year 1999 budget proposal that proposed creating 39 new entitlement programs and 85 new

⁴⁶ Alan Greenblatt, “The Disengaging Voter,” Congressional Quarterly, 24 October 1998, pp. 2880-81.

⁴⁷ Christopher Georges, “Clinton’s Domestic Initiatives Will Provoke Fight With GOP on Whether He’s Violating Budget Pact,” Wall Street Journal, 21 January 1998, p. A24; Andrew Taylor, “Clinton Budget Reaffirms Stand Against Broad GOP Tax Cuts,” Congressional Quarterly, 31 January 1998, pp. 228-31; p. 24; Jonathan Chait, “Reactivated,” The New Republic, 9 February 1998, p. 23.

⁴⁸ Sue Kirchhoff, “Debate on Education Policy Crystallizes Campaign Themes,” Congressional Quarterly, 17 October 1998, pp. 2803-6.

⁴⁹ Christopher Georges, “Clinton’s Domestic Initiatives Will Provoke Fight With GOP on Whether He’s Violating Budget Pact,” Wall Street Journal, 21 January 1998, p. A 24; Richard W. Stevenson, “Money Is Hypothetical, But Agenda Is Very Real,” New York Times, 3 February 1998, p. A 16.

domestic spending programs while increasing domestic spending \$150 billion over a five year period. Each of these proposals sought to move federal policy to the left through increased spending, taxation, and regulation - policy actions that appealed to liberal Democrats and energized the Democratic base. This agenda provided liberal base voters with a compelling reason to vote for Democratic House candidates in the 1998 elections, much like the Contract With America did for Republicans in 1994.

The fight over how to conduct the 2000 census provides an important example of how President Clinton and House Democrats appealed to their through the legislative process to win back the House. Although the 1990 census counted 98.4% of the population using a traditional head count, the 1.6% of the population missed consisted of approximately 8.4 million African-Americans and Hispanics living in urban areas. To avoid the undercounts of the 1990 census, the Clinton Administration proposed using statistical sampling techniques in the 2000 census. This plan called for a traditional headcount for 90% of the census, and then using complicated statistical sampling methods to estimate the remaining 10%. President Clinton and House Democrats used the issue of statistical sampling in their appeals to minority interest groups, arguing that a more accurate census would lead to more federal dollars and more federal representation in the House for depressed inner-city areas.

House Republicans adamantly opposed sampling, arguing it would lead to a fraudulent census and the loss of over 26 Republican House seats through massive redistricting to primarily Democratic urban areas.⁵⁰ Representative Dan Miller (R-FL),

⁵⁰ Christina Duff, "Plans for Census 'Sampling' Anger GOP in Congress," Wall Street Journal, 12 June 1997, p. A 20.

chairman of the census subcommittee of the House Government Reform and Oversight Committee, chided Clinton for “peddling statistical snake oil to the public,” while President Clinton and House Democrats warned that the undercounting of minorities in 2000 would lead to further racial problems in the 21st century.⁵¹ The fight between the two parties on statistical sampling contributed to President Clinton’s veto of the 1997 supplemental disaster relief bill, which contained a Republican-sponsored measure barring statistical sampling in the 2000 census. Statistical sampling also emerged as one of the key issues threatening another government shutdown during the budget negotiations in the fall of 1998. The fight over statistical sampling provided House Democrats and President Clinton with an excellent forum to appeal to minority voters and boost their level of intensity for Democratic congressional candidates in the 1998 election. This fight also illustrated the extent to which jockeying for House control in the short and long term directly molded a more partisan governing environment in the House.

Although the Republican Congress either ignored or eviscerated much of the ambitious Democratic legislative agenda of 1998, President Clinton and House Democrats had considerable success in setting the political agenda and terms of debate for the 1998 elections.⁵² Despite the defeat of much of the Democratic legislative agenda on the House floor, House Democrats gained powerful issues to use in campaigns in the most competitive

⁵¹ Terry M. Neal, “President Makes Push for Census ‘Sampling’,” Washington Times, 3 June 1998, p. A 21.

⁵² Jack W. Germond and Jules Witcover, “Clinton Makes Hay While GOP’s Away,” National Journal, 17 January 1998, p. 132; Paul Gigot, “As Deficit Retires, Liberalism Bids For a Comeback,” Wall Street Journal, 9 January 1998, p. A 16.

districts much as House Republicans had in the 1994 campaign. This development, in conjunction with the impeachment process, pushed President Clinton and House Democrats into close political cooperation, unlike the 1994 campaign and the 104th Congress when they frequently pursued differing governing and electoral strategies. In 1994, several House Democrats ran away from President Clinton as they localized their elections in efforts to escape the Republican's nationalized campaign. In the 104th Congress, President Clinton successfully used a triangulation strategy to separate himself from left-leaning House Democrats to secure his own re-election, while Democrats pursued their own strategies to secure a House majority.

In 1998, however, President Clinton and House Democrats joined together politically, although more out of political self-interest than loyalty. President Clinton, facing impeachment in the Republican House of Representatives, used his proposal-a-day presidency and savvy use of the media to repair his fractured relations with House Democrats. This unity allowed Democrats to pursue a common issue agenda for use in the 1998 campaign to retake the House. Clinton had made the Democratic party electable again at the national level through his 1992 and 1996 election victories. Now, Clinton focused his efforts on making the Democratic party a majority again in the House of Representatives, both for practical political considerations and to boost his own political legacy among Democrats.

Much like President Ronald Reagan, President Clinton possessed a unique gift of communication through which he successfully articulated and sold to the public an ambitious Democratic domestic policy agenda against a Congress controlled by the other party.

Through skillful administrative regulation, public exhortation, and a sophisticated management of media outlets, however, President Clinton's "preacher presidency" efforts far surpassed the successful news management efforts of the Nixon and Reagan administrations, much less the communication capabilities of congressional Republicans.⁵³ President Clinton encouraged House Democrats to exploit Republican inaction on the Democratic agenda in the 1998 election. All House Democratic incumbents and candidates benefitted from these efforts by President Clinton to secure his presidential legacy through a new Democratic House majority.⁵⁴ Despite this congruence between President Clinton and House Democrats on the common goal of electing a Democratic House of Representatives, one House Democrat complained in an interview that the Clinton triangulation strategy still persisted in 1998:

Bill Clinton has no political principles. He is a poll-driven, "I'm-for-being President" politician who is neither liberal or conservative. Unfortunately, this benefits Republicans because they have been able to drive a conservative agenda from the House and Clinton has signed off on most of these bills, like welfare reform.

Democratic success on promoting and using the issue on the "patient's bill of rights" and managed care reform illustrated the degree to which the Democratic House minority

⁵³ Alison Mitchell, "Shift From Perpetual to Slow Motion," New York Times, 9 April 1997; James Bennet and Robert Pear, "How a Presidency Was Defined By the Thousand Parts of Its Sum," New York Times, 8 December 1997, p. A 1; Peter Baker and John F. Harris, "To Boost His Presidency and Party, Clinton Leaps Into the Policy Void," New York Times, 11 January 1998, p. A 1; Ronald Brownstein, "Clintonism," U.S. News & World Report, 26 January 1998, pp. 22-37; Howard Kurtz, Spin Cycle: Inside the Clinton Propaganda Machine (New York: the Free Press, 1998).

⁵⁴ Helen Dewar, "Party Rallies Around the President," Washington Post, 13 February 1998, p. A 4; Stuart Rothenberg, "The Man Without a Party Needs One Now More Than Ever," Roll Call Politics, 19 March 1998, p. 16; Carl M. Cannon, "Clinton's Chance for Redemption," Baltimore Sun, 3 May 1998, p. A 1.

managed to affect the legislative agenda and the Republican majority's control of the House floor. The managed care issue served the same purpose for Democratic efforts to retake the House in 1998 as anti-tax and anti-deficit themes did for House Republicans in the early 1990s. In early 1998, House Democrats unveiled managed care legislation that gave consumers the right to sue their Health Maintenance Organizations (HMOs) and provided more access to other health care providers.⁵⁵ Republican leaders and the business community strongly opposed any managed care legislation like the "patient's bill of rights" that increased litigation against HMOs, preferring market solutions to problems in the HMO industry.

The managed care issue placed the Republican majority in a quandary. 68% of voters wanted some form of HMO regulation, but managed care providers and the business community strongly opposed any expansion of federal regulation and litigation in the managed care industry.⁵⁶ In response to Democratic success on the managed care reform issue, Speaker Gingrich launched a Republican managed care task force, under the leadership of Chief Majority Whip Dennis Hastert (R-IL), which produced managed care legislation that provided political cover for House Republicans.⁵⁷ House Democrats labeled the Republican's "Patient Protection Act" an election-year political fig leaf while the White House threatened a veto. Although House Republicans passed the "Patient Protection Act"

⁵⁵ "Democrat's Health Care Bill Stakes a Claim on the Hill," Congressional Quarterly, 4 April 1998, p. 893.

⁵⁶ "GOP Tries to Claim Middle Ground With Managed Care Overhaul Plan," Congressional Quarterly, 27 June 1998, p. 1753.

⁵⁷ "Gingrich to GOP Task Force: Better Managed Care Without Over-Regulation," Congressional Quarterly, 23 May 1998, pp. 1396-97.

on July 24, 1998, no managed care legislation passed into law in the 105th Congress.

House Democrats, meanwhile, used the “patient’s bill of rights” as a useful electoral tool to hammer Republican candidates in the fall campaigns, much like the role played by congressional reform and the balanced budget for House Republicans in the 103rd Congress and the 1994 campaign. Democratic managed care appeals proved especially useful to appeal to swing, suburban voters - the type of voters both parties needed to grab in order to win a House majority. In the 105th Congress, the Democratic agenda of managed care reform, education, and campaign finance reform helped Democrats set the debate for the 1998 elections, drive the congressional agenda, and successfully framing the debate against the majority party. In many respects, the Democratic minority had further perfected and refined the aggressive tactics used by the Republican minority of the 103rd Congress. Both minority parties sought to sabotage the passage of legislative accomplishments in order to secure House majorities.

In addition to pushing an aggressive agenda, House Democrats also attacked the Republican majority as a “do-nothing” Congress more interested in investigating President Clinton than in passing legislation. These attacks echoed President Truman’s attacks against the “do-nothing” Republican 80th Congress in his come-from-behind 1948 re-election campaign.⁵⁸ The 80th Congress actually had several substantive legislative achievements, but each of these were vetoed by President Truman and used as a foil in campaign appeals to the

⁵⁸ John Harwood and Jackie Calmes, “Election Politics 101: Impeachment Isn’t a Winning Agenda,” Wall Street Journal, 5 November 1998, p. A 1; Richard L. Berke, “Without a New Tune to Whistle, G.O.P. Kept Humming ‘Scandal’,” New York Times, 5 November 1998, p. A 1.

Democratic base of farmers and labor. In the 105th Congress, House Democratic leaders used the “do-nothing” attacks to amplify the Democratic issue agenda over the din of scandal and impeachment that surrounded President Clinton, energizing the liberal Democratic base for 1998.⁵⁹ Democratic leaders assailed the Republican House majority for ignoring or undermining Democratic legislative priorities like managed care reform, inner city school construction, and anti-tobacco legislation. DCCC chairman Martin Frost (D-TX) encouraged House Democratic challengers to attack their Republican opponents as part of a “do-little, do-nothing Congress,” and urged Democratic candidates to “take every opportunity to remind the voters in your district and your local media that if you were in Congress, instead of the current Republican congressman, the job would be getting done. I’ve been here for 20 years and this is the most do-nothing Congress I’ve seen. They have personal rivalries, dissension within their caucus, they have no program.”⁶⁰ Gephardt chided the Republican majority by stating “This is a Bart Simpson Congress -- underachievers and proud of it,”⁶¹ and called the Republican recess strategy a strategy of “no hits, no runs, no errors.”⁶²

Despite these “do-nothing” attacks, the Republican Congress of the 105th did have

⁵⁹ Lindsay Sobel, “GOP Session Agenda Produces Dem Complaints,” The Hill, 18 February 1998, p. 3; John Breshnahan, “As Recess Begins, Democrats Blast ‘Low Productivity’ on Hill,” Roll Call, 2 April 1998, p. 1; Alison Mitchell, “Democrats Find Campaign Trail in the Capital,” New York Times, 12 October 1998, p. A 1.

⁶⁰ “Shop Talk,” Roll Call, 9 March 1998, p. 15.

⁶¹ Alison Mitchell, “As Vacation Begins for Congress, Problems Follow G.O.P. Home,” New York Times, 11 August 1998, p. A 1.

⁶² Helen Dewar and Guy Gugliotta, “Recess Strategy Working for Congress,” Washington Post, 16 March 1998, p. A 19.

several substantive legislative accomplishments, like the 1997 budget agreement, the 1998 highway bill, and reform of the Internal Revenue Service. But these were not the type of accomplishments that would appeal or excite liberal voters in the Democratic base. In addition, the experience of the 103rd Congress illustrated how a majority could pass into law several legislative accomplishments but lose the message war of the overall image of the Congress in the elections to determined minority party attacks. The Republican minority of the 103rd Congress derided a “non-productive” Democratic Congress in the 1994 campaign, despite the record of national service legislation, the crime bill, the 1993 deficit-reduction bill, and family leave legislation. Both the Democratic majority of the 103rd Congress and the Republican majority of the 105th Congress governed in their own distinct manner consistent with their party beliefs and principles. In each Congress, however, aggressive minority parties mined greater legislative wealth from attacking the inevitable inaction of the majority party on the minority party’s legislative agenda. The symbolic usefulness of attacking a “do-nothing” Congress far outweighed the particulars of the legislative record of the majority.

House Democrats, in addition to joining with President Clinton to push the unified Democratic agenda of 1998, also used the numerous Republican investigations of Clinton to attack the Republican majority and energize Democratic base voters for the 1998 election. The Monica Lewinsky investigation conducted by Whitewater Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr proved especially useful to House Democrats seeking to portray the Republican majority as too fixated on scandal and impeachment instead of issues and legislation. The Lewinsky scandal erupted as one of the unpredictable variables in the race for House control

in the 105th Congress, much like the Persian Gulf War in 1991 where House Republicans hoped to use Democratic opposition to the popular war as a potent campaign issue in 1992. In both instances, House Republicans firmly believed that these developments would play to their advantage in the House races; however, in both cases the expected political gains never materialized. On December 19, 1998, the Republican majority brought four articles of impeachment against President Clinton to the floor. The House impeached Clinton, almost entirely with Republican votes, on two of the articles of impeachment relating to perjury in a federal grand jury and obstruction of justice. Only five House Democrats voted for impeachment, as the majority of House Democrats stuck together united behind Clinton. This unity insured that the impeachment vote in the House became a partisan impeachment process, killing any chance of conviction in a Senate trial.⁶³ To show their disgust with the impeachment process, House Democratic leaders and members walked in masse off the floor and out of the Capitol after House Republicans denied a censure vote against Clinton.

Although House Democrats did not condone President Clinton's deceptions and behavior in the Monica Lewinsky matter, they did see political benefit in portraying a Republican majority more interested in investigating than in legislating. On the campaign finance inquiry, Democrats gained symbolic political advantage as the Government Reform

⁶³ The five House Democrats who voted for the articles of impeachment were Virgil Goode (D-VA); Paul McHale (D-PA), who retired at the end of the 105th Congress; Gene Taylor (D-MS), who represented an extremely conservative district in Mississippi that gave 56% of its 1996 presidential election vote to Republican candidate Bob Dole; Charlie Stenholm (D-TX), a Blue Dog member who narrowly won re-election in 1996; and Ralph Hall (D-TX), the most conservative Democrat in the 104th and 105th Congresses who voted consistently with the Republican majority on policy matters, and even procedural matters.

and Oversight Committee's probe under Chairman Dan Burton (R-IN) stumbled. A senior House Democrat stated in an interview:

Dick Armey and Dan Burton are the best thing going for Democratic chances to take back the House in 1998. I hope we see and hear more from them. Guys like that just don't understand that what plays in conservative districts in the House just doesn't fly in other areas of the country, especially in the Northeast and in the swing seats.

The successful House Democratic effort to turn the impeachment process into a partisan Republican impeachment of President Clinton paid off. House Democrats discovered that the Starr investigation worked to their favor by energizing Democratic base voters outraged over a partisan Republican "witch hunt" against a twice-elected Democratic president.⁶⁴ By remaining united in attacking congressional Republicans, House Democrats focused public attention on Republican "vindictiveness" and "anti-Clinton" attitudes and away from the DNC campaign fund-raising and Monica Lewinsky scandals.⁶⁵ This effort successfully inflicted enduring damage to the image of the Republican party in preparation for the 2000 elections. The Republican party's favorability ratings with the public plummeted in early 1999 as the impeachment process reached a crescendo in the Senate trial, with Republicans holding a 2-to-1 unfavorable image.⁶⁶ This represented the worst

⁶⁴ Lizette Alvarez and Eric Schmitt, "House Democrats Seek Party Unity on Impeachment," New York Times, 7 October 1998, p. A 1; Richard L. Berke, "As Scandal's Role Dims, Parties Reassess Prospects," New York Times, 18 October 1998; Dan Carney, "Democrats on the Hill Appear Underwhelmed by Probe, Await Starr Report to House," Congressional Quarterly, 18 April 1998, p. 987.

⁶⁵ Jill Abramson, "How Republican Determination Upset Clinton's Backing at Polls," New York Times, 21 December 1998, p. A 1.

⁶⁶ Thomas B. Edsall and Dan Balz, "GOP Analysts Fear Long-Term Damage," Washington Post, 10 January 1999, p. A 1.

favorability ratings of any political party since Watergate. President Clinton's approval rating, meanwhile, soared amidst the Monica Lewinsky scandal and reached a high of 72% in February, 1998. House Democrats rallied around these high approval ratings, amidst the fallout of the revelations of the perjury allegations, to push the "big four" issues of the Democratic agenda: saving Social Security, managed care reform, education, and the environment.⁶⁷ In 1994, Democrats fled from President Clinton on the campaign trail as his presidency floundered. In 1996, President Clinton abandoned House Democrats in pursuit of his triangulation strategy and personal re-election victory. In 1998, politics and policy drove the White House and House Democrats together instead of pushing them apart.

House Democrats not only attacked the Starr investigation of Clinton, but also attacked the 31 different Republican investigations of the Clinton Administration in 10 different congressional committees.⁶⁸ Through these efforts, House Democrats skillfully painted an image of a "do-nothing, investigate-everything Congress," much like the Republican minority of the 103rd Congress painted the Democratic House majority as "corrupt" and the Democratic minority of the 104th Congress painted the Republican House majority as "extreme." Gephardt attacked the different Republican investigations in the House against Democrats by stating "It's unlimited in terms in terms of time. It's unlimited

⁶⁷ William Schneider, "Clinton's Improbable Life Raft, National Journal, 7 March 1998, p. 546.

⁶⁸ David Nyhan, "Moakley Laments a House Divided," Boston Globe, 26 June 1998, p. A 23.

in terms of money -- and apparently unlimited in terms of people's right to privacy."⁶⁹ House Democrats assembled information on the different Republican investigations in a report entitled "Politically Motivated Investigations by House Committees," which catalogued 39 investigations of the Clinton Administration and Democrats in 11 committees at a cost of \$17 million.⁷⁰ As the Republican majority pursued impeachment in 1998, House Democrats profited politically.⁷¹ Like the Republican minority of the 103rd Congress, House Democrats were free to pursue their own issues and agenda, irrespective of the agenda and governing prerogatives of the majority party. Unlike 1994, where House Democrats deserted President Clinton as his fortunes sagged, House Democrats rallied around a scandal-plagued President Clinton in 1998 in order to achieve a Democratic majority in 1998.

PARTY CULTURE AND PHILOSOPHY

Party Building Reigns Supreme

House Republican party culture in the 105th Congress continued to evolve in the direction of molding a united legislative and political team of House Republicans dedicated to preserving their majority in the short and long term. House Republican party culture served as an important force to change both the organization and politics of both the House of Representatives and American politics, from the Contract agenda of 1995 to the sustained

⁶⁹ Alison Mitchell, "Gingrich Attacks Clinton as Democrats Are Criticizing G.O.P.," New York Times, 30 April 1998.

⁷⁰ David Nyhan, "Moakley Laments a House Divided," Boston Globe, 26 June 1998, p. A 23; "Democrats Plan Attack On GOP Clinton Probes," Roll Call, 6 April 1998, p. 1; "Democrats Prepare 'Laundry' List of GOP Abuses," Roll Call, 1 June 1998, p. 12.

⁷¹ Richard L. Berke, "Without a New Tune to Whistle, G.O.P. Kept Humming 'Scandal'," New York Times, 5 November 1998, p. A 1.

efforts to save the Republican majority in 1996. In the 103rd Congress, Newt Gingrich and his leadership team formed a distinct Republican party culture in the House that united all House Republicans around the goals of achieving a Republican House majority. In the 104th Congress, this change in thinking helped House Republicans maintain their majority amidst fierce Democratic attacks as House Republicans worked as a team to defend their precarious majority, either through fund-raising for vulnerable members or helping to propagate the party message on Republican balanced budget and Medicare plans. In the 105th Congress, this distinct party culture continued to conform to the needs of defending a slim majority in a new competitive era.

New challenges confronted the Republican majority in the 105th Congress that did not exist in the 104th Congress. In addition to losing a net of nine House seats in the 1996 elections, House Republicans also lost 18 solidly conservative Republican incumbents. The loss of these conservative votes meant not only a smaller Republican majority, but the loss of a working conservative majority on the House floor. In the 105th Congress, House Republican leaders and members attempted to fashion House Republican party culture around the precepts of working as a team to keep and maintain the Republican majority in 1998. In the aggregate, Republican party culture in the 105th Congress continued to revolve around the precepts of party-building and preserving and enlarging the Republican majority. This concept of teamwork to achieve and defend the Republican House majority, evident so clearly in the 103rd and 104th Congresses, had become the chief defining attribute of Republican party culture in the 105th Congress.

In the summer of 1997, several Republican House members attempted to overthrow

Speaker Gingrich for reasons related to keeping a Republican majority in the 1998 elections amidst intense competitive pressures. On May 15, 1997, the Republican majority passed a \$8.6 billion supplemental appropriations bill containing emergency disaster relief for the victims of floods in North Dakota and other northern states. Contained in the disaster relief bill were two provisions important to conservative Republicans for the fight to maintain Republican majority control both in 1998 and beyond 2000: an anti-government shutdown provision designed to take away President Clinton's ability to "blackmail" House Republicans with a government shutdown at election time, and a provision banning the use of "statistical sampling" in the 2000 census. President Clinton vetoed the disaster relief bill on June 9, 1997 due to these two provisions. The public overwhelmingly sided with Democrats in blaming congressional Republicans for blocking needed disaster relief to North Dakota, much like they blamed congressional Republicans for the government shutdowns of 1995. House Republican leaders subsequently removed both items from the disaster relief bill and President Clinton signed it into law on June 12, 1997. The fight over the flood relief bill represented a major public relations victory for Democrats, and a major fiasco for House Republicans.

Several disgruntled House Republican conservatives, upset with the outcome of the disaster relief fight with Clinton and fearful of Republican leadership blunders in the 1998 elections, began an effort in July of 1997 to remove Gingrich as speaker. A group of 11 conservative Republican House members led by Representative Lindsey Graham (R-SC) met with House Republican leaders to plot a coup attempt against the speaker through a vote of no confidence on the House floor. To many House Republicans, Gingrich had become a

liability for the Republican majority both politically in Washington, in terms of quagmires like the disaster relief fight, and electorally in the country at large, in terms of risking marginal Republican members to further Democratic “get-Newt” attacks. Gingrich’s abysmal national approval ratings, his ethics problems, and his lack of direction in the 105th Congress vis-a-vis the Democrats made him unpalatable to the coup plotters. The plot to depose Gingrich quickly expanded to include several members of the House Republican leadership team.⁷² The coup attempt against Gingrich, however, resembled a Keystone Cops adventure, and unraveled almost as quickly as it was concocted. The failed coup attempt split the Republican Conference among competing leadership factions as charges of duplicity mounted.⁷³ Representative John Kasich (R-OH) captured the dissension in Republican ranks by stating “This is like an Indiana Jones movie. I mean, you’ve got arrows, you’ve got boulders, you’ve got poisonous snakes, you’ve got everything.”⁷⁴ As the coup attempt fell apart, each Republican House leader provided a differing account of their own involvement or non-involvement in the coup attempt, further undermining confidence among House Republicans in the leadership of the Republican Conference in the 105th Congress.⁷⁵

⁷² Gerald F. Seib, “Newt’s Enemies: A (Mis) reading of GOP Reality,” Wall Street Journal, 23 July 1997, p. A 20; Jackie Koszczuk, “Gingrich Under Fire as Discord Simmers From Rank to Top,” Congressional Quarterly, 21 June 1997, pp. 1415-18.

⁷³ Karen Tumulty, “Julius Speaker,” Time, 30 June 1997, p. 33; James Carney, “Ready, Aim, Misfire,” Time, 28 July 1997, pp. 50-1; Paul A. Gigot, “Coup de GOP: Off With Our Own Heads!,” Wall Street Journal, 18 July 1997, p. A 14.

⁷⁴ John E. Yang, “Paxon Quits House GOP Leadership,” Washington Post, 18 July 1997, p. A 1.

⁷⁵ David Rogers, “Armey, in a Letter, Implicitly Blames Other Leaders for Plot to Oust Gingrich,” Wall Street Journal, 23 July 1997, p. A 6.

Historically, the Republican party has been a relatively homogenous party that unites behind the prevailing leadership faction to focus on big ideas like individual freedom, limited government, cultural conservatism, and free enterprise.⁷⁶ This fundamental element of party culture based on leadership factions has remained consistent over time, providing a solid base upon which most internal Republican politics operate. In the 1980s, for instance, President Ronald Reagan provided a clear sense of direction and unity for the Republican party. Gingrich filled the leadership void in Republican politics in the post-Reagan era in the 103rd and 104th Congresses as he led the Republicans to victory in achieving their first House majority in 40 years. By the 105th Congress, however, Gingrich had lost his luster, and his leadership subsequently waned. Gingrich's numerous gaffes of the 104th Congress combined with the Democratic ethics attacks had made him the most unpopular politician in American political history. Despite this unpopularity, Gingrich still possessed support from House Republican loyalists. One veteran House Republican praised Gingrich's role in the House Republican Conference by stating:

Newt is a professor. He is a visionary. He is a military strategist. He is a leader. He is an excellent politician. He is a teacher for the Republican Conference. Newt is still performing these functions in 1998. He stands up there as a teacher of the House to teach Republicans what to do in terms of process, policy, and politics. He still stands up in front of an easel with a grease pen outlining where he wants us to go.

The coup attempt illustrated the degree to which Gingrich was both a boon and a bane to House Republicans as they fought to obtain their House majority in 1994 and retain it in

⁷⁶ Jo Freeman, "The Political Culture of the Democratic and Republican Parties," Political Science Quarterly 101 (3), 1996, pp. 327-56.

1996 and 1998.⁷⁷ One rank-and-file Republican member admitted in an interview “I don’t trust Newt. I don’t trust Arney. I don’t trust DeLay. I can’t trust any of them. I hate to say that, but it is the truth.” After the coup, House Republican leaders went their own way.⁷⁸ Speaker Gingrich removed Bill Paxon (R-NY) from his appointed leadership post as chairman of the Speaker’s leadership operations, but was unable to enact revenge against the other Republican House leaders who held elected leadership positions. Gingrich further solidified his tenuous grip on the speakership through a coalition of Republican moderates and loyalist conservatives. Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R-TX) increased his base of support in the whip organization, Paxon pursued a stealth campaign for the speakership until his resignation from the House in 1998, while Majority Leader Dick Arney (R-TX) was marginalized as a player in the House.⁷⁹ The internal feuding emboldened House Democrats about chances of capturing the House in 1998, and hurt the morale and recruitment of Republicans in the 105th Congress. Republican leadership divisions also led to additional challenges to Gingrich’s hold on the speakership. After the 1998 election, Appropriations Chairman Robert Livingston (R-LA) launched an open campaign to replace Gingrich as speaker in the 106th Congress. In the previous era of Democratic rule, such a challenge by

⁷⁷ Adam Clymer, “The Revolution Is Dead. Long Live the Revolution,” New York Times, 27 July 1997, p. E 6; Hanna Rosin, “The Madness of Speaker Newt,” The New Republic, 17 March 1997, pp. 23-26.

⁷⁸ Adam Clymer, “The Revolution Is Dead. Long Live the Revolution,” New York Times, 27 July 1997, p. E 6; “House Leadership Battle Mirrors Deeper Conflict,” Washington Post, 20 July 1997, p. A 1.

⁷⁹ Eliza Newlin Carney and Richard E. Cohen, “Newt’s Kitchen Cabinet,” National Journal, 2 August 1997, p. 1560.

a sitting committee chairman would have been unthinkable. In an interview, a House Republican stated:

Every member of the Republican leadership is a professional politician, pure and simple. Do they go out and drink beer together every night? Of course not. But they were successful in driving their agenda through the House, on issues as diverse as welfare reform, reforming the Internal Revenue Service, and balancing the budget.

In 1998, two developments occurred that illustrated the degree to which House Republicans as a party continued to move in the direction of greater teamwork as a majority party on both the House floor and in House elections around the country, much like they had in the 103rd and 104th Congresses. First, several junior House Republicans began a petition drive to change Republican Conference rules to punish those Republican members who sided with the Democratic minority on key procedural votes which aided Democratic efforts to embarrass the Republican majority in the runup to the 1998 campaign. Second, Republican leaders leaned heavily on safe Republican incumbents in 1998 to contribute their unneeded campaign monies to national party advertising to boost the Republican majority in the 1998 elections. Each of these efforts illustrated the degree to which the party culture of the House Republican Conference had permanently changed from the individualized party culture which prevailed until the early 1990s, and the new majority-seeking party culture first molded by Gingrich in the 103rd and 104th Congresses.

In 1998, several Republican freshmen and sophomores under the leadership of Representative Robert Ehrlich (R-MD), including Representatives George Radanovich (R-CA), Dave Camp (R-MI), Pete Sessions (R-TX), Ed Pease (R-IN), and George Nethercutt (R-WA), began a petition drive to change Republican Conference rules to deny members

who voted against the party on key policy and procedural votes the rewards of majority power. Throughout the 105th Congress, House conservatives lost several close votes on Republican priorities, including legislation protecting private property rights, preventing “salting” by unions, requiring prior permission from individuals before labor union dues are taken from paychecks for political purposes, and two anti-affirmative action amendments involving set-aside quotas in federal transportation contracts.⁸⁰ This petition effort sought to deprive moderate Republicans of their committee and subcommittee chairmanships for failing to support the party on procedural votes, consistently voting with the Democrats on policy votes, and helping Democrats set the agenda by signing discharge petitions.

The Ehrlich group’s petition sought to instill further the concept of thinking and acting as a majority team, especially on procedural votes that determined control of the House chamber. The petition drive also sparked a growing feud within the Republican Conference between the majority of Republican conservatives and the smaller cadre of Republican moderates.⁸¹ As illustrated in Appendix D, the Republican moderates sparking the petition drive included Sherwood Boehlert (R-NY), Michael Forbes (R-NY), Nancy Johnson (R-CT), Jim Leach (R-IA), Chris Shays (R-CT), Wayne Gilchrest (R-MD), Sue

⁸⁰ The conservative legislation sparking the Ehrlich petition were H.R. 992, “The Tucker Shuffle Relief Act” allowing greater liability flexibility to property landowners; H.R. 3246, “The Fairness for Small Business Act,” preventing union salting of small businesses; The Boehlert Amendment to H.R. 2525 involving environmental mandates to logging roads; H.R. 2608, “The Paycheck Protection Act” requiring prior permission by individuals before labor dues are withdrawn from paychecks for political purposes; and the Roukema Amendment to H.R. 2400 prohibiting set-aside affirmative action quotas on federal transportation contracts.

⁸¹ Jackie Koszczuk, “On the Hill and at Home, GOP Is Torn by Internal Strife,” Congressional Quarterly, 4 April 1998, pp. 859-61.

Kelly (R-NY), and Connie Morella (R-MD). Republican conservatives expressed especial concern with Banking Committee Chairman Jim Leach (R-IA) and Government Reform and Oversight Subcommittee Chairman Chris Shays (R-CT), both of whom signed the campaign finance reform discharge petition.

To many House Republicans, these moderate defections were interpreted as disloyalty to the cause of re-electing the Republican majority in 1998.⁸² House Republican leaders supported the petition drive, while Republican moderates vociferously opposed it due to the constraints it would impose on their own political viability in marginal and swing districts. Republican Whip Tom DeLay (R-TX), a proponent of the Ehrlich petition, defended it by stating “I do not think it’s fair for our members to turn the floor over to the other side.”⁸³ Representative Joe Scarborough (R-FL), however, responded to the constraints it imposed on Republicans from marginal seats by stating “What the hell are they going to do? Tell Chris Shays and Jim Leach to go to the Democrats?”⁸⁴ Speaker Gingrich and Speaker-elect Livingston both supported the Ehrlich petition and planned to add them to Republican Conference rules in the 106th Congress. Although not formally added to Republican Conference rules, the threat of the petition effort did not escape the notice of moderate Republican committee chairs, and dampened their enthusiasm and support for signing

⁸² Jim VandeHei, “Gingrich Signs On To Ehrlich Petition,” Roll Call, 22 June 1998, p. 1.

⁸³ Jessica Lee, “GOP House leaders warn Members to Toe the Line,” USA Today, 13 July 1998, p. A 7.

⁸⁴ Robert Novak, “GOP Pressure Politics,” Washington Post, 29 June 1998, p. A 15.

discharge petitions proposed by House Democrats in the 106th Congress.⁸⁵

In addition to placing increased emphasis on thinking and voting as a majority party, House Republican leaders also placed a high priority on campaign contributions from safe Republican incumbents toward the goal of protecting the narrow Republican majority. To fund “Operation Breakout,” Republican leaders leaned heavily on safe Republican incumbents to give campaign funds to the greater goal of increasing the Republican majority. The blunt appeal for massive contributions from safe Republican incumbents to “Operation Breakout” far surpassed previous efforts by Republican leaders in the 103rd and 104th Congresses to cajole safe Republican incumbents to give money to the cause of securing a Republican House majority in the 1990s. In special elections in 1997 and 1998, this member giving increased dramatically in order to allow Republicans to claim victory in “bellwether” contests in the war for the House in 1998. In the race to succeed retiring Representative Susan Molinari (R-NY) in 1997, Republican candidate Vito Fossella (R-NY) received \$199,250 from 154 Republican members. In the special election in New Mexico to replace deceased Representative Steven Schiff (R-NM), Republican candidate Heather Wilson received \$290,000 from 178 Republican incumbents.

Through these incumbent contributions to efforts to maintain Republican control of the House, party-building increasingly displaced seniority as the route to leadership positions and committee chairmanships in the Republican House of Representatives. Instead of

⁸⁵ In the 106th Congress, several political commentators attributed the lack of Republican signatories to the campaign finance reform discharge petition to deference to new House Speaker Denny Hastert. Instead, the threat of losing committee and subcommittee assignments served as a more powerful motivation against discharge petition signatures in the 106th Congress after the threat of the Ehrlich petition in the 105th Congress.

automatically receiving a key committee chairmanship through seniority, financial commitments to help expand the Republican majority to a healthy margin became the new standard for gauging worthiness to wield committee power. During the period of Democratic non-competitive rule, individual House Democrats focused on their own re-election effort, with the overall Democratic majority not jeopardized by the loss of any single seat. In the competitive era of the 1990s, every seat counted for majority status. Loyalty to the cause of preserving the Republican majority became a key element of House Republican party culture.

In this new order, contributions from Republican incumbents toward the goal of protecting the Republican majority trumped the traditional seniority route to power that prevailed in the era of non-competitive, one-party Democratic rule. For those House Republicans not deemed “team players” by Republican leaders in terms of their financial contributions to expand the majority, the routes to committee chairmanships were placed in doubt as more aggressive House Republicans, eager to display their majority-seeking credentials, eagerly sought to buy committee chairmanships by giving more to the Republican cause than anyone else. In “Operation Breakout,” Republican leaders sought to raise \$16 million in donations from safe Republican House incumbents as “seed money” to convince the business community that the Republican majority was not only safe, but would expand with the financial resources of additional corporate contributions. In 1996, vulnerable House Republican incumbents were hit hard by millions of dollars in labor union advertising while safe Republican incumbents sat on \$35 million in their respective campaign chests.

In 1998, House Republican leaders increasingly viewed these large campaign cash

reserves of safe House Republicans as communal property in the fight for Republican majority control.⁸⁶ To protect their ten-seat majority in the 1998 elections, House Republican leaders leaned heavily on the 170 House Republican incumbents facing no serious opposition in their individual elections. These members held a collective wealth of over \$60 million in their campaign coffers. Republican leaders designed “Operation Breakout” to tap these unneeded campaign funds to help the greater goal of protecting the Republican majority and enlarging it so all Republican members could benefit in the 106th Congress with better committee assignments and an enlarged majority to pass Republican legislative priorities.

To fund “Operation Breakout,” Republican leaders demanded mandatory contributions from all Republican committee and subcommittee chairmen. Speaker Gingrich defended this policy by stating “It’s a team. But all I am going to say to Members is very straightforward. Do you like being chairman? Well guess what - it takes 218 votes to be chairman.”⁸⁷ House Republican leaders Gingrich, Armey, and Linder asked 130 House Republicans facing little or no opposition to contribute \$100,000 each to pay for the issue advocacy ads of “Operation Breakout,” raising a total sum of \$13 million.⁸⁸ The mandatory contributions from Republican chairmen and subcommittee chairmen to “Operation Breakout” illustrated the degree to which Republican party culture had changed in the midst of the 1994 nationalized campaign for majority control and the competitive 1996 and 1998

⁸⁶ Jim VandeHei, “Armey Wants Millions for Ads,” Roll Call, 13 July 1998, p. 1.

⁸⁷ “Gingrich Promises to Focus on Taxes, Not Impeachment,” Roll Call, 16 July 1998, p. 1.

⁸⁸ Jim VandeHei, “Armey Wants Millions For Ads,” Roll Call, 13 July 1998, p. 1.

elections to retain the majority. House Republicans became increasingly acclimated as a party to the goal of protecting, preserving, and enlarging their House majority.

During the campaign to raise funds from safe Republican committee chairmen for “Operation Breakout,” Speaker Gingrich and NRCC Chairman Linder complained that several subcommittee chairmen, particularly House Appropriations Subcommittee Chairmen John Porter (R-IL), Sonny Callahan (R-AL), Harold Rogers (R-KY), and Ron Packard (R-CA), had failed to contribute or raise their required sum of \$100,000 a piece.⁸⁹ To motivate contributions to “Operation Breakout,” Speaker Gingrich announced that committee and subcommittee chairmen should not assume they will hold the same job titles in the next Congress if they refuse to help Republican candidates in November.⁹⁰ Republican leaders, especially the Speaker, openly stated that “Operation Breakout” contribution figures would be looked at closely when committee assignments for the 106th Congress were assigned.

As an example, Republican leaders pointed to the poor fund-raising performance of Representative Philip Crane (R-IL), a 29-year veteran of the Ways and Means Committee and the second-ranking Republican on the committee. Republican leaders stressed the need for Crane to be a team player in the effort to expand the majority in 1998, and stated that Crane’s poor fund-raising performance for “Operation Breakout” could preclude him from becoming the next chairman when the current Ways and Means Chairman, Bill Archer (R-

⁸⁹ Jim VandeHei, “GOP Chairmen Warned About Contributions,” Roll Call, 1 October 1998.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

TX), retired in 2000.⁹¹ In contrast, House Oversight Chairman Bill Thomas (R-CA), seeking to succeed Archer as Ways and Means Chairman in 2000, pledged to raise \$500,000 for “Operation Breakout.”

Through these statements and actions, Republican leaders sent blunt signals to Republican chairmen and subcommittee chairmen, as well as prospective committee chairmen, that seniority alone would no longer warrant choice committee assignments or chairmanships. Instead, incumbent contributions to Republican candidates and efforts to hold the House, in combination with voting with the party on key votes and abstaining from helping the Democratic minority articulate its agenda through discharge petitions or advancing liberal legislation, would determine a member’s status in regards to committee assignments and influence within the House Republican Conference. These actions by the Republican majority in the 105th Congress differed remarkably from previous Democratic majorities of the 1980s and early 1990s.

Democratic Cohesiveness in the 105th Congress

Throughout the 104th and 105th Congresses, Republican party leaders remade Republican party culture in the image of a united legislative team committed to the goal of re-electing the Republican majority. In the 104th Congress, House Democratic leaders encouraged House Democrats to think and work as a team with similar attributes in order to regain the majority, but faced the challenges of a coalitional and more heterogeneous party. Likewise, in the 105th Congress, Minority Leader Gephardt and other Democratic party

⁹¹ Jim VandeHei, “GOP Chairmen Warned About Contributions,” Roll Call, 1 October 1998.

leaders like DCCC Chairman Martin Frost (D-TX) and Representative Steny Hoyer (D-MD) continued to exhort House Democrats to think and act as a united team to fight for the majority. But like the 104th Congress, Democratic leaders faced challenges in managing a caucus that contained extremely liberal urban members while at the same time more conservative Blue Dog members. In the 105th Congress, Democratic leaders had to contend with a new coalitional group, the New Democratic Forum (NDC). NDC Democrats, like the Blue Dogs of the 104th Congress, sought to move the party in a centrist direction with issues like free trade and a balanced budget. As they dealt with the new challenges of trying to hold House Democrats together in the 105th Congress, House Democratic leaders welded prevailing House Democratic culture, especially its coalitional and heterogeneous aspects, to the cause of obtaining a new Democratic House majority.

House Democratic party culture continued to be different from the highly centralized, homogenous House Republican culture of the 103rd-105th Congresses. House Republican party culture in the 104th and 105th Congresses exhibited clear lines of communication and authority on governing and campaign matters such as the 1994 nationalized campaign, the Contract With America, and using the perks of majority power to cherry-pick House seats into Republican ranks. House Democratic party culture in the 105th Congress remained less centralized, more heterogeneous, and more ideologically diverse than the culture of the Republican majority. The impeachment of President Clinton, combined with the Democratic gain of seats in the 1998 election, each brought greater internal cohesion and unity among House Democrats as they savored the prospect of majority control in 2000. But this temporary unity on impeachment issues and the prospect of majority control in 2000 masked

policy divisions between liberal Democrats and a growing cadre of moderate and conservative House Democrats. House Democratic party culture continued to slowly drift toward the needs of the competitive demands for House control, but the realities of the Democratic Caucus pushed these changes in different directions than the Republican Conference in the 1990s.

Throughout the 105th Congress, House Democratic leaders encouraged House Democrats to work together as a team to achieve a Democratic majority in 1998. Unlike the more unified and more homogeneous Republican majority, however, House Democratic leaders managed a coalitional party with multiple power centers. The Congressional Black Caucus, Hispanic members, and traditional liberals serving as committee chairmen served as traditional power blocks within the Democratic Caucus. These traditional power groups were joined in the 104th Congress by the fiscal conservatives of the Blue Dogs, and in the 105th Congress by the creation of the New Democratic Forum. In the 105th Congress, Democratic leaders focused on managing this diverse coalition and focusing its efforts on achieving a numerical majority in 1998. As they fought for a majority, House Democratic leaders had to minimize divisions within Democratic ranks, especially between Blue Dog/NDC members and the liberal majority of the Democratic Caucus. In the 105th Congress, Democratic leaders continued their efforts to exhort Democratic members to think about obtaining and retaining a Democratic majority, thoughts that did not permeate House Democratic culture in the previous era of non-competition.

House Democratic leaders were successful in implementing a mandatory contributions plan to move money from safe Democratic incumbents to the most competitive

rares that could help propel Democrats into the majority in 1998. Much like House Republicans in the 105th Congress, Democratic leaders Gephardt and Frost requested that all House Democratic incumbents from safe seats, in addition to all House Democrats in leadership positions or in ranking committee positions, contribute money in a “share-the-wealth” strategy to help take back the House.⁹² Members of the Democratic leadership and the 101 ranking Democrats on the committees and subcommittees were expected to contribute \$50,000 a piece to the DCCC and \$25,000 a piece to other candidates and vulnerable Democratic incumbents.⁹³ This represented the first time House Democrats had set any standards for giving to candidates, and followed the example set by the Republican minority in the 103rd Congress and aggressively pursued by the Republican majority in the 105th Congress.

Despite this unity on campaign matters, House Democrats faced an internal debate in the 105th Congress regarding the ideology and direction of the caucus as it searched for the best route to a new majority. In the 104th Congress, the Blue Dog Democrats divorced themselves politically from many aspects of caucus activities and pursued an independent course designed to eventually bring the caucus away from its liberal extremes and back to the center. In the 105th Congress, the Blue Dogs were joined by another group of centrist Democrats, the New Democratic Forum. Representatives Cal Dooley (D-CA), Tim Roemer (D-IN), and James Moran (D-VA) created the New Democratic Forum (NDC) in early 1997 to provide a forum for pro-growth moderate House Democrats. NDC members attempted

⁹² Amy Keller, “Helping Each Other Out,” Roll Call, 15 June 1998, p. 1.

⁹³ Amy Keller, “DCCC Wants More Money From Leaders,” Roll Call, 22 June 1998, p. 1.

to fashion a new centrist House Democratic cultural groundwork in order to attract and recruit centrist Democratic candidates to win the swing seats needed for a new Democratic majority. Through these efforts, the New Democratic Coalition attempted to lay the groundwork for electing a moderate Democratic House majority.

Members of the New Democratic Coalition differed from the Blue Dogs in several important aspects. The Blue Dogs created a culturally separate political entity within House Democratic ranks for moderate and conservative Democrats representing primarily rural and exurban districts. NDC members, in contrast, did not divorce themselves culturally from House Democratic ranks and represented suburban districts immersed in the high-tech economy of the 1990s.⁹⁴ Blue Dog members addressed primarily economic and fiscal issues, like the balanced budget, unfunded mandates legislation, and welfare reform. In addition to addressing traditional “New Democrat” issues like fiscal discipline, NDC members also stressed other issues as diverse as encryption technology, securities litigation reform, education, and international trade. Unlike the Blue Dogs, many of whom opposed Clinton in the 103rd Congress, the NDC members patterned themselves politically after Clinton’s triangulated New Democratic policy stances and became key allies of the White House in the Congress to help pass the 1997 balanced budget agreement.

While the Blue Dogs kept strict barriers to joining their group in order to preserve their policy independence and political integrity, the NDC kept looser requirements for membership and encouraged rapid growth in its ranks in order to achieve maximum political effect in the Democratic Caucus. NDC founder James Moran stated “We’re probably more

⁹⁴ Peter Beinart, “Why the Center Can’t Hold,” Time, 24 November 1997, p. 52.

of a threat to the traditional Democratic Party than the Blue Dogs are. The vast majority of the Democratic Party would never become a Blue Dog. We would be far more likely to influence the mainstream of the caucus.”⁹⁵ Despite these differences, the two groups shared similar objectives of moving the Democratic caucus to the center and electing a centrist Democratic House majority. Together, for instance, members of these two groups assailed the AFL-CIO for targeting free-trade Democrats in the 1998 elections, attacked Minority Whip David Bonior’s 500-mile “Journey For Economic Justice” bus trip touting the defeat of fast-track trade legislation, and worked closely to help implement centrist New Democratic policies in the 105th Congress.⁹⁶

Together, the 23 member group of Blue Dogs and the 41 member New Democratic Coalition attempted to move House Democrats as a caucus in a centrist direction in order to elect House Democrats to the critical swing seats and eventually elect a new moderate Democratic House majority. These centrist House Democrats also advocated the selection of moderate and centrist Democrats to the liberal dominated leadership and committee posts in the House Democratic hierarchy.⁹⁷ On a traditional Democratic priority like raising the minimum wage, these members argued against an increase in the 105th Congress to avoid

⁹⁵ A. B. Stoddard, “New Democrat Coalition, Blue Dogs Share Goals and Members, But Differ On Style and Strategy,” The Hill, 12 November 1997, p. 16.

⁹⁶ A.B. Stoddard, “Bonior Bus Tour on Trade Assailed for Dividing Party,” The Hill, 18 February 1998, p. A1; Jim VandeHei, “New Labor Ads Could Backfire with Dems,” Roll Call, 26 June 1997, p. 1.

⁹⁷ Jim Vande Hei, “The House ‘New Democrats’ Aspire to Leadership,” Roll Call, 15 September 1997; Al From, “Prepare for a Long March,” The New Democrat, July/August 1998, p. 28; Dan Balz, “Dragging the Democrats Behind Him,” Washington Post National Weekly Edition, 27 January 1997, p. 11.

alienating fiscal conservatives and small business owners in swing districts critical for a Democratic recapture of the House.⁹⁸ Traditionally, the issue of a minimum wage increase proved politically popular for Democrats in wooing both the Democratic base and swing voters.

NDC co-chairman Cal Dooley (D-CA), a close ally of President Clinton and Vice-President Al Gore, called the NDC a home for centrist and conservative Democrats. He also told the 1996 Democratic freshmen "If your experience has been anything on the campaign trail like ours, you have probably found that advocating traditional Democratic policies did not get you elected."⁹⁹ Sixty-four of the 207 House Democrats in the 105th Congress were members of either the Blue Dogs or NDC, and 26 of the 42 Democratic freshmen elected in 1996 joined either the Blue Dogs or NDC. But strongly liberal House Democrats held virtually every leadership post or ranking committee position. The 58-member House Progressive Caucus, for instance, represented liberal Democrats who did not subscribe to the centrist philosophy of the Blue Dogs, the NDC, or New Democrats. These Democrats eschewed the philosophical direction of New Democrats, and subscribed to liberal principles like a single-payer health care system, dramatic reductions in defense spending, restoring the highest tax bracket to its 1977 level, and mandated paid family and medical leave. Of the 18 major committees in the House, eight ranking House Democrats belonged to the House Progressive Caucus.

⁹⁸ "'Blue Dogs' Wary of Wage Push," National Journal's CongressDaily, 2 April 1998.

⁹⁹ Mike Tobin, "Dooley Trying to Woo Recruits To His New Democrat Coalition," States News Service, 21 November 1996.

The struggle in the 105th Congress between the majority liberal Democrats and the smaller growing minority of Blue Dog/NDC members became the true flashpoint for action in House Democratic internal politics. The struggle between the two groups on policy and political issues was in reality a fight for the heart and soul of the Democratic party in the post-1994 political environment.¹⁰⁰ Throughout the 105th Congress, Gephardt publicly opposed the Clinton Administration on several New Democratic policies, including extending Most-Favored Nation status to China, extending fast-track trading authority to the president, and the 1997 balanced budget agreement with the Republican majority. Minority Leader Gephardt heatedly opposed the Balanced Budget Act, and strongly denounced it on the House floor on May, 1997. Gephardt also lambasted New Democratic politics and policy measures at a speech at Harvard in December, 1997. While strongly denouncing “some who now call themselves new Democrats,” Gephardt advocated a traditional liberal legislative agenda consisting of opposition to Social Security reform, opposition to the balanced budget agreement of 1997, and opposition to many of the free trade measures of the 1990s.¹⁰¹ Gephardt’s positions and Harvard speech especially angered the leadership of the NDC, which had strongly supported fast-track trading authority for President Clinton and worked closely with Clinton to find common ground on balancing the budget and cutting taxes in tandem with the Republican majority in 1997. NDC co-chairman Tim Roemer (D-IN)

¹⁰⁰ James A. Barnes and Richard E. Cohen, “Divided Democrats,” National Journal, 15 November 1997, pp. 2304-07.

¹⁰¹ Jim VandeHei, “Gephardt’s Speech Riles His Colleagues, Who Fear Party Divisions Will Hurt Chances in 1998,” Roll Call, 8 December 1997; John E. Yang, “Gephardt Speech on Party Angers Some Democrats,” Washington Post, 6 December 1997, p. A 6.

responded to Gephardt's Harvard speech by stating "If the strategy is one of moving further to the left, we've had that debate - it was called the 1994 Republican landslide."¹⁰²

The jockeying by New and Old House Democrats for the future of the Democratic party in the 105th Congress became intimately related to the fight for House. This philosophical struggle among Democrats is similar to the internal struggle within House Republican ranks in the 1980s and early 1990s during their period in the minority. In both instances, insurgent party members challenged the mainstream thinking within the prevailing minority party culture in order to better position the party to retake the House of Representatives. Newt Gingrich and his followers in the Conservative Opportunity Society in the 1980s and early 1990s repeatedly clashed with the Old Bull Republicans led by Minority Leader Bob Michel regarding the need for more confrontation with Democrats in order to retake the House. The centrist and conservative House Democrats of the 104th and 105th Congresses likewise repeatedly clashed with the liberal House Democrats regarding the best ideological posture for Democrats to take to both capture the House and govern with a House majority. The Republican minority struggled primarily over the strategies and tactics necessary to secure a House majority, with the confrontational, nationalized brand of politics created by the Gingrich Republicans ultimately reshaping House Republican culture in the early 1990s.

Internal House Democratic feuds as a minority party, however, have revolved on issues related to the ideology and philosophy of the House Democratic caucus, and in what

¹⁰² "Centrist Democrats Angry at Gephardt," International Herald Tribune, 8 December 1997, p. 3.

direction the next Democratic House majority would govern. Blue Dogs and NDC members demanded the shaping of a new centrist Democratic party culture, while traditional liberal Democrats eschewed a move to the right and believed that the Democrats could retake the House due to Republican incompetence and mismanagement. While the Republican minority argued internally regarding which tactics and strategies were most beneficial to breaking the Democratic lock on the House on a nationwide basis, the Democratic minority has argued internally over the best ideological stance suited to electing and retaining a Democratic House majority on a nationwide basis, especially with the importance of swing seats. In both instances, minority party members attempted to remake the cultural outlook of their party to best accommodate obtaining a House majority.

ELECTIONS

“Operation Breakout”

House Republicans relied heavily on the pro-incumbent political environment of the 105th Congress, and the historical precedent of the party not controlling the presidency to pick up House seats in a midterm election, in the formulation of their electoral strategy to boost their majority in 1998.¹⁰³ A senior Republican captured the Republican electoral strategy of the 105th Congress by stating:

We will gain seats in 1998. The only Republican open-seat in danger is Riggs in the First district of California. The rest aren't perfectly secure, but the GOP will do well in them. There has been a significant move to the right since the 1980 election. This is a center-right country which has been electing center-right leadership. Clinton won re-election in 1996 by moving to the right. Over 366 Democrats have switched parties to the GOP since Clinton's election in 1992. Republicans now control over 30 governor's mansions, and the GOP just

¹⁰³ Benjamin Sheffner, “Republicans, Counting on History, Expect More House Seats Next Year,” Roll Call Politics, 13 March 1997, p. 13.

won control of the Wisconsin legislature. All of this is significant, and proves the GOP will pick up seats in 1998.

As economic and social indicators improved, all incumbents, Republicans and Democrats, became more secure.¹⁰⁴ 83 House incumbents, including 51 Republicans, faced no opposition 1998. This represented the highest number of unopposed incumbents since 1958, when 96 incumbents faced no opponent.¹⁰⁵ In all, 130 House Republicans either faced no opposition or token opposition. While Democrats focused their efforts on a seat-by-seat "fit-the-district" strategy, Republicans aimed to enlarge their numbers in 1998 through national television advertising financed by superior fund-raising abilities.¹⁰⁶ Large Republican gains in the 1998 elections, in addition to providing a healthy Republican House majority in the 106th Congress, would have laid the groundwork for a new era of Republican control of the House.¹⁰⁷

In the 1997 off-year elections, Republicans used massive soft-money advertising to

¹⁰⁴ David S. Broder and Terry M. Neal, "A '98 Campaign of Skirmishes: Next November Looks Good for Incumbents," Washington Post, 9 November 1997, p. A 1; "Many Lawmakers Will Coast to Re-election Unchallenged," Washington Times, 13 April 1998, p. A 10.

¹⁰⁵ Mary Lynn F. Jones and Robert Schlesinger, "83 Unopposed House Members Set 40-year Record," The Hill, 1 July 1998, p. 1; Jim O'Connell, "No-stress Elections For Many in House," Washington Times, 29 June 1998, p. A 4.

¹⁰⁶ John Mercurio and Rachel Van Dongen, "NRCC Chairman Predicts 20-Seat Pickup for GOP," Roll Call Politics, 31 July 1997, p. 13; Stuart Rothenberg, "Governors, Open Seats Keep GOP Optimistic About House Control," Roll Call Politics, 2 April 1998, p. 18; Ceci Connolly, "Suddenly, Things Are Looking Much Brighter," Washington Post National Weekly Edition, 14 September 1998, p. 13.

¹⁰⁷ David S. Broder and Thomas B. Edsall, "What If They Held an Election and Nobody Came?," Washington Post National Weekly Edition, 14 September 1998, p. 12.

propel Republican candidates to victory in every major race, especially in the New York mayoral race and gubernatorial races in New Jersey and Virginia.¹⁰⁸ This strategy helped insure the close re-election effort of Governor Christine Todd Whitman (R-NJ), and helped to elect Vito Fossella (R-NY) to the seat of retiring Representative Susan Molinari (R-NY) in New York City.¹⁰⁹ This winning strategy in 1997 served as an important template for Republican efforts to enlarge the Republican House majority in 1998. To score major gains in the midterm election, House Republicans focused their time and energies on raising funds for an expensive 1998 campaign, while also sharpening party distinctions with Democrats to spur the conservative base to the polls.¹¹⁰

House Republican leaders banked their hopes on expanding their narrow majority in 1998 with "Operation Breakout," a \$37 million television advertising campaign launched in October, 1998 and designed boost the Republican majority with double-digit House gains.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ John Linder, "Why the GOP Winning Streak Will Continue," The Hill, 15 July 1998, p. 29.

¹⁰⁹ Alan Greenblatt, "'Soft Money' Helps Propel GOP to Victory in Key Races," Congressional Quarterly, 8 November 1997, pp. 2784-87; Robert Novak, "Bad Day for Democrats," Washington Post, 6 November 1997, p. A 23; Davis S. Broder, "Election Solidifies GOP," Washington Post, 6 November 1997, p. A 1; Terry M. Neal, "Off-Year Elections Get Huge Infusion of GOP Spending," Washington Post, 2 November 1997, p. A 1.

¹¹⁰ Ceci Connolly and Juliet Eilperin, "For Fall Races, House GOP Has a Playbook of Sound Bites," Washington Post, 31 July 1998, p. A 6.

¹¹¹ Jim VandeHei, "GOP Plans To 'Break Out' in Fall Election," Roll Call, 23 July 1998, p. 1; Rachel Van Dongen, "Making Their Case a Coast-to-Coast Offensive," Roll Call, 8 October 1998; Jill Abramson, "Republican National Committee Funding \$20 Million Advertising Campaign," New York Times, 26 October 1998, p. A 1; Richard L. Berke, "Gleeful Democrats Assail Ads by G.O.P. on Clinton Scandal," New York Times, 29 October 1998, p. A 1.

Through “Operation Breakout,” House Republicans attempted to do in the majority what they had done with great success as a minority party in their nationalized 1994 campaign: articulating differences between the two parties, making nationalized appeals for House control, and articulating what a Republican Congress would do as opposed to a Democratic Congress. During the era of non-competition and one-party Democratic rule, the Democratic majority never felt compelled to engage in national party-building efforts represented by “Operation Breakout.” Instead, each House Democratic incumbent and challenger focused on their own individual campaign since the Democratic majority was never felt to be in jeopardy. In the 103rd Congress, the Democratic House majority followed this same strategy, only to be ambushed by the Republican nationalized campaign and the Contract With America in 1994.

The Republican majority of the 105th Congress, in comparison, felt an intense need to defend its majority on a nationwide basis in 1998, given the intense efforts by House Democrats, organized labor, and liberal interest groups to terminate the Republican majority in the 1996 and 1998 elections. In 1996, organized labor spent \$35 million to defeat the Republican majority, and in 1998 labor spent \$17 million on the Democratic ground campaign. Through “Operation Breakout,” Republican leaders hoped to spur the business community and safe Republican incumbents to provide the resources necessary to both defend and expand the narrow Republican House majority so all Republicans could benefit from greater legislative and policy victories in the 106th Congress, laying the groundwork for a unified Republican government in 2000 with the election of a Republican president to accompany a Republican Congress. In 1995 and 1996, President Clinton unleashed \$40

million in soft money advertising to secure his own re-election. In 1998, House Republicans to follow a similar strategy to re-elect and boost their majority.

The name of “Operation Breakout” recalled the time Patton’s Third Army sought to punch through a weakened German line and shorten World War II. Its mission, according to Speaker Gingrich, was to “define the debate, give exposure to our ideas and shape the political environment,” especially through highlighting Republican achievements on tax cuts, health care portability, and the federal budget surplus.¹¹² Republican House leaders hoped this massive advertising campaign would boost Republican House gains in 1998 from the expected five to ten seats to double-digit gains of twenty-five seats and beyond. Achieving double-digit gains would raise the House Republican majority beyond 250 seats in the 106th Congress, laying the foundation for a Republican House of Representatives for decades to come. The large Democratic gains in the 1958, 1964, 1974, and 1982 elections played similar roles in cementing the Democratic House majority and insuring its long-term survival.¹¹³

“Operation Breakout” involved advertising in 62 television markets targeting 50 hotly contested House races in 30 states.¹¹⁴ In several television markets, like Indianapolis, the Operation Breakout ads were at saturation levels throughout October of 1998. As soft

¹¹² Joel Connelly, “‘Operation Breakout’ Seeks to Swing House,” Seattle Post-Intelligencer, 7 October 1998, p. B 1.

¹¹³ Jim VandeHei, Norah M. O’Donnell, “Gingrich Sees 250 Seats for GOP,” Roll Call Politics, p. 15.

¹¹⁴ Ralph Z. Hallow, “TV Ad Blitz Touts Accomplishments of GOP Congress,” Washington Times, 7 October 1998, p. A 1.

money issue ads, the “Operation Breakout” advertising did not explicitly call for the election or defeat of particular candidates, and therefore did not count against the \$65,100 each party could directly give to support its congressional candidates. At the end of October, House Republican leaders launched “Operation Breakout” ads in 30 competitive congressional districts attacking President Clinton’s integrity in the sex and perjury allegations of the Lewinsky matter. But this aggressive advertising failed. Of these 30 competitive districts, House Republicans only won 12.¹¹⁵

In addition to “Operation Breakout,” Republican leaders engaged in a seat-by-seat campaign in the 105th Congress to save the Republican majority, much as they had in the 104th Congress. In the 103rd and 104th Congresses, Democratic retirements created openings for Republicans to gain the majority in 1994 and maintain it in 1996. In the 105th Congress, several House Republicans vacated their swing seats to run for the Senate, including Representatives Linda Smith (R-WA), Jim Bunning (R-KY), Mark Neumann (R-WI), Frank Riggs (R-CA), and John Ensign (R-NV). Democrats won each of these four Republican open seats created by ambitions for higher office. These Democratic open seat gains reversed the trend of net Republican gains in open Democratic seats in the 103rd and 104th Congresses.¹¹⁶

To stave further losses of the already narrow majority in the 105th Congress and the 1998 election, Republican leaders engaged in selective intervention in several Republican

¹¹⁵ Richard L. Berke, “Without a New Tune to Whistle, G.O.P. Kept Humming ‘Scandal’,” New York Times, 5 November 1998, p. A 1.

¹¹⁶ Charles E. Cook, “Retirements Hurt, But in Swing Districts They Can Be Deadly,” Roll Call, 19 May 1997, p. 8.

seats where death, retirement, or scandal threatened to move a Republican seat into Democratic ranks. House Republican leaders also engaged in additional interventions to save the Republican majority on a seat-by-seat basis, much like they did in the 104th Congress. They persuaded Representative Wes Watkins (R-OK) to reconsider his decision to retire in 1998 due to health problems, which kept Oklahoma's traditionally Democratic Third District in Republican hands.¹¹⁷ House Republican leaders also intervened heavily to help elect Heather Wilson (R-NM) in the special election of New Mexico's First district following the death of Representative Steven Schiff (R-NM).

Through each of these interventions, Republican House leaders placed their political capital and prestige on the line to defend their narrow majority. But there were limits to how far these interventions could be successful in expanding the narrow Republican majority. In the special election race for the 22nd district of California to succeed deceased member Walter Capps (D-CA), Speaker Gingrich recruited moderate Republican Brooks Firestone to run for the Republican nomination.¹¹⁸ Republican House leaders believed the strongly pro-choice Firestone had the best choice to capture the 22nd district, a moderate swing seat, and bring it back into the Republican majority after conservative Representative Andrea Seastrand (R-CA) lost the district to the more liberal Capps in 1996. Gingrich's recruitment and endorsement of Firestone, who opposed a ban on partial-birth abortion, outraged anti-

¹¹⁷ Republican House leaders recruited Wes Watkins to run as a Republican in 1996 to win the Third District of Oklahoma. Republican leaders believed that no other candidate other than Watkins could win the seat for the Republicans in 1998.

¹¹⁸ Mark Sherman, "Republicans in California Snub Gingrich Interference," The Atlanta Journal and Constitution, 15 January 1998, p. A 4.

abortion conservative Republicans in the district and sparked the candidacy of conservative Republican Tom Bordonaro.¹¹⁹

In his campaign against Firestone, Bordonaro stated that “Gingrich’s attempt to anoint Brooks Firestone as the next representative from the Central Coast was a disservice to the voters and just plain wrong.”¹²⁰ Bordonaro used this meddling in local politics by the Speaker to energize conservative base voters, and pledged not to vote for Gingrich for speaker if elected to the House. Further, Bordonaro relied heavily on a \$100,000 issue advertising campaign launched by conservative activist Gary Bauer’s anti-abortion organization, the Campaign for Working Families.¹²¹ This issue advertising campaign prominently featured Bordonaro’s opposition to partial-birth abortion. In the three-way open primary in January, 1998, Lois Capps, the widow of Walter Capps, won 45% of the vote while Bordonaro beat out Firestone, 29%-25%, for the right to confront Capps as the Republican nominee in the special election. In the special election in March, 1998, however, the socially moderate Capps soundly defeated Bordonaro’s Gary Bauer-style social conservatism, 53%-45%. The Firestone-Bordonaro fight represents a classic example of an ideologically pure candidate winning the primary only to be trounced in the general election in a race where moderation, not ideological purity, became the winning political formula.

¹¹⁹ Lou Cannon, “California Race Leaves ‘Passionate Centrist’ Behind,” Washington Post, 15 January 1998, p. A 9.

¹²⁰ Janet Hook, “1998 Dawns as Period of Turmoil for GOP,” Los Angeles Times, 15 January 1998, p. A 3.

¹²¹ Alan Greenblatt, “California House Race Shapes Up As a Duel of Interest Groups,” Congressional Quarterly, 17 January 1998, p. 137.

Despite the seat-by-seat campaign to save the Republican majority and the massive advertising of “Operation Breakout” in the 105th Congress, the expected double-digit Republican House seat gains fizzled into a net Republican loss of five seats. In the 103rd Congress, House Democratic leaders expected a midterm loss of seats in 1994, but not the loss of their majority. In the 105th Congress, House Republican leaders expected at least a modest midterm gain of House seats, but not the loss of seats. In the 1997 off-year elections, Republican candidates coupled a compelling vision and governing agenda with overwhelming financial resources to win election. In Virginia, for instance, Republican gubernatorial candidate James Gilmore seized the issue of eliminating the state’s car tax in order to win a convincing victory. Gilmore then used the “no car tax” vow to cherry-pick Democratic open state House seats in special elections to help achieve a Republican majority in the state General Assembly in 1997 and 1998.

House Republican leaders possessed the resources to launch a nationwide advertising campaign with “Operation Breakout,” but lacked a compelling agenda to motivate voters to elect Republican House candidates in the pivotal competitive districts.¹²² The lack of a coherent message, the last minute budget deal with President Clinton in 1998 that raised domestic spending while avoiding a tax cut, and a focus on impeachment had the combined effect of energizing the Democratic base while discouraging the Republican base.¹²³ While Democratic base voter turnout soared in the 1998 elections, the Republican base vote did not

¹²² Ceci Connolly, “Three Years of Missteps, One Sudden Fall,” Washington Post, 8 November 1998, p. A 1.

¹²³ Jeanne Cummings, “Democrats Gain at Least 4 House Seats,” Wall Street Journal, 5 November 1998, p. A 3.

turn out with the same intensity. Republicans, for instance, garnered only 54% of the vote from social conservatives in 1998, down from 67% in 1994.¹²⁴ The Republican majority did not animate its base voters with a compelling agenda in 1998, while House Democrats picked off several open Republican seats with the right type of Democratic candidate espousing the Democratic issue agenda. House Republicans, despite their massive “Operation Breakout” ads, did not back up these efforts on the ground through turnout efforts for House Republican candidates. Although unsuccessful in boosting the Republican majority, “Operation Breakout” mirrored the Republican’s nationalized Contract With America campaign of 1994 and the Democratic “get-Newt” and Medicare campaign of 1996.

Each of these efforts entailed members of minority and majority parties, in a competitive environment for House control, banding together for the common purpose of attaining a House majority. Before 1994 and the change in party control, congressional politics had been characterized as candidate-centered and involving individual quality House candidates winning elections based national and local issues. Although these attributes still dominated individual campaigns and House races, the 1994 and 1996 nationalized campaigns for House control laid important precedents that affected all House races. These nationalized efforts for House control altered the overall strategic and electoral terrain in the 1990s with the larger-scale party efforts to achieve majority status. In 1998, House Republicans used this same template of nationalization with “Operation Breakout.” These intense efforts for majority status would continue in the 106th Congress as neither party cemented a solid House majority in the 1990s, insuring the continuance of the competitive environment that

¹²⁴ Ibid, p. A 10.

characterized the 103rd-105th Congresses.

The Democratic “Fit-the-District” Strategy

While Republicans focused on their massive air campaign with “Operation Breakout,” House Democrats focused their efforts on achieving a narrow majority in the 106th Congress through a seat-by-seat “cherry-picking” strategy of open Republican swing seats. A shift of 11,889 ballots in 11 congressional districts in 1996 would have produced a Democratic House majority in the 105th Congress. A shift of 9,537 ballots in six congressional districts in 1998 would have produced a Democratic House majority in the 106th Congress. House Democratic leaders knew they would be out-spent by the better-funded Republican majority in the 1998 elections. As a result they targeted the most competitive districts in the country, especially swing seats and open marginal Republican seats, with intense recruiting, fund-raising, and turnout efforts.¹²⁵ The House Democratic strategy for majority status in 1998 required holding all but two of nine open Democratic seats, winning eight open Republican seats, defeating nine Republican incumbents, and losing only three Democratic incumbents.¹²⁶ This strategy, if executed, would have led to a narrow Democratic majority of 222 in the 106th Congress.

The absence of salient issues, especially with the rise of budget surpluses, created an incumbent-friendly environment in the 105th Congress that mitigated against the type of

¹²⁵ “Gephardt Goes Housecleaning,” U.S. News & World Report, 9 June 1997, p. 24.

¹²⁶ Albert Eisele, “Martin Frost’s Game Plan for Getting to 218,” The Hill, 8 April 1998, p. 20; “Why We Will Win in 1998,” Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee web-site presentation, 30 October 1997, <http://www.dccc.org/win/index.html>; Stuart Rothenberg, “How Democrats Can Finally Break a 60-Year Midterm Election Jinx,” Roll Call Politics, 26 March 1998, p. 18..

nationalized campaigns for House control conducted by the Republican minority in 1994 and the Democratic minority in 1996.¹²⁷ This incumbent friendly political environment presented a campaign quandary to House Democrats as they sought a change in party control in the relatively placid 1998 election cycle. In 1994 and 1996, the Republican minority and Democratic minority made bold, nationalized appeals for House majorities based on dissatisfaction with the incumbent House majority. In 1998, House Democrats followed a strategy of silently energizing Democratic base through voter turnout drives, while focusing electoral resources on a seat-by-seat strategy to overthrow the narrow Republican majority without the aid of a nationalized campaign. Through these strategies and tactics, House Democrats managed to pick up five House seats despite the historical nemesis of midterm election results that plagued them throughout the 105th Congress.

House Democrats had several advantages working in their favor in the 105th Congress, despite the historical odds favoring a Republican pick-up in House seats.¹²⁸ First, political controversies engulfed the Republican House majority in the 105th Congress. Republican infighting involving the coup attempt against Gingrich, the flood relief bill of 1997, and the lack of a legislative agenda in 1998 each weakened the narrow Republican House majority. Second, President Clinton consistently enjoyed highly favorable polls in the 105th Congress, despite the campaign finance scandal investigation of 1997 and the Monica Lewinsky controversy in 1998. Third, the public consistently gave Democrats a sizable lead

¹²⁷ "With Major Issues Fading, Capitol Life Lures Fewer," Congressional Quarterly, 25 October 1997, pp. 2625-29.

¹²⁸ Charles E. Cook, "High Approval Ratings, Good Economy are Balm for 'Six-Year-Itch'," Roll Call, 24 November 1997, p. 6.

in generic preference polls for House control throughout the 105th Congress.¹²⁹ The public by large margins gave Democrats higher favorability on a wide variety of issues, including the environment, health care, jobs, and education. Democrats scored evenly with Republicans even on traditionally strong Republican issues like taxes, crime, and economic prosperity.¹³⁰ In addition, with no national wave favoring either party in the 105th Congress, the open seat races emerged as the key to House control in 1998.¹³¹ Unlike the previous elections of the 1990s, the open seat dynamics in 1998 favored House Democrats.¹³² President Clinton carried 15 of the 16 open Democratic seats in his 1996 re-election campaign. In addition, Clinton carried seven of the 15 open Republican seats.¹³³

In 1998, House Democrats focused their political strategies around an energized Democratic base vote as part of a larger nationwide Democratic base-voter strategy. The Democratic ground war of 1998 involved massive turnout efforts of the party's key constituency groups, especially African-Americans and members of labor unions, through one-on-one voter contacts involving highly partisan appeals for a Democratic House of

¹²⁹ Rachel Von Dongen, "'Generic Ballot' Tests Give Democrats Early Edge to Take Back House in '98," Roll Call Politics, 2 October 1997, p. 13.

¹³⁰ Terry M. Neal, "Poll Rates President, Democrats Favorably," Washington Post, 3 April 1998, p. A 20.

¹³¹ Rachel Van Dongen and John Mercurio, "Everything You Always Wanted to Know About House Open Seats....," Roll Call, 15 September 1997, pp. A-27-34.

¹³² Ceci Connolly, "Parties Look to Open Races for Their Greatest House Gains," Washington Post, 25 October 1998, p. A 20.

¹³³ Gerald F. Seib, "House Races: Open and Shut? Well, Maybe Not," Wall Street Journal, 8 April 1998, p. A 24.

Representatives.¹³⁴ 24% of the voters who turned out in the 1998 elections were union members, as opposed to 14% in 1994; 71% of union members voted for Democratic candidates in 1998, as opposed to 60% in 1994.¹³⁵

The Democratic campaign to “increase the juice” in its base led to the adoption of several hard-ball strategies and tactics characteristic of attack politics. This emphasis on attack politics by Democrats mirrored similar aggressive efforts by the Republican Minority in the early 1990s. Republican farm team efforts in the early 1990s encouraged Republicans to attack Democrats in the starkest political language possible. In the 1998 campaign, Democratic campaigns returned fire with their own red-meat appeals to their liberal Democratic base. In Kansas City, for instance, the Democratic party sponsored radio ads targeting conservative Republican freshman Vince Snowbarger (R-KS) in the black community that warned “When you don’t vote, you allow another cross to burn.” These ads implicitly tied Snowbarger to the 72 arsons committed against black churches in the South in 1995 and 1996, and allowed winning Blue Dog candidate Dennis Moore (D-KS) to appeal both to up-scale suburban voters in Johnson County, Kansas and minority voters in heavily Democratic Kansas City, Kansas. Similar Democratic turnout efforts focused on eight states critical to victory in 1998, including California, Washington, Iowa, Wisconsin, North

¹³⁴ Dennis Farney, “Minorities, Especially Blacks in the South, Put Democrats Over the Top in Key Races,” Wall Street Journal, 5 November 1998, p. A 10.

¹³⁵ Steven Greenhouse, “Republicans Credit Labor for Successes by Democrats,” New York Times, 6 November 1998, p. A 28.

Carolina, Kentucky, Georgia, and Nevada.¹³⁶

In the 103rd Congress, Democratic inattention to large-scale House Democratic retirements and the open seats these vacancies created helped sink the Democratic majority. In the 104th Congress, recruitment problems plagued House Democratic leaders as they attempted to stave off open seat losses resulting from the retirement of long-serving Southern House Democrats who thought the party didn't have a chance at recapturing the majority in 1996. These retirements provided Republicans with valuable open seat opportunities in the South, enabling them to save their narrow majority in the 1996 campaign. Early in the 105th Congress, Democratic leaders urged senior Democratic House incumbents not to retire in 1998. If a House Democrat did decide to retire in 1998, Democratic leaders urged them to announce their decision early in order to provide Democrats ample time to recruit a suitable candidate who could hold the seat.

House Democratic leaders addressed the open seat and recruitment problem by pursuing a "fit-the-district" strategy to retake the House.¹³⁷ The "fit-the-district" strategy entailed recruiting the right kind of Democrat, often moderates or conservatives, to run for the most competitive open seats or marginal Republican seats. House Democratic leaders then concentrated their campaign resources on achieving victory in these competitive races to take over several Republican House seats. A House Democrat involved in this "fit-the-

¹³⁶ "National Press Club Luncheon With Jim Nicholson, Chairman of the Republican National Committee, and Steve Grossman, Chairman of the Democratic National Committee," 4 November 1998, Federal Information Systems Corporation.

¹³⁷ Morton M. Kondracke, "GOP Won House by 11,889 Votes; '98 Is Up for Grabs," Roll Call, 16 January 1997, p. 5.

district” recruitment effort stated:

The key thing for Democrats winning the majority is fielding moderate Democratic candidates in swing seats that can win. The real secret of the 1994 blowout was that the liberals remained safe in their inner city and heavily unionized districts. It was the moderate and conservative Democrats in the South and West who paid the price for the liberalism of the 103rd Congress. And they were the people we needed to win back the House in 1996! It is a travesty. You had southern Democrats voting for a BTU tax and gun control, and being associated with Clinton’s big tax and spend 1993 budget. The Democrats in the swing seats we needed for majority control got nuked by the Republicans as a result.

Shortly after the 1996 election, Minority leader Richard Gephardt criss-crossed the country searching for viable Democratic House candidates as part of a massive recruiting drive to find Democratic House candidates ideologically in tune with their districts. These efforts continued every weekend through the summer of 1997. Through these recruiting drives to over 20 states, Gephardt quickly signed up several quality contenders for 1998.¹³⁸ This massive commitment to recruitment focused on finding the right type of Democratic candidate to win open seats vacated by Republican incumbents. Additionally, this “fit-the-district” strategy focused on finding the best quality candidates that could challenge the 26 Republican incumbents elected in 1996 with under 51% of the vote.

The “fit-the-district” strategy in the 105th Congress led to the recruitment of several conservative Democratic candidates whose politics meshed with the character of a particular district better than that of a traditionally liberal Democratic House candidate.¹³⁹ The

¹³⁸ “Dems in Overdrive,” Business Week, 5 May 1997, p. 110.

¹³⁹ Terry M. Neal, “Democrats See Favorable Numbers, Hard Wins in Southern House Bids,” Washington Post, 29 March 1998, p. A 16; Benjamin Sheffner, “Scratching the ‘Six-Year Itch’ Democrats Hoping to Build the Perfect House Candidates,” Roll Call, 13 February 1997; “Can a ‘Different Kind of Democrat’ Retake the House?,” Business Week, 30 March 1998, p. 47; E.J. Dionne, “The New Drumbeat: Moderation,” Washington Post, p. C 1.

Democratic “fit-the-district” strategy was similar to the Republican farm team effort in many critical aspects. Both efforts involved minority parties trying to fight against the inherent campaign disadvantages of a party out of power. Both efforts involved minority party leaders actively engaged in the recruitment process of House candidates. The Republican farm team effort coincided with basic elements of Republican party culture, and then augmented this culture into a distinct fighting force of relatively homogeneous candidates battling for majority status under a centralized leadership command-and-control structure.

The Democratic “fit-the-district” strategy, on the other hand, coincided with basic elements of Democratic party culture, which values diversity, heterogeneity, and a less centralized leadership structure. Republican farm team efforts recruited, trained, and elected a relatively similar cadre of conservative House members dedicated to the same Gingrich-inspired themes of attacking Democratic corruption, renewing American civilization, remaking the federal government, and responding to the challenges of an information-age economy. House Democratic leaders, on the other hand, eschewed these farm team efforts in lieu of building a Democratic House majority seat-by-seat irrespective of party ideology and governance.

House Democratic leaders Gephardt, Frost, and Hoyer recruited several conservative Democratic candidates who supported traditionally Republican stances on public policy issues, including free trade, a balanced budget amendment, opposition to abortion, and support of conservative “takings” legislation.¹⁴⁰ The Democratic “fit-the-district” recruits were often more conservative and closer to the business community than the Republicans

¹⁴⁰ Dana Milbank, “Party Crashers,” The New Republic, 15 June 1998, pp. 21-25.

they were running against. For instance, in the race to succeed retiring incumbent Joseph McDade (R-PA) in Pennsylvania's Tenth District, House Democratic leaders recruited Pat Casey, a pro-life Democrat. Pat Casey's father, former Governor Bob Casey (D-PN), had been barred from speaking at the 1992 Democratic convention due to his pro-life stance.¹⁴¹ But the imperative of achieving the eleven seats required for a Democratic House majority in 1998 overcame previous Democratic demands of ideological and liberal purity within party ranks.

In addition to Casey, House Democratic leaders recruited other social and economic Democratic conservatives to run for crucial open seats or against vulnerable Republican incumbents, including Joe Turnam (D-AL), David Phelps (D-IL), Chris Gorman (D-KY), Richard Stallings (D-ID), Ken Lucas (D-KY), and Loy Sneary (D-TX). As Table 4-3 illustrates, the Democratic "fit-the-district" candidates helped Democrats gain six previously Republican seats and retain two Democratic open seats vulnerable to Republican capture. In the race for the House in 1998, Democratic desires for a House majority superseded concerns of ideology or governance in a Democratic House with a slim majority. According to Paul Frick, political director of the DCCC, "The only real litmus test we have is, 'Who are you going to vote for for Speaker?'"¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Rachel Van Dongen, "Pro-Life & Pro-Democrat," Roll Call Politics, 20 April 1998, p. 15.

¹⁴² Ibid.

Table 4-3: The Democratic “fit-the-district” Strategy

Democratic Candidate	District	1998 seat status	1998 election result
Joe Turnham	Alabama 3	Inc., Bob Riley (R)	Republican hold
Mike Thompson*	California 1	open Republican seat	Democratic gain
Richard Stallings	Idaho 3	open Republican seat	Republican hold
Baron Hill	Indiana 9	open Democratic seat	Democratic hold
David Phelps	Illinois 19	open Democratic seat	Democratic hold
Dennis Moore*	Kansas 3	Inc., Vince Snowbarger (R)	Democratic gain
Chris Gorman	Kentucky 3	Inc., Anne Northrup (R)	Republican hold
Ken Lucas*	Kentucky 6	open Republican seat	Democratic gain
Marjorie McKeithen	Louisiana 6	Inc., Richard Baker (R)	Republican hold
Ronnie Shows*	Mississippi 4	open Republican seat	Democratic gain
Glenn Jernigan	North Carolina 8	open Democratic seat	Republican gain
Thomas Udall*	New Mexico 3	Inc., Bill Redmond	Democratic gain
Shelley Berkley*	Nevada 2	open Republican seat	Democratic gain
Roxanne Qualls	Ohio 1	Inc., Steve Chabot	Republican hold
Pat Casey	Pennsylvania 10	open Republican seat	Republican hold
Roy Afflerbach	Pennsylvania 15	open Democratic seat	Republican gain
Loy Sneyry	Texas 14	Inc., Ron Paul	Republican hold
Lydia Spottwood	Wisconsin 1	open Republican seat	Republican hold

In addition to recruiting conservative Democrats to help propel Democrats to majority status in the House, House Democratic leaders also intervened to support them in Democratic primaries against more liberal Democratic House candidates.¹⁴³ In the 104th Congress, House Republican leaders intervened in several key races to insure the most electable Republican candidate became the party’s nominee in the general election. These Republican interventions helped the Republican majority to save or grab conservative districts in Utah,

¹⁴³ Norah M. O’Donnell and John Mercurio, “Dems Play Favorites in Key Seats,” Roll Call Politics, 2 April 1998, p. 13.

Oklahoma, and Oregon. In the 105th Congress, House Democratic leaders likewise intervened in several primary elections to insure the most electable, mainstream Democratic House candidate would face a Republican opponent in the general election, helping Democrats to win the critical swing seats for victory in 1998. In the race for the Tenth District of Pennsylvania, Democratic leaders encouraged pro-choice House candidate Joe Cullen to drop out in favor of pro-life “fit-the-district” House candidate Pat Casey. Democratic leaders and DCCC officials also intervened in the California 1, Nevada 2, and Kentucky 6 primary races, each open seat races due to Republican incumbent retirements, to insure the victories of “fit-the-district” candidates Mike Thompson (D-CA), Shelley Berkley (D-NV), and Ken Lucas (D-KY).¹⁴⁴

Other conservative Democratic House candidates receiving primary intervention by Democratic leaders included Glenn Jernigan in North Carolina’s Eight district (for the race to replace retiring Democrat Bill Heffner), pro-life Democrat Chris Gorman in Kentucky’s Third district (to challenge vulnerable Republican freshman Anne Northrup), and social conservative Joe Turnham in Alabama’s Third district (to challenge vulnerable Republican freshman Bob Riley).¹⁴⁵ Through this activity, Democratic leaders picked winners and losers as they attempted to find the most electable candidate to win open seat races, defeat vulnerable Republican incumbents, and help achieve a new Democratic majority in the 106th

¹⁴⁴ Thomas B. Edsall, “1998 Could Bring Power Shift in House,” Washington Post, 15 February 1998, p. A 8; Candidates Thompson, Berkley, and Lucas each won a Republican open seat in the 1998 election.

¹⁴⁵ John Mercurio and Norah M. O’Donnell, “Frost Is Bullish on Clinton, Democrats Retaking the House,” Roll Call Politics, 16 February 1998, p. 11. Despite these “fit-the-district” Democratic candidates, Republicans won all three seats.

Congress.

In terms of financing elections, House Democrats knew they would be outspent by the better-funded Republican majority in the 1998 elections. The DNC's debt from the 1996 election, combined with its legal bills from the 1997 congressional campaign finance investigations, contributed to a large \$15 million debt at the beginning of 1998. For the 1998 election cycle, the NRCC significantly out-raised the DCCC, raising \$43 million as opposed to \$19 million raised by the DCCC. As they confronted the Republican money advantage, House Democratic leaders made two key decisions that affected their victory in 1998. First, they decided to maintain the DCCC staff levels of the 1996 campaign through 1997 in order to provide the quality Democratic House recruits with additional instruction on how to raise campaign funds.¹⁴⁶ In addition to recruiting their "fit-the-district" candidates, House Democratic leaders taught them the art of fund-raising and urged them to raise money early and often to blunt the inevitable Republican soft money advantage at the national level. DCCC Executive Director Matt Angle stated "We don't pretend that we're going to compete with the [GOP] financially. The question is do you have enough money to play in the districts that are really in question, and in those districts do you have enough money to tell your story and we feel that we do."¹⁴⁷

This "teach-them-to-fish" effort, which mirrored similar efforts by GOPAC and Newt Gingrich in the early 1990s, gave early boosts to the campaigns of winning Democratic

¹⁴⁶ Adam Clymer, "Democrats Lead G.O.P. in an Early Money Race," New York Times, 7 March 1998, p. A 9.

¹⁴⁷ Ceci Connolly and Ruth Marcus, "GOP Launches Aerial Attack; Democrats Struggle Against Torrent of Money," Washington Post, 18 October 1998, p. A 1.

candidates Mike Thompson (D-CA), Ken Lucas (D-KY), Shelley Berkley (D-NV), Brian Baird (D-WA), and Dennis Moore (D-KS). Each of these winning candidates captured a previously Republican House seat in 1998.¹⁴⁸ Second, House Democratic leaders decided not to support Democratic candidates in races against guaranteed Republican winners, leaving 51 Republican incumbents unopposed in 1998.¹⁴⁹ Instead of funding futile challenges to inevitable Republican victors, House Democratic leaders chose to focus resources on the most winnable open seat races. As a result, House Democratic candidates in open seat contests out-raised their Republican opponents, enabling Democrats to score key victories in their seat-by-seat trench warfare for House control.

Conclusion

The fight for House control dominated the politics and legislative process of the 105th Congress, much like it had in the previous Congresses of the 1990s. In the 103rd Congress, a determined Republican minority defeated a complacent Democratic majority at the end of the session. In the 104th Congress, a determined Democratic minority confronted a Republican majority bent on saving itself at the end of the session. In the 105th Congress, however, the drive for majority status consumed the politics of both parties throughout 1997 and 1998. House Democrats began fighting for a Democratic majority in 1998 as soon as the ballots of the 1996 election were counted, focusing on recruitment and the “fit-the-district” strategy. House Republicans structured the 105th Congress to defend their majority

¹⁴⁸ John Mercurio and Rachel Van Dongen, “Challengers Get Jump in Money Chase,” Roll Call, 10 April 1998, p. 1.

¹⁴⁹ Guy Gugliotta and Ceci Connolly, “Money Imbalance Is Driving Campaign Tactics,” Washington Post, 14 June 1998, p. A 4.

in 1998, from the bipartisan budget deal of 1997 to the recess strategy of 1998 to “Operation Breakout” of the 1998 campaign. In the process, the legislative process became used primarily as a campaign vehicle for parties angling for House majorities instead of a vehicle to pass legislation into law. The two parties used the legislative process to appeal to their bases, accentuate conflict and partisan divisions, and seek ways to embarrass the other side in preparation for the 1998 midterm election.

This intense focus for majority status led the House of Representatives to be governed in a different manner than in the previous era of non-competition, much as it did in the 103rd and 104th Congresses. In the 103rd Congress, the Democratic majority attempted to govern the country from the left under the auspices of the first unified Democratic government in 12 years. In the 104th Congress, the Republican majority attempted to govern the country from the right under the auspices of the first Republican House majority in 40 years. In both Congresses, the majority party lost seats in the following election. In the 105th Congress, the Republican majority’s recess strategy attempted to play it safe in order to avoid risking a slim ten-seat majority. House Democrats, meanwhile, pursued a base-voter strategy in 1998, and used the impeachment process and the “do-nothing” moniker to both appeal to their most committee liberal voters and spur a higher turnout in the midterm election. But as House Democratic leaders pursued a base voter strategy designed to increase liberal turnout, they also had to contend with a caucus comprised of a growing Blue Dog/New Democratic Coalition cadre of moderate and conservative members. These members demanded a more centrist face on the House Democratic Caucus, both in terms of politics and policy, in order to win and maintain a secure Democratic majority in 1998 and beyond.

Like the Democratic majority of the 103rd Congress, the Republican majority of the 105th Congress kept a tight grip on the House floor in order to protect its hold on power. In both instances, this effort to keep a tight majority party grip on the House procedurally sparked discharge petition fights from the minority party in efforts to embarrass the prevailing House majority and create campaign issues for the fall campaign. The end result was a series of Congresses in the 1990s dominated by intense partisanship, little or no compromise between the two parties in the House on the major legislative proposals, and the triumph of attack politics as a key weapon for majority status.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussions and Conclusions Implications for Analysis, Practice, Theory, and American Democracy

As the examinations of the 103rd-105th Congresses illustrate, two-party competition for House control in the 1990s is having a tangible effect on the electoral and institutional foundations of House politics. The competitive pressures of the 1990s are not merely isolated phenomenon with minor effects on the House. Instead, competitive pressures provide important an important analytical framework to better understand and explain the House of Representatives. This chapter concludes the current examination of the House of Representatives by analyzing how the race for the House in the 1990s shapes contemporary House politics and expands on current theoretical understandings of the Congress. In addition, this chapter examines how the current period of two-party competition for House control influences the nature and operation of American government. As citizens, it is important that we think about how legislative changes either enhance or negate the American experiment in democratic self-government.

Implications for Analysis and Practice: Two-Party Competition and the 103rd-105th Congresses

The examinations of the 103rd-105th have shown how the battle for majority control has affected electoral strategies, governing strategies and tactics, and the party cultures of the Republican Conference and the Democratic Caucus. In terms of electoral strategies, the two parties now operate more from a concern to obtain a House majority than from ideological concerns. In terms of party culture, the two parties are acting more like unified teams and

less like loose conglomerations of individual entrepreneurs. And finally, in terms of governing strategies, the two parties are deploying more partisan governing tactics aimed at producing political punishment on the opposing party in the electoral arena instead of legislative successes in the governing arena. The drive for House majorities by the two parties dominates the politics of the institution, from high-level leadership decisions and actions to the most obscure House races in far-flung districts. This focus on seeking House majorities by the two parties affects congressional action from the Speaker's office down to the most obscure House race. As competitive pressures ripple through the political system, all prevailing political forces and tactics have become aligned with the over-riding mission of capturing the House. Until one of the party solidifies an enduring, stable majority, two-party competition will continue to affect and dominate the politics of the House of Representatives, both institutionally and on the campaign trail. The end result is a more partisan institution where principles of party-building dominate most political action.

In terms of electoral strategies, a clear and distinct shift has occurred. House campaigns still remain candidate-centered affairs based largely on local issues, and their outcomes are still largely determined by the absence or presence of quality candidates. But the larger strategic terrain upon which all campaigns operate has now been changed in the nationalized campaigns of 1994, 1996, and 1998. Congressional politics have been skewed in favor of strategies and tactics that are successful in obtaining and retaining a House majority. Nationalized campaign strategies have emerged as one of the most successful strategies to grab control of the House. In each of these nationalized campaigns for House control in the 1990s, attack politics has played a prominent role as the weapon of choice for

achieving majority status. The nationalized precedents of the 1994-1998 campaigns provide a new avenue of analysis for congressional elections in addition to the traditional candidate-centered analytical framework currently offered by political science.

The chief incentive for both parties in this competitive environment is not to work together in a civil manner, but to divide into opposing teams whose chief mission is to embarrass and harangue the other side in the House. In this environment, the tactics of Gingrich differ little from the tactics of Bonior. Both congressional leaders deployed their own version of attack politics to fuel nationalized drives for House control. These tactics amplify the politics of “revelation, investigation, and prosecution” first conceptualized by Ginsberg and Shefter. But while Ginsberg and Shefter illustrated how the politics of R.I.P. had supplanted electoral combat with institutional combat, the competitive pressures of the 1990s have forced this institutional combat out of the halls of Washington, D.C. and onto the campaign trail in the nationalized fights for majority control. As the two parties have bitterly fought for House control in the 1990s, obtaining a House majority has emerged as the ultimate method to inflict political damage and “revenge” on the other party.

The race for the House is also shaping other aspects of the electoral process. Both parties have placed more emphasis on the recruitment of House candidates, although in manners that reflect their distinct party cultures. Republican farm team efforts in the early 1990s and Democratic “fit-the-district” efforts in the late 1990s each illustrate the degree to which competitive pressures have infected the recruitment process in individual House races. The imperative of gaining a House majority has compelled the leaders of both parties in the House to selectively intervene in close races and districts around the country to insure the

election of their most electable House candidates. These activities by party leaders are having a direct effect on which party ultimately controls in the House of Representatives, both in the short and long term. Republican leaders have intervened in competitive and conservative districts all across the United States to insure their majority status continued beyond the 104th Congress. House Democratic leaders have likewise adopted a similar interventionist stance to influence individual House elections in order to build a new Democratic majority. In the process, these exogenous interventions in various House races have altered the traditional norm of “candidate-centered” campaigns based solely on local issues. Now, the imperatives of grabbing or keeping a House majority force the dynamics of House races to be influenced by political players from far outside the local politics of a House district.

In addition to the nature of House elections, two-party competition is tangibly changing the party cultures of the Republican Conference and the Democratic Caucus. Competitive pressures are forcing both parties to work as tighter political teams to obtain and maintain House majorities. This represents a big shift in thinking from the more individualistic party cultures prevalent in both parties during the previous non-competitive era. Both parties are now displaying collective loyalty to their party in order to reap the collective gains emanating from majority control. From the Contract With America to “Operation Breakout,” competitive pressures have molded House Republican culture around the precepts of teamwork and collective party accountability. These political developments have molded House Republican party culture into a united fighting machine adept in the art

of protecting a fragile majority amidst a fiercely contested environment.¹ Competitive pressures have likewise molded House Democratic culture in the direction of increased teamwork.

Competitive pressures have forced a re-thinking within both parties about basic party beliefs and ideology. House Republicans enjoyed great success in their highly ideological 1994 victory, but lost ground in the 1996 and 1998 elections. As they confront an intense battle to keep their narrow majority in the 2000 elections, competitive pressures have forced the adoption of a more pragmatic outlook by Republican House leaders. Competitive pressures have likewise affected House Democrats, who engaged in ideological soul-searching following their 1994 defeat and loss of majority control. The competitive wake-up call of the 1994 election sparked immediate change within the Democratic party. While President Clinton abandoned House Democratic liberals and embarked on a centrist triangulation strategy, House Democratic leaders and members engaged in much-needed dialogue about basic party principles and beliefs. Much of the change in the Democratic Caucus between 1994 and 2000, from the Blue Dogs to the New Democratic Coalition, can be ascribed to the competitive pressures emanating from the loss of majority control in 1994 and the inability to regain the House in 1996.

¹ There will always be a tension between ideology and constituency within House Republican ranks. While House Republican culture has increasingly advocated a unified team approach to governing as a House majority, several Republican moderates and conservatives have bucked this team-oriented thinking in the 104th-106th Congresses. The more ideological Republicans are less likely to be team players, but are cross pressured by leadership pressures and party culture to become team players. The Democrats have been more autonomous and pragmatic.

In addition to elections and party cultures, the new era of competition for House control has altered the governing and legislative process. Competitive pressures and the fight for majority control have sparked a flurry of new governing strategies, from triangulation to shutdown politics to using the legislative power of the House to pursue a base-voter strategy. In addition, competitive pressures have forced both parties to spell out clear and defined agendas that can satisfy both their base voters and more moderate and apolitical swing voters. But most importantly, the competitive race for the House in the 1990s has molded a new governing paradigm for the House of Representatives based on conflict, extreme partisanship, and the absence of compromise and civility. Now, pursuing a partisan agenda designed to garner votes and increased House seats in the fall elections has become the most profitable political stance by the two parties, especially the minority party. Instead of mutual concession, there is obstruction. Instead of bipartisanship, there is gridlock. Instead of civility, there is venom and conflict. This shift from compromise and civility to partisan conflict and intense partisan combat has changed the nature and character of the House of Representatives in the 1990s and beyond. The key motivation now governing congressional action in the U.S. House is the struggle to obtain the 218 seats to organize and control the House of Representatives. This shift to a partisan, electorally-minded House in a competitive environment provides an important analytical and theoretical prism from which to understand electoral and institutional developments in House politics.

Although the current era of competition presents new challenges to both the majority and minority parties, competitive pressures have especially squeezed each of the House majorities of the 1990s, from the 103rd Congress to the 106th Congress. Each of the House

majorities of the 1990s has lost seats as it lost ground to more determined and aggressive minority party campaigns for House control. The evidence of the 103rd, 104th, and 105th Congresses provides no good answer regarding the best manner in which a House majority can balance the competing political needs of keeping its base secure while still being able to present a moderate and “commonsense” image to swing voters. For each of the Congresses under review, the majority party leadership hurt its party's chances in the general elections through the type of agenda, or lack of agenda, pursued. As a result, controlling the legislative and political agenda has emerged as one of the most important lessons for both parties in the war for House control in the 1990s. When the Republican minority controlled the agenda in 1994, it won both 52 House seats and majority status. In 1996, the Democratic minority seized control of the agenda in the period after the government shutdowns, but the Republican majority managed to re-establish its own control of the agenda with its bipartisan deals with President Clinton in the summer of 1996. This situation produced a mixed election result, with the Democrats gaining seats but the Republicans maintaining House control. In 1998, the Republican majority offered no clear agenda in the fall campaign while the Democratic minority pushed a clear agenda that contained bold appeals to its liberal base and centrist policy proposals to attract swing voters. While the Democrats remained united around its activist agenda, the Republican majority floundered as it presented no unified agenda to either its base or to swing voters while choosing misguided electoral strategies and tactics.

The political necessities of two-party competition for House control in the 1990s presents both the majority and minority party with a quandary. Both parties must appeal to

their more ideological bases of support while appearing centrist and pragmatic in order to win the pivotal swing seats that determine House control. The evidence of the 103rd-105th Congresses illustrates that this task is easier for the minority party than the majority party. While majority parties have the responsibility of governing and campaigning, the minority party can operate under the political radar screen, creating mayhem and mischief for the majority party and hobbling it in preparation for the fall elections. The tactics and strategies of the Republican minority of 1994 are very similar to that of the Democratic minority since 1994. In each case, the minority party managed to use media outlets, public relations gimmicks, and political rhetoric to help set the agenda for the fall elections. House minority parties can more easily take their base of support for granted since they do not control the legislative agenda and thus have fewer opportunities to upset their base voters. The plight of the Republican House majority in the 104th and 105th Congresses is instructive to any future House majority. In 1996 and 1998, the Republican House majority confronted a listless and de-energized conservative base, while having trouble articulating themes that could appeal to swing voters amidst sustained attack politics from the Democratic minority. After the clarity of the Contract With America in 1994 and 1995, the Republican base became upset with the compromises with President Clinton in 1996 and 1997 by Republican congressional leaders. The Republican House majority shrunk in the 1996-1998 period as a result.

The key trick for majority parties in this environment is to implement into law legislation that both satisfies its base vote while at the same time building a positive reputation of the party for swing voters in the fall elections. The competitive pressures of

the race for the House practically demands majority parties to adopt a lowest common denominator governing strategy. This strategy not only helps members running in safe seats, but also enables candidates in swing seats to attract their respective base voters and appeal to swing voters. The Republican majority of the 1990s has encountered its best political success when it pursued lowest common denominator governing strategies, from welfare reform to fiscal discipline to tax cuts. A future Democratic House majority could likewise adopt a similar governing strategy on issues like campaign finance reform, managed care reform, education issues, and gun control. When the majority party confronts voters in low turnout elections empty-handed, like the Democratic majority of 1994 and the Republican majority of 1998, then it loses politically as it becomes squeezed between angry swing voters and a de-energized base. When it confronts voters with clear agendas and numerous legislative accomplishments, like the Democratic majority of 1988 and, to some extent, the Republican majority of 1996, then it can both satisfy its base and appeal to more independent voters.

The events of the 103rd-105th Congresses illustrate how the current competitive environment of House politics demands clear and defined leadership and agendas from the parties in order for them to be successful. The case study of Representative Newt Gingrich is instructive to congressional leaders of both parties in a competitive environment where House control is up for grabs. In 1994, Minority Whip Newt Gingrich provided a clear agenda and undisputed leadership in the quest for a Republican House majority. In 1996 and 1998, Speaker Gingrich was damaged political goods who, despite his strengths in terms of fund-raising and appealing to Republican base voters, hurt his party in the pivotal swing

districts. During his tenure as House Speaker, Gingrich played the role of 1) legislative leader and Speaker of the House, 2) philosophical leader of the Republican party, 3) chief Republican election strategist, 4) party leader, primarily chief fund-raiser of the Republican party, and 5) shadow presidential candidate in the 1996 and 2000 Republican presidential primaries. When the Democratic “get-Newt” strategy succeeded in transforming Gingrich into a liability for Republicans, the Republican center of gravity was upset and the Republican House majority endangered.

The competitive era that began in the 1994 campaign continued unabated in the 1996, 1998, and 2000 election cycles. No matter which party wins the House or presidency in 2000, the groundwork will be laid for another competitive contest for House control in the 2002 midterm. In all likelihood, any House majority obtained in 2000 will be a narrow and tenuous majority, much like the slim majorities of the 104th-106th Congresses. If Republicans manage to hold their tenuous five-seat majority in the 2000 elections while winning the presidency, they will face the historical burden of keeping their House majority amidst inevitable midterm burdens in 2002. If Democrats win the House and the presidency in 2000, they will in all likelihood possess a narrow House majority that would likewise be vulnerable in the 2002 midterm. A Republican presidential win combined with a Democratic victory in the House (or vice-versa) would produce interesting political developments, but would still produce a competitive environment for House control in 2002. The 1998 election results, where Democrats gained five House seats despite the historical onus of second-term midterms and the cloud of scandal and impeachment swirling around President Clinton, illustrate the extent to which the actual election results in the current competitive era are

difficult to predict. Whatever the 2000 election results dole out to the two parties in terms of House control, the changes emanating from the race for the House will continue for the foreseeable future until the electoral foundations of this competitive era change.

Currently, the two parties have achieved parity in terms of their regional representation in the House. The Republicans have secured a base of support of House seats in the South, buttressed by their tremendous gains in southern, conservative House seats in the 1994-1998 elections. The Democrats have likewise secured a base of support in the Northeast, on the Pacific coast, and in the inner city urban areas that has been solidified in the 1994-1998 elections. These regional developments have produced larger minority parties and smaller majority parties in each of the Congresses under review. Both parties can easily control roughly 187+ seats. The remaining sixty swing seats, now equally divided between both parties, have become political nomads waiting to be tamed by one of the parties. Until this situation changes, either due to a massive political realignment, economic depression, or artful redistricting, then a competitive environment for House control will persist into the near future. This competitive era will remain a significant development in House politics, and will provide fruitful avenues for research and study.

Although no electoral basis exists as of yet for another era of one-party non-competitive rule, there are plenty of opportunities for both parties to achieve stable, working majorities that approach 240-250 seats. The swing seats needed to comprise such a majority, however, would always be vulnerable to attack from the minority party. But the majority party in this situation would be able to use the “better to be in the majority” mentality to attract savvy political entrepreneurs to its ranks who argue that a particular

district's legislative needs are best served by a representative of the majority party. Under this scenario, the majority party could then "tame" several swing seats using this logic. Both parties have the potential of capturing and "taming" competitive swing seats, much like in the previous non-competitive era where politically savvy House Democrats "tamed" moderate and conservative House districts around the country.

Since their 1994 victory, House Republicans have lost ground in 30 seats they controlled in either the 104th or 105th Congresses. The Democratic nationalized campaign of 1996, the Medicare and anti-Gingrich campaigns, and the successful Democratic "fit-the-district" strategy of 1998 have each been effective in depriving the Republican majority of a stable majority, capturing 33 Republican House seats and bringing them into Democratic ranks. If the Republicans had maintained control of these 33 competitive seats, they would have possessed a stable majority of around 250 seats in the 106th Congress (1999-2001). Since 1995, however, Republicans have only defeated four Democratic House incumbents while House Democrats have defeated 23 Republican House incumbents. Unless House Republicans can make a successful effort to defeat more Democratic incumbents in the 2000 and 2002 elections, House Democrats will have an advantage in the 2000 elections as they fight for majority status, much like House Republicans had the advantage in 1992 and 1994 as they minimized Republican incumbent defeats and grabbed over 60 Democratic House seats. The potential vacancies of self term limited Republican members, or the retirements of moderate Republicans holding traditionally Democratic House seats, also provide ripe targets for House Democrats. Successful and adept electoral and governing strategies could provide an opportunity for one of the parties to cobble together a majority by grabbing these

seats and taming them over several election cycles. But this majority would remain a tenuous majority like the majorities of the 103rd-105th Congress, and would face determined and aggressive efforts by the minority party to regain majority status.

The Race for the House Continues: the 106th Congress*

The competitive pressures driving congressional action in the 103rd-105th Congresses continued to drive congressional action and behavior in the 106th Congress. After the 1998 elections, House Republicans emerged with a mere five seat majority. Only 50 of the original 73 members of the class of 1994 remained in the House after the 1998 midterm election. As the 106th Congress started, House Republicans confronted ominous poll numbers, campaign debts emanating from the 1998 campaign, and the challenges of keeping their majority in 2000 as seven House Republicans prepared to step down from their seats to keep their self-term limit pledges.² The extreme narrowness of the Republican majority changed the political calculus of the 106th Congress remarkably, with House Democrats viewing a takeover in 2000 as extremely possible and House Republicans struggling to find new strategies and tactics to preserve their six year old House majority.³

The competitive pressures of the 106th Congress had a profound affect on House Republican governing, leadership, and agenda strategies. The new Republican leadership team under the leadership of Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-IL) attempted to put a new

² Juliet Eilperin and Dan Balz, "House GOP Leaders Sound an Alarm," Washington Post, 5 February 1999, p. A 4.

³ Juliet Eilperin, "In Divided House, All Eyes on 2000," Washington Post, 3 June 1999, p. A 3; David S. Broder, "Stakes High in 2000: Voters Can Redirect 3 Federal Branches," Washington Post, 21 June 1999, p. A 1.

pragmatic political face on the Republican majority. The extreme competitive pressures of keeping the House in Republican hands in 2000 forced House Republicans to pursue a lowest common denominator strategy in the 106th Congress consisting of four core Republican policy issues: protecting and preserving Social Security, passing additional tax relief, addressing problems in the nation's educational system, and addressing concerns about the nation's national security.⁴ Competitive pressures in 1998 led to Republican adoption of a recess strategy in the 105th Congress. Competitive pressures in 1999 had the opposite effect of spurring the Republican majority of the 106th Congress to quickly pass several legislative achievements, especially by passing the fiscal year 2000 budget resolution before the April 15th deadline. Through each of the efforts, House Republicans hoped to burnish their negative perceptions with voters as they faced a tough fight to keep their majority in the 2000 elections. But the difficulty of governing the House and the country with a five-seat majority hobbled the Republican majority in the first six months of the 106th Congress.

To save their imperiled majority, 114 Republican House members endorsed the presidential bid of Republican front-runner Texas Governor George W. Bush before the summer of 1999.⁵ These House Republicans, impressed with Bush's double-digit lead over Democratic presidential candidate Vice-President Al Gore and his ability to appeal to women and minority votes, hoped that a strong Republican presidential victory in 2000 would help carry House Republicans to another term as a majority party in the 107th (2001-2002)

⁴ Ceci Connolly and Juliet Eilperin, "Hastert Steps Up to Leading Role," Washington Post, 5 January 1999, p. A 1; Alison Mitchell, "G.O.P. Picks Its Fight," New York Times, 13 March 1999, p. A 1.

⁵ Fred Barnes, "The Anointed One," The Weekly Standard, 14 June 1999, pp. 19-21.

Congress.⁶ The House Republican embrace of Governor Bush illustrates how competition for House control not only impacts politics in the House of Representatives, but has also spilled over into the realm of presidential politics. The competitive pressures emanating from the new race for the House have forced the 2000 presidential election to become intertwined with the battle for House control. Just as Republicans rallied around Bush's front-runner status, Democrats rallied around the presidential candidacy of Vice President Al Gore, hoping to avoid a messy primary that could rob the party of electoral successes in 2000. Meanwhile, competitive pressures have affected not only presidential politics, but presidential legacies as well. President Clinton, angered at the Republican effort to impeach him in 1998, vowed political revenge on the Republican majority in the 2000 elections.⁷ Although unable to run for re-election in 2000, Clinton viewed a Democratic recapture of the House in 2000 as a pivotal part of his political legacy, especially after the 1994 Democratic defeat and the 1996 Democratic failure to retake the House.

Competitive pressures likewise affected House Democrats in the 106th Congress as they intensely fought for a new Democratic House majority in the 2000 elections. The 1998 election results emboldened Democrats for a takeover effort in 2000 after six years in minority status. This task of retaking the House became easier as several Republican members elected in 1994 intended to keep their self-term limit promises in 2000 and vacate their Democratic-leaning seats, including Representatives Tom Coburn (R-OK) and Jack

⁶ Dan Balz and Ceci Connolly, "Poll Shows Bush Gains With Women, Hispanics," Washington Post, 25 June 1999, p. A 7.

⁷ Richard L. Berke and James Bennet, "Clinton Vows Strong Drive to Win a House Majority, Advisers Say," New York Times, 11 February 1999, p. A 1.

Metcalf (R-WA). In addition, four House Republicans won election in 1998 with under 50% of the vote, providing Democrats with excellent opportunities to gain seats. Each of these situations presented numerous opportunities for House Democrats to use “fit-the-district” candidates to win an additional six seats and a House majority in 2000.

The narrow six-seat margin of Republican majority control in 1999 whetted Democratic desires for capturing the House in 2000, igniting a thirst for majority status by all House Democrats and their political allies in Democratic base. This thirst for majority status structured many of the political developments in the Democratic Caucus in 1999. The AFL-CIO, for instance, pledged \$46 million to keep union political operatives in the field over the course of the 106th Congress to help Democrats win back control 2000.⁸ Minority Leader Gephardt, meanwhile, announced in early 1999 he would not seek the Democratic presidential nomination in 2000 in order to concentrate all of his efforts on retaking the House. Throughout 1999, Gephardt pursued an extremely partisan agenda that eschewed compromise with the Republican agenda while accentuating partisan divisions between the two parties in order to present voters with a clear choice in the 2000 elections.⁹ President Clinton also worked closely with House Democrats throughout the early months of the 106th Congress to embarrass and attack the Republican majority through issues like gun control, HMO reform, campaign finance reform, school construction funds, Medicare, and Social

⁸ Frank Swoboda, “AFL-CIO Plots a Push for Democratic House,” Washington Post, 18 February 1999, p. A 1.

⁹ Michael Grunwald, “Gephardt Works Tirelessly to Take Back the House,” Washington Post, 12 July 1999, p. A 1.

Security.¹⁰ Through these developments, Democrats worked together to lay the groundwork for capturing the House in 2000, adopting many of the same strategies and tactics first pioneered by the House Republican minority in the 102nd and 103rd Congresses. Each of these developments illustrate how the race for the House remains a central motivating force in U.S. politics in the 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century.

Theoretical Implications of Two-Party Competition for Congressional Scholarship

The new era of two-party competition clearly affects our theoretical understanding of the U.S. House. The drive for House majorities by the two parties provides a new determinant of congressional action and behavior. Thinking about the House in terms of the presence or absence of two-party competition makes a theoretical contribution to the discipline of political science and the study of the House, especially in regards to the nature of House elections, party culture, and governing strategies in the U.S. Congress. Current theories of the U.S. House do not account for the vagaries of two-party competition in the 103rd-105th Congresses. As political scientists and observers of the modern Congress, it is imperative that we begin thinking about the House of Representatives from the perspective offered by the tenuous majority and two-party competition. Failure to incorporate this aspect of House politics into our thinking could lead to a misleading and inaccurate account of what is truly driving congressional action in the House of Representatives amidst sustained two-party competition.

Take the case study of the 13th district of Pennsylvania in the 1990s. In 1992,

¹⁰ Rachel Van Dongen, "Struggle for Control, House in Balance, Both Parties See Competitive 2000 Cycle," Roll Call, 18 January 1999.

Democratic candidate Marjorie Margolies-Mezvinsky defeated Republican Jon Fox by 1,373 votes. In 1994, Jon Fox (R-PA) defeated freshman Representative Marjorie Margolies-Mezvinsky (D-PA) by the close margin of 49%-45% after Mezvinsky cast the deciding vote to pass the 1993 Clinton budget plan that increased taxes. In the 1996 elections, Representative Jon Fox (R-PA) won re-election to his swing seat in the House by a bare 84-vote margin as Democrats attacked his association to the unpopular Newt Gingrich. In 1998, Jon Fox lost his bid for re-election. In the previous era of non-competition, the rise and fall of Marjorie Margolies-Mezvinsky and Jon Fox would be an interesting case study of members of both parties struggling to tame a swing seat.

In the era of the tenuous majority of the 103rd-105th Congresses, however, the sawing of this swing seat has significance not only to Jon Fox and Mezvinsky, but also the political careers of every other member of their respective parties in the House. Mezvinsky's loss in 1994 contributed to the Republican takeover, which affected every surviving House Democrat in the 104th Congress serving in minority status. Likewise, the Republican majority of the 104th and 105th Congresses depended on the Jon Foxes in their ranks to provide Republicans with enough seats to be able to organize the House. Fox's loss in 1998 endangered not only his own personal political fortunes, but also jeopardized the Republican majority's hold on power in the 106th Congress as they clung to mere five seat majority. The realization by members of both parties that their collective futures are dependent not only on their own political skills, but the political skills of every other member of their party to win a majority of 218, is forcing members of the House to think and act collectively in terms of winning a House majority.

In terms of the re-election thesis, an additional perspective must be added. Members are indeed still single-minded pursuers of re-election. But the era of the tenuous majority also forces them to be single-minded pursuers of majority status. The re-election thesis must be adapted to account for this dual re-election perspective, both by members individually in their districts and nationwide in terms of securing a House majority. Richard Fenno has stated that all House members share similar goals of re-election, gaining influence within the House chamber, and implementing good public policy. We must now add a fourth goal to Fenno's analysis that all members of the House now share: securing a House majority. For instance, when House Republicans won a House majority in 1994, this immediately increased their ability to gain influence in the House and implement their vision of good public policy. Likewise, when House Democrats lost their majority in 1994, they immediately lost influence in the House and the ability to structure the agenda toward their policy goals. Probing the tension between members' individual and collective re-elections to the House will provide fruitful avenues of research to future scholars of the Congress.

In terms to the re-election thesis, the quality candidate thesis of congressional scholarship must be altered as well. While House victories still remain contingent on the presence of quality candidates capable of running good campaigns, the image of completely autonomous and indigenous House campaigns needs to be abridged in light of the evidence of the 103rd-105th Congresses. Legislative parties and leaders in the U.S. House are increasingly playing larger roles in determining the outcome of individual House races through recruitment efforts, the training of candidates, leadership PACs, and nationalized appeals that provide a cookie-cutter agenda to each congressional candidate. Gary Jacobson's

strategic politician thesis, which marginalized the role played by party leaders and party organs, must also be adapted in light of the evidence of the 103rd-105th Congresses. Jacobson's thesis still holds, just not in the manner he originally envisioned. Republican farm team efforts in the early 1990s, combined with the Democratic "fit-the-district" strategy of the 105th Congress, each illustrate the extent to which parties are actively working to shape electoral outcomes at the candidate level. House candidates are not only springing from the earth indigenously, as the candidate-emergence research states, but are also being cultivated in terms of nationwide recruiting and training efforts by national party leaders. Congressional leaders are now salting the districts with their own selected candidates groomed and trained in their vision of what their future House majority should look like.

The party government thesis of Cox and McCubbins in Legislative Leviathan must also be steered toward the new realities of two-party competition. The majority party still works its will on the system of the House, as Cox and McCubbins argue, but the majority party is also working its will in individual House races to help individual candidates secure victory in the war for the House. Information theory presented congressional committees as serving important informational specialization roles for a majority party and its members. This view of committees remains valid, however both parties are also using the committees in an electoral fashion as bait to lure or convert members or help marginal members raise important campaign cash in the midst of a competitive re-election campaign.

Both the party government view of Cox and McCubbins, and the informational theory of Krehbiel, state that parties in the House seek to preserve their brand name through committee specialization, and as a result its top committee members are not policy outliers

who could hurt the party electorally. The evidence of the 103rd-105th Congresses illustrates that this is not always the case. In the 103rd Congress, several Democratic members complained that the liberal committee chairs and leaders who controlled the agenda hurt the Democratic party electorally in 1994. In the 1996 campaign, House Republicans used the liberal ranking Democrats on the congressional committees as bogeymen to motivate Republican base votes in a semi-nationalized campaign for House control. In addition, elements within each party have worked to reshape their respective party cultures to make the party more electable. Sometimes, the party's leaders and top committee members can be considered "outliers" hurting efforts to gain or enlarge a House majority. In the 104th and 105th Congresses, the Blue Dog Democrats and the New Democratic Coalition organized to move the House Democratic Caucus away from the liberalism of its ranking committee chairs and toward a moderate perception of the party. In the 105th Congress, conservative House Republicans launched a petition drive against moderate Republican committee and subcommittee chairs which bucked the party on key procedural votes. In both cases, members of the House believed that elements of their leadership were hurting their efforts to obtain or enlarge their respective parties electorally.

The evidence of the 103rd-105th Congresses also illustrates the changes in incentive structures affecting House leaders in the 1990s due to the demands of two-party competition. In the 1980s and early 1990s, congressional scholars accurately portrayed a more partisan House leadership exercising strong procedural control of the House agenda and of the House floor. In the era of two-party competition, congressional leaders are not only flexing a tightened procedural grip on the House floor, but also in the dynamics of individual races

across the country. In the 103rd, 104th, and 105th Congresses, Republican House leaders intervened heavily in special elections and general election contests to insure the right Republican nominee won the primary and won election to the House. The strong, centralized leadership of Speaker Jim Wright in the 100th Congress (1987-1988) has taken a new twist in the 1990s as centralized leadership dominated not only the institution of the House but also spilled over into House elections all over the country.

In Unorthodox Lawmaking, Barbara Sinclair illustrates how the traditional textbook model which describes the lawmaking process has been supplanted by new unorthodox legislative processes. Variety, instead of uniformity, now characterizes the contemporary legislative process.¹¹ But this emphasis on unorthodox lawmaking should not stop at the Capitol steps. Congressional leaders and members now face new, unorthodox pressures emanating from the demands of securing a House majority in the midst of an intensely competitive era. Just as the textbook description of the “how-a-bill-becomes-a-law” model has changed in favor of a more varied and chaotic process, so too has change descended upon the textbook model of how congressional leaders and members organize their time, institutionally and electorally. These changes are creating new rules and methods of political operation for House leaders as they cope with the demands of the governing prerogatives emanating from competition for majority control. The new race for the House and the resulting narrow, tenuous majorities force us to re-examine the congressional process, electorally and institutionally, both in the House chamber and in the various House

¹¹ Barbara Sinclair, Unorthodox Lawmaking: New Legislative Processes in the U.S. Congress (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1997), pp. 217-33.

campaigns at large. We must now re-think our traditional images of how congressional members and leaders conduct their affairs, inserting the needs of securing a House majority in the midst of increasingly hectic and atomized political careers and activities.

Implications of Two-Party Competition for American Constitutional Government

The current period of two-party competition has broader implications for the health of the American political system at the dawn of a new century. The intense two-party competition for House control that has emerged in the 1990s directly effects the substantive and time-less issues confronting Congress in the political system. The study of Congress is really a study of the role of Congress in a system of separated institutions sharing powers. The effectiveness of the U.S. Congress in the separated American system of government is shaped by whether it is stable or in flux, responsive or responsible, centrifugal or centripetal. Now, whether the House is under a period of competition or non-competition also shapes its effectiveness as a legislative body. In addition, issues of collective accountability and the power of Congress as an effective legislative body are each influenced by the current race for the House.

Two-party competition for House control is relevant in examining each of these concerns, because not too long ago congressional scholars were talking about an entirely different set of issues and problems in terms of the House of Representatives. The topics of an entrenched Democratic majority, the pros and cons of divided government between a Republican presidency and a permanent Democratic House, and the problem of exploding deficits resulting from the gridlock of divided government each drove American politics and scholarly examinations of the Congress. We are now witnessing a new era of intense

competition for the House and as a result, new issues and concerns in contemporary House politics like triangulation, shutdown politics, budget surplus politics, and omnibus budget processes. These developments are conditioning the House of Representatives as a legislative body and its accountability to the citizens it represents. While we are witnessing this process now, it is worth thinking about how it impacts the health of our democratic institutions.

Periods of two-party competition are fundamentally good for the institution. A common and consistent refrain made by House Democrats and Republicans during my interviews was that 40 years of one-party had a deleterious effect on the institution. Members of both parties complained that the Democratic leaders and committee chairs had become so accustomed to majority status that they became arrogant, out of touch, and ignored policy proposals like the balanced budget and welfare reform that could have presented a better image for all House Democrats running for election. A similar argument could be made in regard to the Republican majorities of the 104th and 105th Congresses, especially on the issues of the government shutdowns, campaign finance reform, and the partisan impeachment process of 1998. Nelson Polsby has described the U.S. Congress as a transformative legislative body which possesses the independent capacity to mold and transform policy proposals from whatever sources into law.¹² The transformative quality of the U.S. Congress makes it different from the other legislatures of the world which are primarily parliamentary arenas for the formalized interplay of political forces. Periods of

¹² Nelson Polsby, "Legislatures," in Handbook of Political Science v. 5, (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1975), pp. 277-303.

competitive pressures and two-party competition in the 1990s have sharpened the transformative abilities of the U.S. House by bringing more linkage between what happens on the campaign trail to what happens on the House floor, and vice-versa.

The Contract With America and the Families First platform each delineated clear issue agendas to the American public regarding what the two parties would accomplish with a House majority. These clear agendas are fundamentally good for the institution because they improve the collective accountability of the House and make it more effective in responding to issues of concern articulated in the previous election. This, in turn, helps improve the legitimacy of the House as a legislative body. For instance, in the 103rd Congress Democratic House leaders deliberately prevented welfare reform, term limits, further deficit reduction based on spending cuts, tax reduction, and congressional reform a chance to be enacted into law. The Republican minority and a growing cadre of moderate and conservative Democrats were forced to resort to discharge petitions in attempts to circumvent the procedural bottlenecks of House Democratic leaders. The change of party control in 1994 insured that each of these items were addressed by the Republican majority in the 104th Congress, providing each with a policy outlet and procedural forum on the House floor. In the 105th Congress, Republican House leaders deliberately prevented campaign finance reform, school construction legislation, and managed care reform from being honestly debated on the House floor, much less enacted into law. The Democratic minority and a growing cadre of Republican moderates resorted to discharge petitions in a failed attempt to circumvent the intransigence of Republican leaders. A change in party control to the Democrats would insure that each of these legislative items would be given a chance to

pass into law unhindered by procedural roadblocks.

The sharpening of party lines provided by the nationalized campaigns of the 1990s also translates into the sharpening of conceptions of what Republican and Democratic House majorities are elected to accomplish. The Democratic majority of the 103rd Congress made universal health care reform a top priority of the 103rd Congress. The failure to enact health care reform hurt the Democratic majority in the 1994 election. The Republican majorities of the 104th and 105th Congress were elected for very specific reasons, primarily balancing the budget, reforming welfare, cutting taxes, and holding the line on federal discretionary spending. In both Congresses, the Republican majority successfully accomplished each of these goals. In terms of fiscal discipline, the change in party control in 1994 had a clear impact on federal spending levels. Federal discretionary domestic spending increased \$102 billion in the Democratic controlled 101st-103rd Congresses (1989-1994). In the Republican controlled 104th Congress (1995-1996), domestic discretionary spending fell by \$10.9 billion.¹³ When the Republican majority tapped \$20 billion of the budget surplus for new spending initiatives in the 1998 budget accord, it suffered at the polls as its conservative base turned out with less intensity than in 1994 or 1996.

The 1994, 1996, and 1998 elections witnessed extremely negative campaigns for House control by the two parties, which helped produce wider partisan gulfs between the two parties in the House. The most significant and important legislation and events of the 1990s, from budget fights to impeachment, have witnessed the two parties squared off in partisan

¹³ "Trends In Congressional Appropriations: Fiscal Restraint in the 1990s," Joint Economic Committee, United States Congress, April 1998.

confrontations and divisions. The comity and civility of the House, which many members nostalgically yearn for in a previous Elysian era of House politics, no longer exists.¹⁴ This is one of the unfortunate byproducts of the current partisan war for the House. Many scholars and political observers of the House of Representatives have commented on the increasing incivility within the House chamber in the 1990s as the two parties square off in partisan skirmishes.¹⁵ In February of 1997, over 200 Members of the House and their families attended a bipartisan leadership retreat in Hershey, Pennsylvania to improve the discourse between members of the two parties after the rancorous 104th Congress.¹⁶

In many respects, however, unrelenting war for House control is the major culprit in the rise of incivility and the decline of comity in the Congresses under review. The aggressive, anti-Democratic rhetoric of the Gingrich Republicans of the 1990s, combined with the aggressive anti-Gingrich and anti-Republican rhetoric of a majority of House Democrats in the 104th and 105th Congresses, have each poisoned the well of the House. Attack politics indeed polarizes the House on a partisan basis while reflecting poorly on the general reputation of the Congress. But in the current era of two-party competition, attack

¹⁴ Dan Wilfensberger, "In Search of Civility: Vigorous Debate Doesn't Have to Hurt," Roll Call, 22 April 1997, p. 5; R. W. Apple, Jr., "Changes Times in Capital Come With High Costs," New York Times, 18 March 1997, p. A 1.

¹⁵ Albert R. Hunt, "A 20th Century Giant Going Strong at 95," Wall Street Journal, 26 March 1998, p. A 23; "Civility in the House of Representatives," A Background Report prepared for the Bipartisan Congressional Retreat by Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Professor and Dean of the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania, March 1997.

¹⁶ Francis X. Clines, "'Bipartisan Retreat' Hopes to Overcome Animosity in House," New York Times, 6 March 1997, p. A 1.

politics also gets results: it stopped the Clinton health care plan in 1994, halted the Republican budget plan of 1995, forced an ethics inquiry into Speaker Gingrich in 1996, and insured a partisan impeachment of President Clinton in 1998 that insured the defeat of his conviction in the Senate in 1999. Attack politics, the cornerstone of the nationalized campaigns for House control in the 1990s, has provided the electorate with clearer agendas and a more concise picture of the direction of their government over the course of a two-year period.

The intense campaigns for House control in the 1994-2000 period augment the innate transformative nature of the U.S. House of Representatives. The two-party competition of the 103rd-105th Congresses has jolted an often placid citizenry into confronting stark choices in the direction of their government through the House of Representatives, especially on the “big-ticket” policy and political items of the 1990s. Universal health care reform, the drive for deficit reduction and the balanced budget, the size and scope of the federal government, tax cuts, and the impeachment of President Clinton have each been directly affected by the drive by the two parties to secure a House majority. The change in party control in 1994, driven by the Contract With America and the Republican’s nationalized campaign, set the Republican House of the 104th Congress on a different policy direction than the Democratic House of the 103rd Congress or even the policy direction of a hypothetical Democratic House in the 104th Congress. A change in party control to the Democrats in election of 2000 or beyond would similarly set the Congress on a different policy course.

The nationalized campaigns for House control of 1994, 1996, and 1998 have presented voters and citizens with sharpened differences between the parties and a clear

choice on the direction of domestic policy. Unlike a change in presidents, which occurs on a constitutionally-mandated timetable every four or eight years, a change in party control in the House has a direct and tangible impact on the direction of U.S. domestic policy. Federal spending patterns clearly and consistently reflect the preferences of the majority parties in the Congress. House Democrats in the 103rd Congress stressed universal health care reform, cutting the deficit based on tax increases, protecting federal domestic spending, and addressing quality of life concerns like family leave and the anti-crime measures in the 1994 crime bill. House Republicans since 1994 have stressed reforming entitlement programs, cutting taxes, balancing the budget through spending cuts, and reforming the Internal Revenue Service and other government agencies. House Democrats since 1994 have stressed protecting and preserving Medicare and Social Security programs and quality of life issues like managed care reform, education, protecting the environment, and campaign finance reform. Changing the direction of the American separated system of government is much like turning around an aircraft carrier. Both require a lot of time before a new course and direction can be implemented. But a change in party control in the House speeds this process of change more rapidly than a change in the Senate or the presidency. The House of Representatives still remains the unruly hot cup in American politics as depicted by George Washington over 200 years ago.

Periodic eras of two-party competition bring rapid change to the House, alter the course of federal policy, and bring more accountability to the institution through the intense efforts of both parties to woo swing voters and address the concerns of their respective bases. Of course, lengthy periods of two-party competition could have a malignant effect on the

U.S. House if its politics become totally warped by intense politics over several consecutive election cycles. The experience of the Italian parliamentary government, which has experienced 56 changes in party control since World War II, is not an acceptable model for the U.S. House of Representatives. But occasional periods of intense two-party competition inject health doses of representation, collective accountability, and change into the institution of the House, both institutionally and electorally. Between the Civil War and the 1950s, House majorities endured between four and sixteen years. Changes in majority control every four, eight, or twelve years create more windows of opportunity for change and responsive in the U.S. political system.

The Framers of the U.S. Constitution designed a republican government which has persevered for over two centuries as a democratic model for the world. This republican form of government is rooted in the liberal concepts of legitimacy and consent of the governed first advocated by John Locke. The American House of Representatives is a messy institution which attempts to reconcile effective government while preserving the freedoms and liberty of the citizens it represents. Periodic doses of two-party competition for House control, combined with actual changes in House control, serve as well-needed jolts of accountability and legislative change in American government. The threat of losing majority status serves as a powerful check on the parties, further limiting the persistent dangers of despotism and majority faction inherent in any democratic system of government.

**APPENDIX A: CHANGES IN PARTY CONTROL OF THE HOUSE
SINCE THE CIVIL WAR**

Congress	Years	President	Number of Representatives	Democrats	Republicans	Other Parties	Vacant	Majority Party Margin over Minority
39th	1865-67	A. Johnson (R)	191	46	145			99 (R)
40th	1867-69	A. Johnson (R)	193	49	143			94 (R)
41st	1869-71	U. Grant (R)	243	73	170			97 (R)
42nd	1871-73	U. Grant (R)	243	104	139			35 (R)
43rd	1873-75	U. Grant (R)	293	88	203		2	115 (R)
44th	1875-77	U. Grant (R)	293	181	107	3	2	74 (D)
45th	1877-79	R. Hayes (R)	293	156	137			19 (D)
46th	1879-81	R. Hayes (R)	293	150	128	14	1	22 (D)
47th	1881-83	C. Arthur (R)	293	130	152	11		22 (R)
48th	1883-85	C. Arthur (R)	325	200	119	6		81 (D)
49th	1885-87	G. Cleveland (D)	325	182	140	2	1	42 (D)
50th	1887-89	G. Cleveland (D)	325	170	151	4		19 (D)
51st	1889-91	B. Harrison (R)	330	156	173	1		17 (R)
52nd	1891-93	B. Harrison (R)	333	231	88	14		217 (D)

Congress	Years	President	Number of Representatives	Democrats	Republicans	Other Parties	Vacant	Majority Party Margin over Minority
53rd	1893-95	G. Cleveland (D)	356	220	126	10		94 (D)
54th	1895-97	G. Cleveland (D)	357	104	246	7		142 (R)
55th	1897-99	W. McKinley (R)	357	134	206	16	1	72 (R)
56th	1899- 1901	W. McKinley (R)	357	163	185	9		22 (R)
57th	1901-03	T. Roosevelt (R)	357	153	198	5	1	45 (R)
58th	1903-05	T. Roosevelt (R)	386	178	207		1	29 (R)
59th	1905-07	T. Roosevelt (R)	386	136	250			114 (R)
60th	1907-09	T. Roosevelt (R)	386	164	222			58 (R)
61st	1909-11	W. Taft (R)	391	172	219			47 (R)
62nd	1911-13	W. Taft (R)	391	228	162	1		66 (D)
63rd	1913-15	W. Wilson (D)	435	290	127	18		163 (D)
64th	1915-17	W. Wilson (D)	435	231	193	8	3	38 (D)
65th	1917-19	W. Wilson (D)	435	210	216	9		6 (R)
66th	1919-21	W. Wilson (D)	435	191	237	7		46 (R)
67th	1921-23	W. Harding (R)	435	132	300	1	2	168 (R)
68th	1923-25	C. Coolidge (R)	435	207	225	3		18 (R)

Congress	Years	President	Number of Representatives	Democrats	Republicans	Other Parties	Vacant	Majority Party Margin over Minority
69th	1925-27	C. Coolidge (R)	435	183	247	5		64 (R)
70th	1927-29	C. Coolidge (R)	435	195	237	3		42 (R)
71st	1929-31	H. Hoover (R)	435	163	267	1	4	104 (R)
72nd	1931-33	H. Hoover (R)	435	216	218	1		2 (R)
73rd	1933-35	F. Roosevelt (D)	435	313	117	5		196 (D)
74th	1935-37	F. Roosevelt (D)	435	322	103	10		219 (D)
75th	1937-39	F. Roosevelt (D)	435	333	89	13		244 (D)
76th	1939-41	F. Roosevelt (D)	435	262	169	4		93 (D)
77th	1941-43	F. Roosevelt (D)	435	267	162	6		105 (D)
78th	1943-45	F. Roosevelt (D)	435	222	209	4		13 (D)
79th	1945-47	H. Truman (D)	435	243	190	2		53 (D)
80th	1947-49	H. Truman (D)	435	188	246	1		58 (R)
81st	1949-51	H. Truman (D)	435	263	171	1		92 (D)
82nd	1951-53	H. Truman (D)	435	234	199	2		35 (D)
83rd	1953-55	D. Eisenhower (R)	435	213	221	1		8 (R)
84th	1955-57	D. Eisenhower (R)	435	232	203			29 (D)
85th	1957-59	D. Eisenhower (R)	435	234	201			33 (D)

Congress	Years	President	Number of Representatives	Democrats	Republicans	Other Parties	Vacant	Majority Party Margin over Minority
86th	1959-61	D. Eisenhower (R)	436	283	153			130 (D)
87th	1961-63	J. Kennedy (D)	437	262	175			87 (D)
88th	1963-65	L. Johnson (D)	435	258	176		1	82 (D)
89th	1965-67	L. Johnson (D)	435	295	140			155 (D)
90th	1967-69	L. Johnson (D)	435	248	187			61 (D)
91st	1969-71	R. Nixon (R)	435	243	192			51 (D)
92nd	1971-73	R. Nixon (R)	435	255	180			75 (D)
93rd	1973-75	R. Nixon (R)	435	242	192	1		50 (D)
94th	1975-77	G. Ford (R)	435	291	144			147 (D)
95th	1977-79	J. Carter (D)	435	292	143			149 (D)
96th	1979-81	J. Carter (D)	435	277	158			119 (D)
97th	1981-83	R. Reagan (R)	435	243	192			51 (D)
98th	1983-85	R. Reagan (R)	435	268	167			101 (D)
99th	1985-87	R. Reagan (R)	435	253	182			71 (D)
100th	1987-89	R. Reagan (R)	435	258	177			81 (D)
101st	1989-91	G. Bush (R)	435	259	174		2	85 (D)
102nd	1991-93	G. Bush (R)	435	268	166	1		102 (D)

Congress	Years	President	Number of Representatives	Democrats	Republicans	Other Parties	Vacant	Majority Party Margin over Minority
103rd	1993-95	B. Clinton (D)	435	258	176	1		82 (D)
104th	1995-97	B. Clinton (D)	435	204	230	1		26 (R)
105th	1997-99	B. Clinton (D)	435	207	227	1		20 (R)
106th	1999-01	B. Clinton (D)	435	211	223	1		12 (R)

Note: Bold indicates a change in party control of the House of Representatives.

APPENDIX B: THE SWING SEATS OF THE 1990s

District	1992 Winner	1994 Winner	1996 Winner	1998 Winner	1988 prez.	1992 prez.	1996 prez.
Arkansas 4	Dickey (R); 52%*	Dickey (R); 52%	Dickey (R); 64%	Dickey (R); 58%	Bush 52%	Clinton 57%	Clinton 60%
Arizona 6	English (D); 53%*	Hayworth (R); 55%*	Hayworth (R); 48%	Hayworth (R); 52%	Bush 59%	Bush 38%	Clinton 47%
California 1	Hamburg (D); 48%*	Riggs (R); 53%*	Riggs (R); 50%	Thompson (D); 62%*	Dukakis 52%	Clinton 57%	Clinton 48%
California 3	Fazio (D); 51%	Fazio (D); 50%	Fazio (D); 54%	Ose (R); 53%*	Bush 55%	Clinton 41%	Clinton 45%
California 10	Baker (R); 52%*	Baker (R); 59%	Tauscher (D); 49%*	Tauscher (D); 53%	Bush 58%	Clinton 42%	Clinton 48%
California 22	Michael Huffington (R); 53%*	Seastrand (R); 49%*	W. Capps (D); 48%*	L. Capps (D); 55%	Bush 56%	Clinton 41%	Dole 44%
California 24	Beilenson (D); 56%	Beilenson (D); 49%	Sherman (D); 49%*	Sherman (D); 58%	Bush 57%	Clinton 48%	Clinton 52%
California 27	Moorhead (R); 50%	Moorhead (R); 53%	Rogan (R); 50%*	Rogan (R); 50%	Bush 57%	Clinton 44%	Clinton 49%
California 36	Harman (D); 48%*	Harman (D); 48%	Harman (D); 52%	Kuykendall (R); 49%*	Bush 60%	Clinton 41%	Clinton 47%
California 38	Horn (R); 49%	Horn (R); 58%	Horn (R); 53%	Horn (R); 53%	Bush 56%	Clinton 44%	Clinton 53%
California 42	Brown (D); 51%	Brown (D); 51%	Brown (D); 50%	Brown (D); 50%	Bush 54%	Clinton 45%	Clinton 53%
California 46	Dornan (R); 50%	Dornan (R); 57%	Sanchez (D); 47%*	Sanchez (D); 56%	Bush 62%	Bush 40%	Clinton 49%

District	1992 Winner	1994 Winner	1996 Winner	1998 Winner	1988 prez.	1992 prez.	1996 prez.
California 49	Schenk (D); 51%*	Bilbray (R); 49%*	Bilbray (R); (53%)	Bilbray (R); 49%	Bush 57%	Clinton 43%	Clinton 49%
Connecticut 2	Gejdenson (D); 51%	Gejdenson (D); 43%	Gejdenson (D); 52%	Gejdenson (D); 61%	Bush 51%	Clinton 43%	Clinton 53%
Connecticut 5	Franks (R); 44%	Franks (R); 52%	Maloney (D); 52%*	Maloney (D); 50%	Bush 59%	Bush 42%	Clinton 48%
Illinois 11	Sangmeister (D); 56%	Weller (R); 61%*	Weller (R); 52%	Weller (R); 59%	Bush 57%	Clinton 43%	Clinton 51%
Illinois 20	Durbin (D); 57%	Durbin (D); 55%	Shimkus (R); 50%*	Shimkus (R); 61%	Bush 51%	Clinton 46%	Clinton 47%
Indiana 8	McCloskey (D); 53%	Hostettler (R); 55%*	Hostettler (R); 50%	Hostettler (R); 52%	Bush 57%	Clinton 42%	Clinton 46%
Indiana 9	Hamilton (D); 70%	Hamilton (D); 52%	Hamilton (D); 56%	Hill (D); 51%*	Bush 58%	Clinton 41%	Clinton 48%
Kansas 3	Meyers (R); 58%	Meyers (R); 57%	Snowbarger (R); 50%*	Moore (D); 52%*	Bush 54%	Clinton 38%	Dole 50%
Kentucky 3	Mazzoli (D); 53%	Ward (D); 44%*	Northrup (R); 50%*	Northrup (R); 52%	Bush 51%	Clinton 50%	Clinton 53%
Maine 2	Snowe (R); 49%	Baldacci (D); 46%*	Baldacci (D); 72%	Baldacci (D); 76%	Bush 55%	Clinton 38%	Clinton 51%
Mass. 7	Torkildsen (R); 55%*	Torkildsen (R); 51%	Tierney (D); 48%*	Tierney (D); 55%	Dukakis 51%	Clinton 43%	Clinton 59%

District	1992 Winner	1994 Winner	1996 Winner	1998 Winner	1988 prez.	1992 prez.	1996 prez.
Michigan 8	Carr (D); 48%	Chrysler (R); 52%*	Stabenow (D); 54%*	Stabenow (D); 57%	Bush 56%	Clinton 40%	Clinton 49%
Michigan 10	Bonior (D); 53%	Bonior (D); 62%	Bonior (D); 54%	Bonior (D); 52%	Bush 62%	Bush 41%	Clinton 49%
Michigan 12	Levin (D); 53%	Levin (D); 52%	Levin (D); 57%	Levin (D); 56%	Bush 58%	Clinton 42%	Clinton 52%
Michigan 13	Ford (D); 52%	Rivers (D); 52%*	Rivers (D); 57%	Rivers (D); 58%	Bush 51%	Clinton 49%	Clinton 58%
Minnesota 1	Penny (D); 74%	Gutknecht (R); 55%*	Gutknecht (R); 53%	Gutknecht (R); 55%	Bush 51%	Clinton 38%	Clinton 48%
Minnesota 2	Minge (D); 48%*	Minge (D); 52%	Minge (D); 55%	Minge (D); 57%	Bush 52%	Clinton 37%	Clinton 45%
Missouri 9	Volkmer (D); 48%	Volkmer (D); 50%	Hulshof (R); 49%*	Hulshof (R); 62%	Bush 54%	Clinton 41%	Clinton 44%
Montana AL	Williams (D); 48%	Williams (D); 49%	Hill (R); 52%*	Hill (R); 53%	Bush 52%	Clinton 38%	Dole 44%
Nevada 1	Bilbray (D); 58%	Ensign (R); 48%*	Ensign (R); 50%	Berkley (D); 49%*	Bush 56%	Clinton 43%	Clinton 51%
New Hampshire 1	Zeliff (R); 53%	Zeliff (R); 66%	Sununu (R); 50%*	Sununu (R); 67%	Bush 64%	Bush 39%	Clinton 48%
New Hampshire 2	Swett (D); 62%	Bass (R); 51%*	Bass (R); 51%	Bass (R); 53%	Bush 62%	Clinton 40%	Clinton 50%
New Jersey 8	Klein (D); 47%*	Martini (R); 50%*	Pascarella (D); 51%*	Pascarella (D); 62%	Bush 55%	Clinton 45%	Clinton 58%

District	1992 Winner	1994 Winner	1996 Winner	1998 Winner	1988 prez.	1992 prez.	1996 prez.
New Jersey 12	Zimmer (R); 64%	Zimmer (R); 68%	Pappas (R); 50%*	Holt (D); 50%*	Bush 61%	Bush 43%	Clinton 48%
New York 1	Hochbrueckner (D); 52%	Forbes (R); 53%*	Forbes (R); 55%	Forbes (R); 64%	Bush 61%	Bush 40%	Clinton 51%
New York 4	Levy (R); 50%	Frisa (R); 50%*	McCarthy (D); 57%*	McCarthy (D); 52%	Bush 57%	Clinton 47%	Clinton 56%
New York 26	Hinchey (D); 50%*	Hinchey (D); 49%	Hinchey (D); 55%	Hinchey (D); 62%	Bush 52%	Clinton 44%	Clinton 51%
North Carolina 4	Price (D); 65%	Heineman (R); 50%*	Price (D); 54%*	Price (D); 57%	Bush 53%	Clinton 47%	Clinton 49%
Ohio 1	Mann (D); 51%*	Chabot (R); 56%*	Chabot (R); 54%	Chabot (R); 53%	Bush 55%	Clinton 43%	Clinton 50%
Ohio 6	Strickland (D); 51%*	Cremins (R); 51%*	Strickland (D); 51%*	Strickland (D); 57%	Bush 59%	Bush 40%	Clinton 44%
Ohio 10	Hoke (R); 57%*	Hoke (R); 52%	Kucinich (D); 49%*	Kucinich (D); 67%	Bush 52%	Clinton 41%	Clinton 51%
Ohio 18	Applegate (D); 68%	Ney (R); 54%*	Ney (R); 50%	Ney (R); 60%	Bush 52%	Clinton 43%	Clinton 47%
Ohio 19	Fingerhut (D); 53%*	LaTourette (R); 48%*	LaTourette (R); 55%	LaTourette (R); 66%	Bush 53%	Clinton 40%	Clinton 48%
Oregon 5	Kopetski (D); 64%	Bunn (R); 50%*	Hooley (D); 51%*	Hooley (D); 55%	Dukakis 50%	Clinton 40%	Clinton 47%
Penn. 13	Mezvinsky (D); 50%*	Fox (R); 49%*	Fox (R); 49%	Hoeffel (D); 52%*	Bush 60%	Clinton 44%	Clinton 50%

District	1992 Winner	1994 Winner	1996 Winner	1998 Winner	1988 prez.	1992 prez.	1996 prez.
Penn. 15	McHale (D); 52%*	McHale (D); 48%	McHale (D); 55%	Toomey (R); 55%*	Bush 55%	Clinton 41%	Clinton 46%
Penn. 21	Ridge (R); 68%	English (R); 49%*	English (R); 51%	English (R); 63%	Dukakis 51%	Clinton 45%	Clinton 49%
Tennessee 3	Lloyd (D); 49%	Wamp (R); 52%*	Wamp (R); 56%	Wamp (R); 66%	Bush 61%	Clinton 44%	Dole 47%
Texas 1	Chapman (D); unopposed	Chapman (D); 55%	Sandlin (D); 52%*	Sandlin (D); 59%	Bush 55%	Clinton 39%	Dole 46%
Texas 5	Bryant (D); 59%	Bryant (D); 50%	Sessions (R); 53%*	Sessions (R); 56%	Bush 53%	Clinton 40%	Clinton 46%
Virginia 11	Byrne (D); 50%*	Davis (R); 53%*	Davis (R); 64%	Davis (R); 83%	Bush 61%	Bush 43%	Clinton 48%
Washington 1	Cantwell (D); 55%*	White (R); 52%*	White (R); 54%	Inslee (D); 51%*	Bush 52%	Clinton 42%	Clinton 51%
Washington 2	Swift (D); 52%	Metcalf (R); 55%*	Metcalf (R); 49%	Metcalf (R); 55%	Bush 51%	Clinton 39%	Clinton 47%
Washington 3	Unsoeld (D); 56%	Smith (R); 52%*	Smith (R); 50%	Baird (D); 55%*	Dukakis 52%	Clinton 42%	Clinton 49%
Washington 5	Foley (D); 55%	Nethercutt (R); 51%*	Nethercutt (R); 56%	Nethercutt (R); 57%	Bush 51%	Clinton 40%	Clinton 44%
Washington 9	Kreidler (D); 52%*	Tate (R); 52%*	Smith (D); 50%*	Smith (D); 65%	Bush 52%	Clinton 42%	Clinton 51%
Wisconsin 1	Aspin (D); 58%	Neumann (R); 49%*	Neumann (R); 51%	Ryan (R); 58%*	Dukakis 51%	Clinton 41%	Clinton 50%
Wisconsin 8	Roth (R); 70%	Roth (R); 64%	Johnson (D); 52%*	Green (R); 54%*	Bush 53%	Bush 40%	Clinton 46%

* denotes new member

There are 60 swing seats depicted in this table.

51 have seen a change in party control in the 1990s

18 have seen more than two changes in representatives in the 1990s.

1992: Democrats win 44 of the swing seats, Republicans win 16

1994: Republicans win 41 of the swing seats, Democrats 19

1996: Republicans win 33 of the swing seats, Democrats 27

1998: Republicans win 32 of the swing seats, Democrats 28

1988: George Bush carries 54 of the swing districts (average of 55.4%)

1992: Bill Clinton carries 50 of the swing districts (average of 42.8%)

1996: Bill Clinton carries 55 of the swing districts (average of 49.4%)

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW LIST

Members of Congress

Representative John Boehner (R-OH)

Representative Ben Cardin (D-MD)

Representative Gary Condit (D-CA)

Representative Pat Danner (D-MO)

Representative Cal Dooley (D-CA)

Representative David Dreier (R-CA)

Representative Tom DeLay (R-TX)

Representative Vernon Ehlers (R-MI)

Representative Robert Ehrlich (R-MD)

Representative Vic Fazio (D-CA)

Representative Martin Frost (D-TX)

Representative Lee Hamilton (D-IN)

Representative Wally Herger (R-CA)

Representative Steny Hoyer (D-MD)

Representative John Kasich (R-OH)

Representative Barbara Kennelly (D-CT)

Representative Ray LaHood (R-IL)

Representative John Linder (R-GA)

Representative Bill McCollum (R-FL)

Representative David Minge (D-MN)

Representative Mike Parker (R-MS)

Representative Bill Paxon (R-NY)

Representative Ed Pease (R-IN)

Representative Collin Peterson (D-MN)

Representative Tim Roemer (D-IN)

Representative John Shadegg (R-AZ)

Representative Chris Shays (R-CT)

Representative David Skaggs (D-CO)

Representative Charlie Stenholm (D-TX)

Representative J.C. Watts (R-OK)

Congressional Staff/Press

Jeffrey Biggs, Press Sectary, Office of Speaker Thomas Foley
George Behan, Press Secretary, Office of Representative Norm Dicks
Mark Brownell, Administrative Assistant, Office of Representative Collin C. Peterson
David Broder, Washington Post
Adam Clymer, New York Times
Mary Crawford, Communications Director, National Republican Congressional Committee
Arne Christenson, Chief of Staff, Office of Speaker Newt Gingrich
Monica Maples Dixon, Chief of Staff, Democratic Caucus
Scott Douglas, National Republican Congressional Committee
Steve Elmendorf, Chief of Staff, Office of Minority Leader Richard Gephardt
Roger France, Administrative Assistant, Office of Representative Charlie Taylor
Ed Goeas, Political Consultant
Tony Hammond, National Republican Congressional Committee
Terry Holt, Press Secretary, Republican Conference
Barry Jackson, Executive Director, House Republican Conference
Charles Johnson, House Parliamentarian
Ed McDonald, Administrative Assistant, Office of Representative Howard Coble
Laura Nichols, Communications Director, Office of Minority Leader Richard Gephardt
Don Sallick, Director of Communications, Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee
Sam Stratman, Press Secretary, Office of Representative Henry Hyde
Cokie Roberts, ABC News
Don Ritchie, Senate Historian

APPENDIX D: Moderate Republican Vote Dissensions, 105th Congress

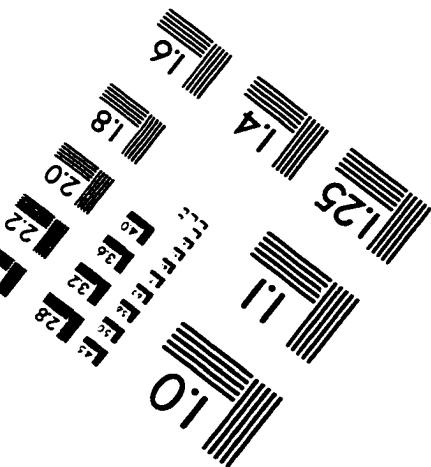
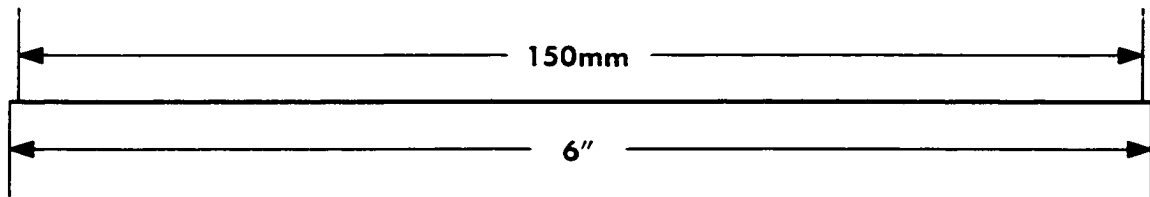
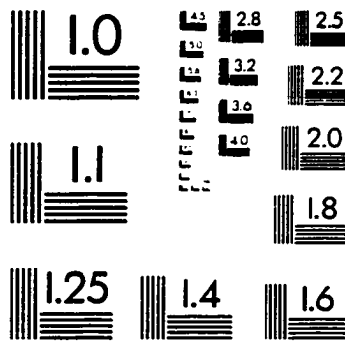
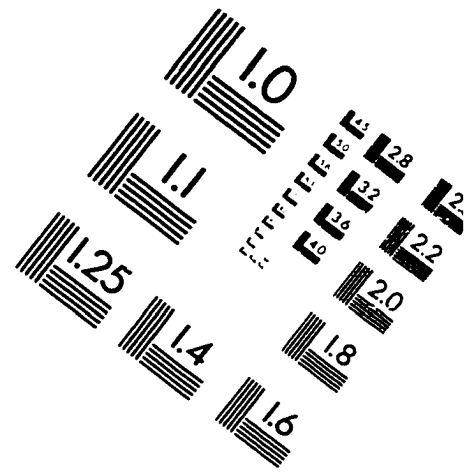
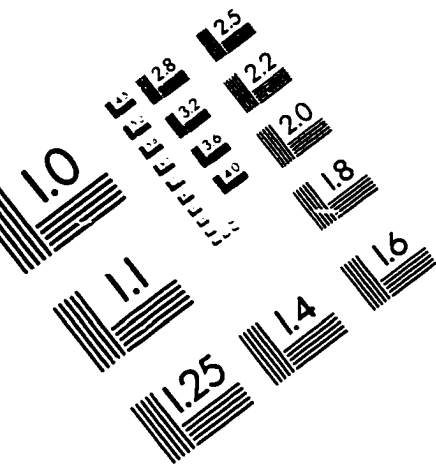
	H.R. 992: The Tucker Shuffle Relief Act (Passed 3/12/98; 230-180). Member voted against	H.R. 3246: Fairness for Small Business Act (Passed 3/26/98; 202-200). Member voted against	Boehlert Amendment to H.R. 2515 (Passed 3/26/98; 200-187). Member voted in favor	H.R. 2608: The Paycheck Protection Act (Defeated 3/30/98; 166-246). Member voted against:	Roukema Amendment to H.R. 2400 (Defeated 4/1/98; 194-225). Member voted against:	Tax Limitation Amendment (Defeated 4/22/98; 238-186). Member voted against:
	(Allows landowners suits to be heard in either U.S. District Court or U.S. Court of Federal Claims)	(Prevents "salting" by unions)	(Requires all logging roads to comply with all current and pending environmental regulations)	(Requires prior permission by individuals before union dues are taken from paychecks for political purposes)	(Prohibits affirmative action and preferential racial treatment in federal transportation contracts)	(Requires a 2/3 majority of Congress to increase taxes)
Bass	x		x	x		
Bilbray	x		x			
Boehlert	x	x	x	x	x	x
Campbell		x		x		
Castle	x		x	x	x	
Davis (VA)			x	x	x	
Diaz-Balart		x	x	x	x	
Ehlers	x		x	x	x	

	H.R. 992: The Tucker Shuffle Relief Act (Passed 3/12/98; 230-180). Member voted against	H.R. 3246: Fairness for Small Business Act (Passed 3/26/98, 202-200). Member voted against	Boehlert Amendment to H.R. 2515 (Passed 3/26/98, 200-187). Member voted in favor	H.R. 2608: The Paycheck Protection Act (Defeated 3/30/98; 166-246). Member voted against:	Roukema Amendment to H.R. 2400 (Defeated 4/1/98; 194-225). Member voted against:	Tax Limitation Amendment (Defeated 4/22/98; 238-186). Member voted against:
English			x	x	x	
Fawell	x		x			
Forbes	x	x	x	x	x	x
Fox	x		x	x	x	x
Franks (NJ)	x	x	x	x		
Gilchrest	x		x		x	
Gilman	x		x	x	x	
Greenwood	x		x	x		
Horn			x	x		
Houghton				x	x	x
Johnson (CT)	x	x	x	x	x	x
Kelly	x	x	x	x	x	
Klug	x		x			
Lal Hood		x		x	x	

	H.R. 992: The Tucker Shuffle Relief Act (Passed 3/12/98; 230-180) Member voted against	H.R. 3246: Fairness for Small Business Act (Passed 3/26/98; 202-200). Member voted against	Boehlert Amendment to H.R. 2515 (Passed 3/26/98; 200-187). Member voted in favor	H.R. 2608: The Paycheck Protection Act (Defeated 3/30/98; 166-246). Member voted against:	Roukema Amendment to H.R. 2400 (Defeated 4/1/98; 194-225). Member voted against:	Tax Limitation Amendment (Defeated 4/22/98; 238-186). Member voted against:
LaTourette	x	x		x	x	
Lazio	x	x	x	x	x	
Leach	x		x	x	x	
Lobiondo	x		x	x		
McDade				x	x	
Morella	x		x	x	x	x
Pappas	x		x	x		
Petri			x	x	x	
Porter	x		x			x
Quinn	x	x	x	x	x	
Ramstad	x		x			
Regula	x			x		
Roukema	x		x			
Saxton	x		x	x		

	H.R. 992: The Tucker Shuffle Relief Act (Passed 3/12/98, 230-180). Member voted against	H.R. 3246: Fairness for Small Business Act (Passed 3/26/98; 202-200). Member voted against	Boehlert Amendment to H.R. 2515 (Passed 3/26/98; 200-187). Member voted in favor	H.R. 2608: The Paycheck Protection Act (Defeated 3/30/98; 166-246). Member voted against.	Roukema Amendment to H.R. 2400 (Defeated 4/1/98; 194-225). Member voted against.	Tax Limitation Amendment (Defeated 4/22/98; 238-186). Member voted against.
Shays	x	x	x		x	
Smith (NJ)	x	x	x	x		
Walsh	x		x	x	x	x
Weldon	x	x	x	x		
Weller			x		x	

IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)



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