

# M E M O

To: House Republicans of the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress

From: Leader Boehner

Re: The Mission Ahead

Date: 08 Dec 06

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Hours from now, the House Republican majority that began in 1995 with the historic *Contract with America* will come to a close. In a month, the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress will convene. The Speaker's gavel will be handed over to Representative Pelosi. And the United States Congress will be under the control of the Democratic Party for the first time in more than a decade.

It is truly the end of an era. Or is it?

The incoming majority won't really be a "new" majority as much as it will be the return of a former majority. The incoming leaders and committee chairmen of the House Democratic Caucus – including Reps. Pelosi, Hoyer, Conyers, Frank, Obey, Rangel, (George) Miller, and Waxman – played key roles in the Democrat-controlled Houses of the 1980s and early 1990s.

Similarly, the legacy of the *Contract with America* is alive and well – perhaps more now than it has been at any other time in recent years. Chastened and humbled by our defeat at the ballot box, Republicans have taken a critical look inward. We've looked back at our greatest success, in search of lessons to guide us as we move ahead. The benefit of this exercise has been that the *Contract*-era has been looked at, analyzed, and discussed more extensively in the past several weeks than at any time since it actually happened.

I've spoken at length with members from all reaches of our Conference – from veteran Members to incoming freshmen, moderate members to conservative members – and whether you were here in 1994 or not, virtually all of us agree that what made the *Contract* historic and effective 12 years ago was its broad appeal. The *Contract* was about reform. It emphasized the things that unite all Republicans, but it went beyond that; it spoke to the hopes and values of most Americans. It was a sincere, bold, creative statement of Republicans' heartfelt belief in smaller, more accountable government, and the importance of personal responsibility and individual freedom – objectives that capture the American spirit as well today as they did 12 years ago. The *Contract* worked because we recognized a

congressional majority is only as good as the vision that drives it, and the effort it puts forth to make that vision a reality.

The end of our Republican majority was not inevitable. Nor is the return of our majority two years from now. Our fate is in our own hands, and that of the American people we were elected to serve.

As I emphasized last month: Republicans have to earn our way back to majority status – and it starts with recognizing that having a majority in Congress is meaningless if we don't use it to pursue our broader vision. Most Americans don't care who controls Congress. What they care about is having a government that is limited, honest, accountable, and responsive to their concerns.

Some would argue House Republicans forgot this and came to take our majority status for granted in recent years. If such an entitlement mentality did creep in, it should now be dead and gone. And the humbling conditions Republicans face during the first few months of 2007 will stamp out any trace that remains.

We won't take back our majority by simply studying the playbooks of the past and learning to run a few new maneuvers. But we can take the lessons of the past and learn from them. We can apply those lessons as we renew our commitment to the reform principles that define us as Republicans and chart our future course. That process begins today.

### **FOR EVERYTHING, THERE IS A SEASON. . .**

I want to commend you all for the restraint and discipline you've demonstrated in recent weeks as the spotlight has shifted to the future custodians of the House. I know you're already tired of hearing me say it – but adjusting to our new status means recognizing there's a time and a place for everything.

- Sometimes we'll need to work with the new majority to advance Republican principles and the good of our nation.
- Sometimes we'll need to engage, dig in, and fight the Democrats toe to toe.
- And sometimes we'll want to simply get out of the way and let the other side struggle under the weight of its own insincere promises, internal turmoil, and inherent contradictions. The past couple of weeks – clearly – have been such an occasion.

The current mode is, however, a very temporary one for House Republicans. In the weeks ahead, we will turn our attention to the future and dig in for the mission ahead – applying the lessons of the past, fixing the mistakes, and returning to the principles that unite Republicans and can inspire a nation. We'll work with the new majority whenever possible,

when it's in the best interests of our country. We'll hold the new majority accountable for its past promises, as well as its future actions. And most importantly, we'll offer our *own* ideas to address the challenges facing the American people, articulating a positive vision of lean government that offers solutions and reform. Good policy equals good politics.

## **FIRST STEPS**

Next week, with the business of the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress now complete, the new House Republican leadership team will gather outside the Beltway to take the first small steps on the path back to a Republican majority. Armed with the input and ideas we've received from you and other members of our Conference – and the hard lessons of the November 7 election – we'll set the stage not only for a unified, principled Republican to the Democrats' so-called "first 100 hours," but also a productive House Republican Conference members' retreat in January.

I know I speak for the whole leadership team – Republican Whip Blunt, Conference Chairman Putnam, Chief Deputy Whip Cantor, Policy Chairman McCotter, Conference Vice-Chair Kay Granger, Conference Secretary Carter, and NRCC Chairman Cole – when I say we are ready to get down to business and start the process of earning it back.

Whatever your plans may be during the holidays, I urge you to make certain we have a way to reach you. Important information regarding the opening days of the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress will be e-mailed to you, your chief of staff, or other designated contact on a number of occasions between now and the opening session on Thursday, January 4, 2007. If you have specific details on how to reach you or get information to you during the holiday season, please contact my Member Services Director, Greg Maurer, at [greg.maurer@mail.house.gov](mailto:greg.maurer@mail.house.gov).

## **THE DEMOCRATS' FIRST – OR WORST? – 100 HOURS**

The Democrats' return to power will commence in January with a series of votes that correspond – very loosely, in some cases – to poll-tested promises made by House Democratic leaders during the most critical months of the 2006 cycle. Specific details on most of the Democrats' plans remain unavailable as of this writing, as they have been since the promises were first made.

In some cases, Democrats have acknowledged they really don't know how they're going to deliver. "We didn't have all this up on the screen ready to hit send," one Democratic leadership aide told *National Journal's CongressDaily* last month. That staff member was echoed by another Democratic staffer who acknowledged, "We don't know what exactly will be brought to the floor."

In other cases, Democrats have hinted at a bait-and-switch. Take earmark reform, for example. In September, when House Republicans fought successfully for adoption of

earmark reforms requiring all earmark sponsors to be identified, Ms. Pelosi called the Republican reform a “sham.” Yet just days after the 2006 election, *USA Today* reported that Ms. Pelosi had decided “her first agenda item after being elected House speaker will be a vote to require sponsors of earmarks to be identified.” And days later, the *New York Times* reported House Democrats may actually propose earmark rules that retreat from those adopted by the House under Republican leadership this year.

In some other instances, Democrats have simply indicated they have no intention of doing what they promised they’d do. As the *Washington Post*’s Jonathan Weisman recently reported:

- “*It was a solemn pledge, repeated by Democratic leaders and candidates over and over: If elected to the majority in Congress, Democrats would implement all of the recommendations of the bipartisan commission that examined the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. But with control of Congress now secured, Democratic leaders have decided for now against implementing the one measure that would affect them most directly: a wholesale reorganization of Congress to improve oversight and funding of the nation’s intelligence agencies.*” (“Democrats Reject Key 9/11 Panel Suggestion; Neither Party Has an Appetite for Overhauling Congressional Oversight of Intelligence;” Weisman, Jonathan; *Washington Post*, 30 Nov 2006)
- “The Democrats pledged to implement all the remaining 9/11 reforms, not some of them,” the *Post* quoted former Rep. Timothy Roemer (D-IN), a 9/11 commission member, as saying.

Republicans won’t fault Democrats for arriving at the same conclusions we did when we were in the majority. But we *will* fault them for promising one thing to the American people and then doing the opposite.

As details of the Democrats’ “first 100 hours” finally begin to surface in the coming weeks, here are a few other things to keep in mind.

- Democrats promised to cut student loan interest rates in half. But they don’t mention who will cover the \$60 billion it will cost the federal government to do this over five years (Source: House Budget Committee Republican staff); nor how they will reconcile this promise with another “first 100 hours” pledge, to adopt “pay as you go” budget rules that require all spending increases and tax cuts to be offset with corresponding cuts in spending elsewhere; nor do they address evidence that the more government spends on college programs, the more college tuition rates continue to soar.
- Democrats promised to apply government price controls to the Medicare prescription drug benefit. But as the *Washington Post* recently reported: “[A]s Democrats prepare

to take control of Congress, they are struggling to keep that promise without wrecking a program that has proven cheaper and more popular than anyone imagined.” (“Success of Drug Plan Challenges Democrats; Medicare Benefit's Cost Beat Estimates;" Lori Montgomery and Christopher Lee, *Washington Post*, 26 Nov 2006)

- Democrats promised to increase the minimum wage for hourly workers. But they don't mention they voted against increasing the minimum wage in 2006 when it was offered by Republicans along with a package of tax relief measures for small businesses that would have prevented the minimum wage hike from destroying jobs.

I urge you to keep these things in mind as the Democrats reveal their plans in the weeks ahead. But I also urge you to remember this: Republicans will not return to the majority by mimicking the relentlessly negative approach taken by the Democrats when they were the minority. Simply saying “no” to everything won't cut it; Republicans have to offer ideas of our own. If we want to reclaim our majority, we first have to reclaim our mantle as the party of hope, freedom, and reform. . .the party of Reagan and Lincoln. As our Democratic counterparts may discover the hard way, having a majority is of limited value if you don't have a vision and a plan for using it.

## **CLOSING THOUGHTS**

I'm not looking forward to serving in the minority during the next two years. But I am looking forward to serving with you, and working with each and every one of you – tirelessly – in the months ahead to re-unite our Conference, re-engage the American people in the drive for a smaller, more accountable federal government, and earn back our majority.

I offer my best wishes to Nancy Pelosi. Though our philosophical differences are significant, her ascension to the office of Speaker – third in line for the Presidency of the United States – is a symbolic victory you don't have to be a Democrat to appreciate. It's an important moment not only for the women of America, but people of all free nations around the globe. It will be my honor to serve as the leader of the Republican Conference during Ms. Pelosi's history-making – but hopefully brief – tenure as House Speaker.

I also want to offer my thanks and prayers for the men and women of our armed forces stationed around the world, who will spend this Christmas season making great sacrifices in defense of our freedom and that of others. We are grateful for their courage, and awed by their deep commitment to our country – a commitment that must inspire and guide us in the new year as we confront the challenges ahead.

I wish you and all members of the House – Republican and Democrat alike – a safe, peaceful, and blessed holiday. God Bless you, your family, and your constituents.