



Congress's Feisty Frosh

by Grover G. Norquist

On January 5, 1993, the 103rd Congress was sworn in with 110 new members. This unusually large influx of new blood was caused by the decennial redistricting for the nineties, the House Bank and House Post Office scandals, and the congressional golden parachute that allowed members of the House to add their campaign war chests to their government pensions if they retired in 1992. (From now on, congressional retirees will have to subsidize on pensions averaging a total of \$1.4 million.)

While the 1992 campaign had all candidates using "change" as a mantra, the forty-seven new Republicans and sixty-three new Democrats in the House will only accelerate recent trends in both parties. The Republican freshmen are moving their party to the right, and toward confrontation as a strategy. The new Democrats continue to cede power to the House leadership, and to press the scales in favor of the American left by changing election laws and the rules of the House.

This will make for an interesting next two years, as an increasingly vocal Republican leadership runs up against an increasingly closed system. Republicans can expect frustration: while the Senate offers more opportunity to challenge Democrats, only in the House do Republicans possess the will to do so. Nothing may move, but sparks will fly.

First, the Republican changes: The forty-seven Republican freshmen make up almost a third of the 177

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Republicans in the House. They immediately moved to place their stamp on the House leadership. While minority leader Bob Michel and whip Newt Gingrich were re-elected without a challenge, Dick Armev won a critical race for the number-three spot in the leadership, chairman of the Republican conference, by defeating incumbent Jerry Lewis by four votes. Lewis had shared Michel's unwillingness to confront the Democrats. In his seconding speech for Armev, Ohio freshman Martin Hoke explained why most of the new Republicans feel compelled to confront the Democrats:

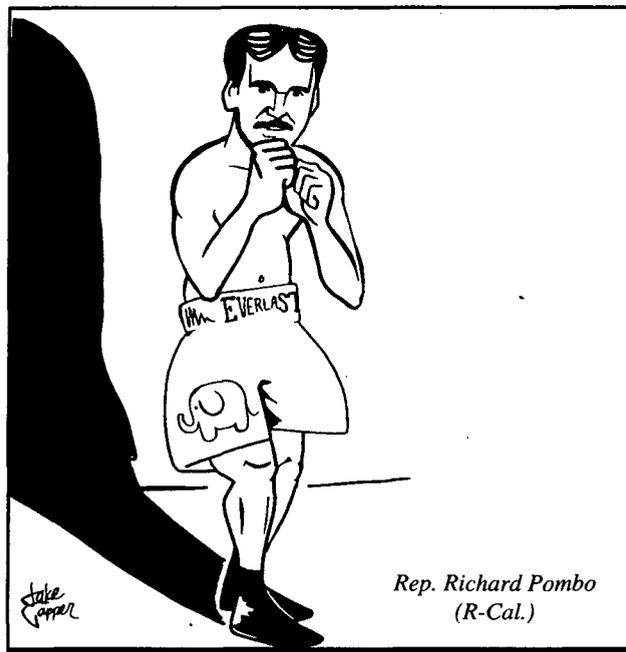
I was elected because the American people are fed up with the status quo. They want change. . . . We've lost our momentum, not because the two parties have changed, but because our leadership has not effectively expressed the differences between us. We need Dick Armev to draw these

contrasts in a persuasive and convincing manner. . . . The lesson of the last four years is clear: the more we act like them, the more we lose; the more we act like us, the more we win. I haven't been here long, but I've figured that much out.

The freshmen then went on to spearhead the election of Tom DeLay of Texas over Bill Gradison of Ohio as conference secretary. Gradison barely campaigned, expecting, he told friends, to win based on his seniority and ability to get along. This year, "getting along" was not viewed as an asset.

Reports from Republican leadership meetings now read like dispatches from a War Room. Newt Gingrich has been emboldened by the reinforcements, and aggressive new leadership is also to be found in John Kasich of Ohio, the ranking member on Budget, a position usually filled by an accommodationist, in the interest of politely dividing up the spoils. It remains for Kasich to find professional staff who can neutralize the accommodationist expertise of Pete Domenici, his Senate counterpart.

Having radically changed their leadership, the forty-seven freshmen demanded and won in conference a House Republican rule change that will place a six-year limit on a member's service as ranking member of a committee. A similar boomlet in the House Democratic caucus went nowhere. On the Senate side, the newly elected senator from Utah, Robert Bennett, who had promised similar action in his campaign, made no effort to get a vote in the Republican caucus.



Rep. Richard Pombo (R-Cal.)

The fireworks continued when the House Republicans agreed to try to limit the re-authorization of funding of the four Select Committees—Aging; Hunger; Narcotics; and Children, Youth and Families. With ninety staffers, these committees spend more than \$4 million each year, and do little more than provide opportunities for members to grandstand. They are not “real” committees like Ways and Means or Armed Services, which actually draft and forward legislation to the full House. Confident of their control in the House, Democrats rejected the Republicans’ compromise offer of a one-year funding re-authorization, opting instead to pursue full funding for two years. This left the Republicans with no choice but to vote to end the committees’ existence. When the Narcotics Committee came up for the first vote, the House voted 237 to 180 not to give them any money.

Forty-five of the freshmen Republicans voted to kill this wasteful committee, as opposed to eighteen of the sixty-three Democratic freshmen. It took the votes of sixty-four non-freshman Democrats to defeat re-authorization—including the leaders of real committees who resent having to face competition from the grandstanders.

Furious at losing control of their members, the Democratic leadership knew it would lose the votes on the next three committees as well. House Majority Leader Richard Gephardt thus moved to adjourn, promising “extensive consultation about how and when to proceed with the other committee questions”—i.e., arm-twisting. Still scrambling, Gephardt was pulled from the fire by House Republican Leader Michel, who asked, “Mr. Speaker, if I might be so bold as to suggest that an easy way out of the particular predicament for all of these select committees would be frankly to . . . extend all of them for one year.”

Gephardt replied, “I appreciate the gentleman’s suggestion.” Well he might, but the House Republican freshmen did not appreciate seeing their first victory thrown away in favor of a compromise position no longer needed. They made their disgust unmistakably clear in an unprecedented number of phone calls to Michel, Gingrich, Armev, and DeLay.

To suit the radical freshmen, the Republican leadership now rejects

Michel’s compromise position. The new battle cry is “No prisoners,” meaning no funding for any of the four committees. Unable to bribe, threaten, or cajole enough Democrats, the Democratic leadership has reneged on its promise of another vote. If no vote is taken before March 31, the four committees will cease to exist and their funding will flow into the infamous Speaker’s Slush Fund. A chastened Republican leadership is working with the freshmen to demand a vote to kill the committees and withdraw

the funding—keeping it free from the clutches of the Speaker of the House and his chief of staff, who doubles as his wife.

Unlike their Republican counterparts, the Democratic freshmen arrived in Washington as sheared sheep. In three regional meetings with them, Speaker Tom Foley and other Democratic leaders drove home the point that good committee assignments would flow from absolute loyal-

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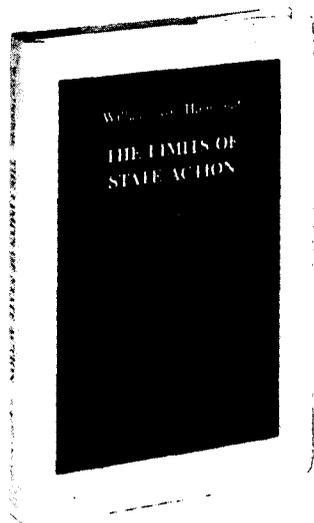
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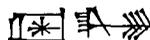
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ty. (The meetings were all financed by Washington lobbyists.) Meanwhile, these freshmen Democrats were ordered not to attend a bipartisan Omaha "Freshman Summit" scheduled to meet a few weeks after the election to unite the entire 1992 class in a fight for congressional reform. Many of Foley's deputies had come to Washington as part of the "Watergate Baby" class of 1974, and they remember the damage that seventy-five freshmen Democrats inflicted on the older, seniority-based Democrat leadership. Those who had overthrown the old order were not about to allow sixty-three freshmen to rock the boat. None did. Not a single Democrat showed up in Omaha.

Six Democratic freshmen had committed to attend the nonpartisan, privately funded, conservative-oriented conference in Annapolis co-sponsored by the Heritage Foundation, the Free Congress Foundation, and the Family Research Council. These six were gently reminded that membership on "juice" committees would be denied those who fraternized with conservatives. (A juice committee controls legislation with the potential to damage an entire industry; its members thus enjoy the unmatched munificence of protection-seeking industry-backed PACs.)

The Freshmen Democrats were also buffaloed into voting for certain rules changes that stripped them of much of their potential power as a group or as individuals. These rules changes give the speaker the right to remove House members from conference committees at will. A conference committee is composed of House and Senate members of both parties who meet to iron out differences between House and Senate versions of the same legislation. Conference committees can be critical in shaping the final details of legislation.

For instance, it was during just such a conference in 1980 that Rhode Island Rep. Freddy St Germain—in the dead of night—helped set the stage for the savings and loan problem by increasing the federal deposit insurance exposure from \$40,000 per person to \$100,000 per account. This without a hearing or a vote in either house of Congress.

Under the new rules, any Republican or Democratic House member who objects to such shenanigans can be

pulled off the conference committee by Speaker Foley. The new rules also allow Foley two days to respond to "questions of privilege," motions that in the last Congress served to allow Republicans to force embarrassing votes on the House check-kiting and Post Office scandals.

Of course, the changes in the rules also gave Speaker Foley five additional votes to pad his already generous partisan majority. Now the delegates (not House members) from the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa (population: 32,395), and the U.S. Virgin Islands (pop. 95,214) will be able to vote in the Committee of the Whole House—in essence giving them a vote on the floor equal to that of any other member (population of the average congressional district: 570,352).

Democrats have tried to deflect criticism by arguing that the five extra votes won't really count, promising to vote again should any vote in the Committee of the Whole be decided by those five votes. Nonetheless, the psychological advantage will remain. The move cuts in half the 10-vote gain registered by Republicans in the 1992 elections. All votes reported in the press will appear to give the Democratic position an additional five supporting votes. Meanwhile, forcing a second vote on close issues will give the Democratic leadership time to twist arms before the roll is called again.

In any event, the measure is almost certainly unconstitutional (Foley himself made this point on the House floor in 1970), and it is a mark of their servility that all sixty-three of the Democratic freshmen present cast their votes at Foley's direction to expand the delegates' power.

Foley & Co.'s power grab includes the just-passed "Motor Voter" bill, which will register to vote any applicant for a driver's license or welfare. Under this bill, Zoë Baird's chauffeur could be registered to vote in the state of Connecticut, and in his Peruvian hometown. "Motor Voter" goes further, and forbids local or state governments from dropping voters from the rolls even if they haven't voted for the last four, ten, or even fifty years. The bill institutionalizes Chicago-style voter fraud opportunities in states that heretofore have been

honest. (Republican Richard Pombo of California unsuccessfully tried to offer an amendment that would have registered taxpayers to vote when they paid their taxes.)

Why the difference in direction between this year's freshman classes? Why the successful party revolt in the Republican ranks and the hangdog "check your constituents at the door" approach of the Democrats?

One answer is term limits. California freshman Pombo—who made a famous phone call to Bob Michel following the select committee sell-out—says bluntly, "I have six years to make changes in Congress. I have no time to waste." Pombo says his term-limited compatriots "are not interested in learning the system, they want to change it." The Democratic leadership keeps reassuring its members that it will use tax dollars to fight term limits in the courts. The Republican platform, by contrast, has endorsed term limits since 1988.

A second reason is the lack of a Republican president. There is no White House to defer to. The Free Congress Foundation's Paul Weyrich points out that this incoming freshman class is the feistiest, most determined, and most self-starting since 1978—another year without a Republican in the White House. "Even the moderates," Weyrich says, "are spoiling for a fight and listening to no one who says, 'Let's wait and see.'"

Third, for the first time the conservatives ran a congressional training conference in direct competition with the traditional taxpayer-funded "Welcome to Congress" seminar held at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government. The Republican House leadership wrote to all elected Republicans and urged them to attend the conservative Annapolis conference and *not* the Harvard conference. Last December, thirty-two Republican freshmen attended the Free Congress/Heritage/Family Research Council conference in Annapolis on how to be an effective freshman activist. Only a handful of Republicans ventured to Harvard to sit with the bulk of the Democratic freshmen and be told that freshmen should bide their time, defer to the leadership, and learn the ropes. Republicans and Democrats alike have taken their initial lessons to heart. □



Two Steps Forward

by Benjamin J. Stein

Friday

I see America dancing, and it's a Texas two-step. Let me tell you some more about The Borderline.

Near my house in Trancas, at the North End of Malibu, there was for years a tumbledown restaurant and bar at the edge of a grocery store parking lot. By night, there would be a few ranch hands guzzling beer, and an occasional, mostly terrible, rock band on the stage. About a year ago, the place was vandalized and closed. It stood empty for months. Then workmen came with their hammers and saws, and on New Year's Eve the Borderline—a combined restaurant, bar, and dance floor for country music—was opened.

It is as if Lazarus had been raised from the dead. The Borderline is packed almost every night, not with drunk ranch hands, but with men and women of all ages from their twenties to their seventies with dancing on their minds. They come from Van Nuys and Encino, from Manhattan Beach and Torrance, from Ventura and Oxnard, from Beverly Hills, and most of all from Malibu and Santa Monica, and can they dance!

We're not talking the Virginia Reel here, but complex "line dances" in which men and women line up and kick in all different—highly coordinated—ways, turn and re-turn, generally like a Broadway chorus line but vastly more complicated. That's

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about a third of the time. But most of the time, there are the hand-holding, look-your-partner-in-the-eye and look-seriously-romantic dances, particularly the two-step and the "cowboy cha-cha." For every "neon moon," "electric slide," and "tush push," there are five hand-holders.

I loved The Borderline from the moment I walked in the door. For one thing, it usually has a number of pretty girls, and I love to watch pretty girls dancing. For another, the people who are dancing look like they're fond of one another. Unlike revolting rap dancing, or "hip hop" or whatever moron word describes it, country dancing has men and women holding each other, staring into each other's eyes, dancing in rhythm with one another, looking happy, talking to each other, and generally acting as if they meant each other well.

About two weeks ago I took a dance lesson—an almost unbelievably expensive private session—so I wouldn't be

embarrassed and look like a big nerdy teacher on the floor with my pal Jane, and now I know the two-step pretty well, and the neon moon haltingly.

It's Friday night tonight, and Jane and I are eating dinner here, and between courses and afterwards, we've been dancing the two-step, with many twirls, "sweetheart positions," and an occasional dip, in the midst of the happy other dancers. There are a few stars here from Malibu's firmament, notably my former neighbor Martin Sheen, and a major league record producer named Susan Hamilton. But mostly it's just ordinary folks, who turn up in Nissans and Jeeps and Oldsmobiles and really know their stuff.

This is America dancing. My dance partner and pal, Jane, keeps getting passed by a Vietnamese man in a cowboy outfit complete with red bandanna coming out of his back pocket. He's dancing with a Korean woman who owns one of the best two-steps I've ever seen. There are two black couples out on the floor, looking relaxed and at home in the midst of the country-comforts crowd.

There's a woman dancing near me whom I know from another life. She works with retarded and autistic children at a state home near Camarillo, and she just lost her own three-year-old son, and her life has not been easy. But she's dancing and looking brave and even happy, in between waiting tables so that she can subsidize the state of California for her work on behalf of its least fortunate citizens.

Then there's Jane, dancing with me, concentrating mightily, looking as if she really means to

