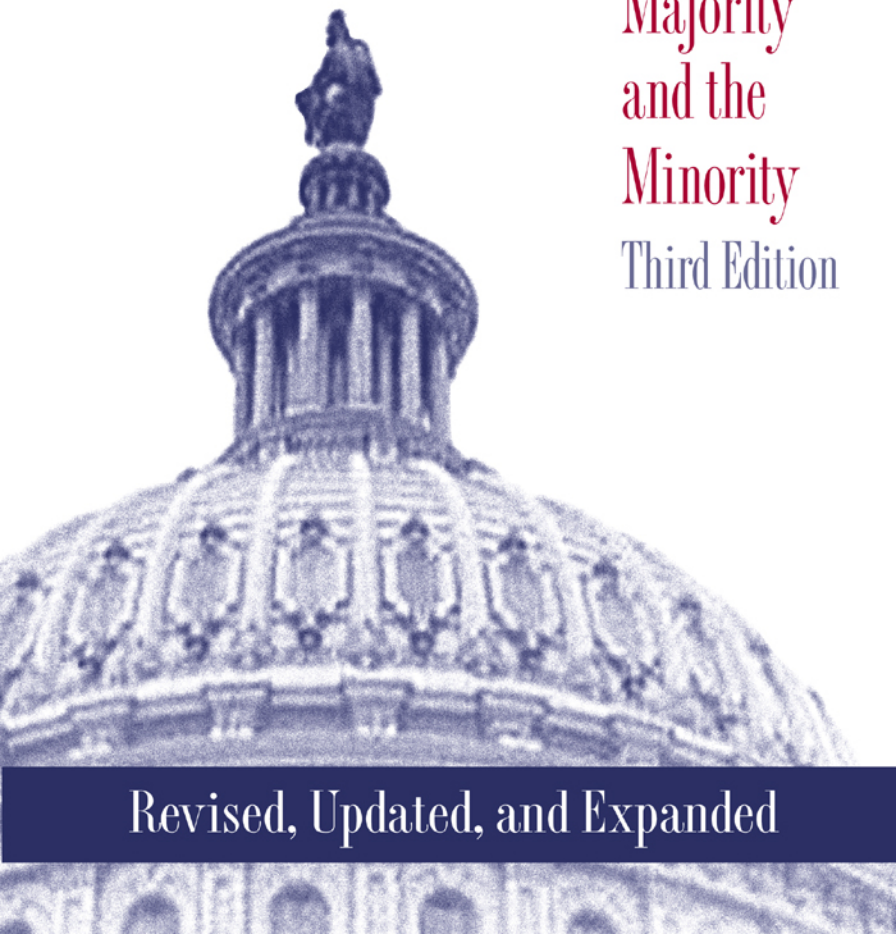
CONGRESS from the INSIDE

Sherrod Brown

Observations from the Majority and the Minority

Third Edition



Revised, Updated, and Expanded

CONGRESS FROM THE INSIDE

Two of Sherrod Brown's passions are baseball and politics. He has represented Ohio's 13th Congressional District since 1992, after having served for two decades as a state politician, initially in the Ohio legislature and then as Ohio's Secretary of State. Brown, from Lorain, Ohio, is currently the ranking Democrat on the House Commerce Subcommittee on Health and the Environment. He plays center field and leads off for the Democrats in the annual congressional baseball game.

CONGRESS FROM THE INSIDE

OBSERVATIONS FROM THE MAJORITY AND THE MINORITY

Sherrod Brown

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To my daughters, Emily and Elizabeth,
who are already pursuing lives of service.
To my mother, Emily Campbell Brown, who helped
to teach them and me about social justice.
And to Connie, who changed my life.

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PREFACE

THIS BOOK IS ABOUT POLITICS, elections, governing, and people . . . powerful people. Not a kiss-and-tell, it's an instructive book of what my first terms in Congress were like and what has transpired in the years since.

This story of a newly elected representative navigating his way through Congress begins in hopeful times, when most of us were optimistic that partisan gridlock was over, as a huge, diverse, goal-oriented freshman class was sworn in.

My five completed terms in Congress have provided an interesting perspective in a unique period of congressional history. The 103d Congress in 1993–94, the first time in over a decade when one party controlled the presidency and both houses of Congress, saw a brief period of high public expectation and a longer period of low performance. A decisive portion of the electorate thought that we moved too far too fast, especially on the budget and the crime bill. At the same time, we failed the public by our inability to pass health care reform, in large part because our efforts were characterized as proposing radical reform. And the Democratic president disappointed large numbers of Democrats and enraged Perot voters with his aggressive lobbying for the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

My second term saw a group of dispirited Democrats defending our values against a buoyant crowd of Republicans who thought America's political world had changed dramatically, permanently, and irreversibly. Republicans in the House passed, with great ideological fervor, issue after issue. Debate was limited; their certitude and determination were not. They felt certain that they were the vanguard of a movement that would elect a conservative president in 1996 and govern the country with conservative principles well into the next century. Before the government shutdown in late 1995, many Democrats thought they might be right. But by 1996, the Democrats seemed almost ascendant and the Republicans were in disarray. GOP bills died in the Senate or were vetoed by the president. Democrats realized that the public supported them on Medicare, education, and the

environment. Republicans who came to Congress in 1994 ended up, to the horror of many of them, passing in 1996 an increase in the minimum wage, strengthening some environmental laws, and appropriating more money for education—not because very many of them wanted to do so, but because they wanted to be reelected.

My third term, when the Republicans held the slimmest majority that either party has held since the early days of the Great Depression, saw a cautious time for an embattled Speaker, a struggle for power among embittered members of the majority leadership, and a Congress that accomplished very little. Congress was to be in session only eighty-nine legislative days in 1997, one of the most abysmal marks in decades. As John Dingell quipped, "Most of those days didn't start until 5:00." And 1998 was even less productive.

Many of the Republican Revolutionaries of the Class of 1994 expressed their unhappiness with GOP leadership and their leadership's unwillingness to pursue the Republican agenda. Lindsey Graham, one of the most outspoken members of that class, muttered, "It's about time to practice one or two things we preach." Ultraconservative Steve Largent, an Oklahoma Republican, after seeing a new round of spending unveiled by fellow GOP Transportation chairman Bud Shuster, proclaimed, "The revolution is over."

In many ways, Congress itself has not recovered from the strategy adopted by Newt Gingrich almost twenty years ago. His years of incessant criticism of Congress enabled Republicans in 1994 to take control of a Congress with which the American public was increasingly angry. Today, and into the foreseeable future, all of us in Congress—Republicans and Democrats alike—must live with the extraordinarily low regard in which the public holds us and the institution to which we belong. And unfortunately, the public is paying the price.

Conflict is inherent to governing, to politics, to policy making. That same conflict, which, productively, can result in legislation and reform, can also incite anger out of legitimate (and illegitimate) differences. Many observers think our zeal and partisanship too childish, that much too often we disingenuously posture for partisan gain. But these displays of passion and anger, and even the barbs, are rhetorical outlets for those same deeply held beliefs. While the words may be vituperative, or even violent and vengeful, they are still only words. On a larger, societal scale this charged rhetoric helps us to avoid a domestic situation such as that in Bosnia or Rwanda, the kind of civil rancor and animosity that can divide and destroy a society.

In the past, underneath the partisan tension there was often a fundamental respect and collegiality among members of Congress that crossed party lines. Unfortunately some of that seems to have vanished. Today we're less likely to be colleagues *and* friends. While we may genuinely like one another, our friendships are usually not deep or long term. One reason for this shift is explained by my distinguished and thoughtful predecessor, Don Pease, who told me that members only get to know each other when they live in Washington and when they travel together. But the daily, fast pace of modern congressional life and the increasing work load leave little time for nurturing friendships.

Twenty years ago members and their families typically moved to Washington when they were elected. They socialized on weekends, their spouses became friends, and their children often went to school together. Also, for many years, until the early 1990s, members—and often their spouses—traveled frequently on congressional business (probably too frequently, especially to places like England, France, and the Caribbean). On those trips members of Congress had the opportunity to get to know one another across party lines, off The Hill, on a more personal, intimate basis. Members travel less frequently today, in large part because of deserved media attacks on perceived abuses. An unfortunate result of this, however, is that genuine fact-finding trips important to our national interest have also been sharply curtailed.

Today, with a society that is more atomized and with members of Congress increasingly isolated from each other, Congress is more partisan, less civil, less friendly. Unlike in the past, that partisanship is infrequently buffered or softened by friendship or personal experiences.

And so the inside of Congress revealed itself—its strengths and weaknesses as an institution, its successes and failures, its diversity and its elitism.

Books that influenced what follows range from Richard Fenno's *Home Style,* which examines the importance of district activities and the image of a candidate at home, to Edward R. Tuft's *Political Control of the Economy,* which analyzes the role that national conditions—a seemingly strong economy with no growth in real income and an unpopular president—played in 1994. Gary Jacobson's *The Politics of Congressional Elections* argues the importance of local factors. Those factors played a significant role even in 1994, especially in the early stages of candidate recruitment and the incumbents' efforts

to keep out good candidates. David Mayhew's *Congress: The Electoral Connection,* which examines the phenomenon that no one felt safe in his or her own district in the 1990s, has also proved influential in the development of *Congress from the Inside.*

When faced with a difficult decision in Congress, I often think back to a beautiful sunny morning in May 1997 when I visited Israel with two friends from Cleveland, Fred Rzepka and Harley Gross. Standing at the shrine at the top of the hill where Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount, our Jewish guide handed me a Bible and asked me to read the Beatitudes:

> Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.
> Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.
> Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.

Reflecting on my Judeo-Christian heritage, I thought about a quote from the great Jewish teacher Maimonides:

> Everyone throughout the year must regard himself as if he were half innocent and half guilty. And he should regard the whole of mankind in the same way. If then he commits one more sin, he weighs down the scale of guilt against himself and against the whole world. And he himself causes the destruction of all. But if he fulfills one commandment, he turns the scale of merit in his favor and perhaps he saves the whole world. He by himself has the power to bring salvation and deliverance to all the world.

When faced with a vote in a Congress where class warfare seems to be the order of the day, in a House of Representatives where those with so much already are given even more, in a country where the most privileged are given greater privilege almost every day, the lessons of my faith grow ever more important. And while some use the popular "What Would Jesus Do?" to drive a hard-Right, intolerant agenda, I often wonder what Jesus would really do about the poor, about the meek, about the peacemakers, about those with little.

Through most of my years in Congress, I have been a part of a group called Faith and Politics, a nondenominational prayer and reflection group headed by Reverend Doug Tanner, a Methodist minister. Six or seven of us—Joseph Eldridge, the chaplain at American University; Jack Moline, a rabbi; Representatives Rush Holt and Nancy Pelosi; David Cohen, a human rights activist; and former representative Vic Fazio—meet every Wednesday before breakfast in Representative Pelosi's office for devotions and discus-

sions about our faith, concluding with a prayer. With our all-too-frenetic schedules, it is one of the few times when we have time to reflect, to think deeply, to talk about God, and to examine our values. And twice a year Woody Chamberlain, my pastor from First Lutheran Church in Lorain, comes to my house for devotions. He helps to connect my work to my faith, my hectic life to my spirituality.

Few jobs provide an opportunity for a passion for social justice and spirituality to intersect, and I am blessed to have one of them.

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PRODUCING A THIRD EDITION OF *Congress from the Inside* may have been a simpler task than writing the original book, but my appreciation to those who assisted in this effort is just as great.

My special thanks go to all those in Ohio who helped send me to Washington and played a role in my five reelection campaigns. You continue to remind me why we must continue to fight for the principles we value.

My gratitude extends to those in Washington who have mentored me and taught me the ways of Congress. Your guidance has helped keep the message focused and strong. And I thank those around the country who work with me on health care and trade issues. Your commitment to these causes is unparalleled.

Special thanks to Donna Pignatelli, who so adeptly handled what could have been a disaster in redistricting and continues her strong hand at the helm of my office; to Elizabeth Thames, who delivers for so many who have little hope; to Ed Walz, who always has a big idea; to Ellie Dehoney, who knows more about health policy and explains it better than anyone I know; to Tonya Rawe, whose cheerfulness infects everyone; to Diana Milete, whose service has touched so many lives; to Katie Porter, whose compassion for the downtrodden shows every day; to Laura Pechaitis, whose efficiency and steadiness help Ohioans live better; to Pam Walker, whose compassion and kindness shines for all the world to see; to Brett Gibson, who is a fighter for human rights and fair treatment of workers around the world; to Ted Miller, who never misses an opportunity and almost daily creates new ones; to Pat Rogala, whose patience amazes me; to Diana Baron, whose skills remind us always of her value and of her values; and to John Sawyer, who, thankfully, came back; to Rick Diegel, who always fights on; to Vic Stewart, who never gives up. And thanks to Russ Pry and Joe Kanfer for welcoming me to Akron.

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Thanks to George Miller, Henry Waxman, and John Lewis, who serve as role models for so many of us, and David Bonior, who taught me how to be a congressman. Many thanks to John Kleshinski, whose steady voice and wise counsel are always just a phone call away.

I thank my wonderful family—my mother, Emily, who never gives up in her battle to improve the world; my brother Charlie, who never lets go; my brother Bob, whose humor and good sense always make things easier; and my daughters, Emily, the union activist, and Elizabeth, whose future is so bright.

My heartfelt thanks go to Connie Schultz, who has taught me so much about writing and even more about so much else.

INTRODUCTION

There is not a district in this country where many men and women would not like to sit where you sit today and would run against you any time they thought they could defeat you either in the primary or in the general election.

—Speaker Sam Rayburn, opening remarks to the House of Representatives, January 1961

This being the day fixed by the 20th amendment of the Constitution for the annual meeting of the Congress of the United States, the Members-elect of the 103rd Congress met in their Hall, and at 12 noon were called to order by the Clerk of the House of Representatives.

—Opening of the *Congressional Record,* January 5, 1993

MY FIRST DAY IN CONGRESS happened to be the most colorful day in its history. Whites and blacks. Latinos and Asians. Women dressed in reds and greens. The happy voices of children.

I was one of 110 new members in the Class of 1992. Within four months three others joined us when two senior Democrats left to join the Clinton administration and one senior Republican departed to head the Health Insurance Association of America, which played a big role in defeating the health care bill. Incoming Democrats—sixty-three of us—were surely the most representative congressional class America had ever seen and likely the most diverse group of legislators ever to assemble in a legislative chamber anywhere else in the world: ranging in age from thirty to sixty-six, the new Democrats were more than one-third women, one-fourth African American, one-seventh Latino. Incoming Republicans, however, did not look much different from Congresses of the past: the forty-seven Republicans numbered only three women, two Latinos, and no African Americans. Of the 110 representatives sworn in on January 5, 1993, nineteen would not be back to take the oath two years later.

The camaraderie among members of the House is real. The shallow political friendliness that the public sees in the parliamentary calisthenics of "my good friend" or "the gentlelady from California" or "my esteemed colleague" reflects the outward courtesy between Members. But genuine affection makes Congress a physical place, where members do slap each other on the back, shake hands frequently, or drape an arm over a colleague's shoulder. The shared experiences do forge a friendliness that few outside of the institution know or understand. Each member has waged a political war to get here, through one election or a dozen. Each knows he or she is fair game for a biting, often unfair editorial. Each knows that spouses and children can be targets of nasty comments in embarrassing situations.

Each also shares membership in a very select organization. Even today, when most of the public has a negative opinion of Congress and low regard for politicians generally, each member knows that many thousands of people in the United States would love the opportunity to serve in the United States Congress, to be numbered among 535 in a nation of 280 million people.

On my first Opening Day, partisanship was subdued. Republicans sat on one side, Democrats on the other. Friendliness between the Members across the aisle was demonstrative, if not typically exuberant. When we were sworn in, everyone stood up together. When the vote for Speaker was made, it was done by a thirty minute roll call, not electronically as is the case for the remainder of the session. That first day in 1993, every Democrat voted for Thomas Foley; every Republican voted for Robert Michel.

The reelected Speaker Foley was sworn in, as is the tradition, by the dean of the House, Jamie Whitten, who was elected to the House of Representatives one month before Pearl Harbor. The Mississippi Democrat, once a staunch segregationist whom the Voting Rights Act turned into a moderate on racial issues, was elected to the House before 83 of us in the freshman class were even born. When asked by another member whether he went back home to Mississippi very often, he answered, "Mississippi? Almost everyone I know in Mississippi has died."

On that day we were sworn in, all of us in the freshman class thought we were part of history. The largest congressional class since 1946, we were elected to change things and to reform the institution.

PART I

Energy is the first quality of a statesman.
—Ivan Turgenev, *Fathers and Sons*

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1

Election 1992: Getting There

Politics is show business for ugly people.

—Mike Turpin, Oklahoma attorney general

The only cats worth anything are the cats who take chances. Sometimes I play things I never heard myself.

—Thelonius Monk, jazz pianist

ELECTION NIGHT, as it always is for the winner, was a glorious night. Early in the evening, we knew we had won when the absentee ballots showed us with a substantial lead. Absentee voters, often business travelers and Florida vacationers, are more likely to vote Republican.

Two years earlier, the voters decided they did not want me in office. After eight years as an Ohio legislator and eight years as Ohio's secretary of state, I was defeated in 1990 for a third term as secretary of state. As difficult as election night was in 1990—as difficult as it was telling my daughters Emily and Elizabeth that we were going to lose, as difficult as it was calling my opponent to congratulate him, and as difficult as it was to stand in front of family, friends, and a thousand Democrats and make a concession speech—nothing hit me as hard as the close of my last day in office. My daughters—Emily was nine, Elizabeth six—were with me as my chief deputy Wayne West and I left the office on that January day. The girls had grown up with me in this office, coming in on Saturdays, attending all kinds of office functions, even playing here in the evening from time to time. Wayne, my daughters, and I walked out of the office at about six o'clock. Wayne and I were talking, and as we approached the elevator, I looked back and didn't see the girls. I walked back down the hall and reentered my office for the last time. Emily and Elizabeth were kissing the furniture good-bye, piece by piece.

Twelve months later, congressional redistricting and the retirement of two veteran northeast Ohio congressmen opened up a new congressional seat. Eight-term congressman Don Pease represented my home county of Richland, where I grew up and which I had represented in the Ohio House of Representatives for four terms, but I had not lived there for nine years because of my service as secretary of state in Columbus. The first redistricting plan kept Ohio's Thirteenth District pretty much intact and included the cities of Lorain, Elyria, Sandusky, North Ridgeville, Brunswick, Ashland, Wadsworth, Avon Lake, Avon, Amherst, Vermilion, Oberlin, and my hometown of Mansfield. When the plan for the new seat seemed headed for approval, I shared with family, friends, and political supporters my intentions to run. I notified the newspapers of the date of my announcement, which would be made at the grade school I attended in Mansfield.

However, a newly revised plan, drawn by the Republicans—apparently with me in mind—took Mansfield out of the district and extended the district almost one hundred miles east, making it probably the most grotesquely gerrymandered district in Ohio. After the first plan had been tentatively approved, one veteran legislator stood up in the Republican caucus in Columbus and thundered, "We spent $4 million to beat that son of a bitch two years ago. Why are we drawing a district for him now?" Lorain County, by far the largest county in the district, was split for the first time in at least one hundred years. The Lorain County Democratic chairman, Victor Stewart, said, "We'll need Houdini to represent the kind of district they came up with here." Others referred to it as the "barbell district," the "turnpike district," and the "roadkill district." One wag wryly commented that the district looked like "something my kid drew with an Etch-a-Sketch."

I had less than a week to decide whether to run in the open seat, which for ten years had included my hometown, or the very Republican Fourth District seat, represented for a decade by Republican Mike Oxley, that now encompassed all of Mansfield. I met with Wayne West, campaign manager Sue Adams, and a couple of friends to discuss how difficult this race would be, based on the Republicans' plan. I decided to run in the open Thirteenth District, knowing I would be called a carpetbagger and an opportunist. (On this I was not disappointed by either the newspapers or other candidates.)

The skills required to run a successful campaign are similar to those necessary for running a business or for being a successful entrepreneur. A candidate needs to raise substantial amounts of capital or campaign money, usu-

ally in excess of $500,000. He needs to hire staff and make wise use of volunteers. He must craft a cogent, clear message that is broad enough to appeal to tens of thousands of people. A candidate must budget carefully in order to be able to deliver that message to thousands of voters in a variety of ways—through the mail, on television, on radio, and through printed material distributed by volunteer speakers, canvassers, leafleteers. And he must be able to successfully sell the product—himself—to the public and to the media: one-on-one, at editorial board meetings, through speeches, and in literally hundreds of personal appearances.

Eight Democrats and six Republicans qualified for the Thirteenth Congressional District ballot. A half-dozen more attempted to run but were ruled off the ballot, in most cases for insufficient valid signatures on their petitions. Most of the other Democrats were qualified and articulate but not widely known or able to raise the substantial amount of money necessary for a campaign. My eight years as Ohio secretary of state and my experiences as an officeholder and as both a successful (six times) and unsuccessful candidate (once) helped me substantially. I spent approximately $150,000 and won the primary by almost 25 percent.

As we looked ahead to the general election, my eighty-one-year-old father was not thrilled. He told *Akron Beacon Journal* reporter Regina Brett, "I'm still working for him, that's all I can say. But I'm not glad he's back. I think it's a hell of a way to make a living."

Initially, the most daunting Republican was a very wealthy, former state legislator whose father owned the Cleveland Indians. He, too, moved into the district to run. My daughter Elizabeth worriedly commented on him and his political strength: "You're running against the man who owns the Cleveland Indians. I think all the Cleveland Indians will vote for him." My older daughter, Emily, presciently responded, "That's okay. It's not like there are that many of them." And she was right; he lost the Republican primary to an heiress who had run for Congress and lost three times in a row, spending millions in the process.

Under the direction of my campaign manager and longtime friend, Sue Adams, we organized a 150-mile bicycle trip that took us through dozens of communities in every corner of the district. As Bill Clinton was traveling around and learning about the country by bus, our bicycle trip taught me much about the district and its people. It drew a great deal of media attention and generated an outpouring of grassroots support. Members from a

bicycle club joined us in Medina; we played softball with elected officials and community leaders in Garrettsville; in Elyria my daughters did a rap song they had written; we ate breakfast with the county fair board in Lorain County; and we were greeted by a hundred Democrats as we ended our journey in Newton Falls. Almost every stop attracted a great deal of media attention—television at the kick-off at Lakeview Park on Lake Erie in Lorain, radio interviews at several stops, conversations with dailies and weeklies through most of the seven counties. My familiarity with the district from the bicycle trip, from my days as secretary of state, and from our intensive grassroots effort played a significant role in winning the election.

In contrast, my opponent lived in the far-eastern, less populous part of the district and was unfamiliar with most of it. Although she repeatedly labeled me "a carpetbagger, an opportunist, and a professional, career politician," she had not, even by election day, learned much about the district she wanted to represent. At a debate at Oberlin College, the format allowed each candidate to question the other. I asked her to name the high schools in the two largest cities in the district. Her failure even to attempt to answer—or guess—had its effect on the audience.

A typical October campaign day started at 4:00 or 4:30 A.M. at the Lorain Ford plant meeting workers. After a couple of hours there, two volunteers and I would go to another plant gate where a later shift started. From there, after a quick breakfast (if we were lucky), I walked through fast-food restaurants going table to table meeting people as they ate. Midmorning usually found us at supermarkets and discount stores, where I stood out front and greeted voters. (More often than not, the manager would throw me out after an hour or so.) Back to restaurants between 11:30 and 1:30. In the afternoon I returned to campaign headquarters to call potential contributors and ask for some last-minute help to buy television time to counter my opponent's ostensibly unlimited bank account. Later in the afternoon I would either go door to door for a few minutes, go back to a supermarket, or return to fast-food restaurants. In the evening, when there were not candidates' nights (which were often attended by more candidates, their families, and their workers than by district voters), I would campaign at bowling alleys. When up to it, I'd stand outside movie theaters when the shows let out or return to headquarters for a late-night campaign meeting.

At one event, a middle-aged woman walked up to me and asked in a friendly voice, "You're Sherrod Brown, aren't you?" I nodded. "You look a lot better on TV than you do in person." Thank you.

During the campaign we unveiled a seventeen-page economic plan and made some very specific first-term promises, promises I knew I could keep: I pledged to pay my own health care until Congress passed universal coverage; to hold regular town meetings and not travel on junkets at taxpayers' expense; to turn back part of my office budget; to turn down any congressional pay raise; to fight for fair trade and an industrial policy; and to end the corporate deductibility for multimillion-dollar salaries. As it turned out, keeping those promises may have been the reason I was reelected two years later.

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was perhaps the central issue of the campaign. Without major side agreements on the environment, worker safety, minimum wage, and guarantees of free elections, I opposed NAFTA. My opponent supported it unequivocally. During my first year in office, NAFTA was to occupy a huge portion of my legislative efforts and ongoing trade interest.

Although being outspent $860,000 to $480,000, we won by 46,000 votes, or 18 percent. And the major issues of health care, congressional reform, and the economy helped Bill Clinton carry the district by five thousand votes, about 2 percent. Interestingly, the Thirteenth District gave Ross Perot his fourth highest vote east of the Mississippi, well over 30 percent in many precincts.

The morning after the election, I was up at 4:00 A.M. at the plant gates thanking voters, many of whom did not know who won because they had gone to bed at nine or ten o'clock. At a morning breakfast, I celebrated with the people I care about the most—my parents, my brothers Bob and Charlie, my daughters, and my niece Tara.

Election day 1992 was over. So now began the next campaign—the campaign for a congressional career. Four major tasks face a newly elected member of Congress: hiring a staff, attending the new-member training seminars, learning about the institution and its players, and campaigning for committee assignments. How the member-elect handles these duties can set the tone not only for the first term but for an entire career.

Soon after the election, newly elected members are handed a 350-page book entitled *Setting Course: A Congressional Management Guide*. In early December, incoming members are first invited to Washington, and then to Harvard, for two weeks of training and issue seminars. Few of us, frankly, knew much about the rules and procedures of the House. Most of us were significantly more conversant with issues, although exposure to some of

America's premier public policy experts showed us how much we still needed to learn. Training—lectures, small seminars, role playing, and hand-outs—helps; but, like most jobs, you don't really learn it until you start doing it.

The new member quickly realizes that he is on his own. One veteran said, "Congress is like 435 separate corporations." From running for political office to running a government office, he is in charge—hiring staffs in Washington and back in the district, budgeting, deciding what issues are important for him and his district. He is running a small business with a $900,000 budget and sixteen or seventeen employees, and his constituents are his customers.

Each week every congressional office receives literally hundreds of letters, dozens of individual problems and complaints, sometimes more than a thousand postcards, petitions with hundreds of signatures, and multitudinous invitations. A member who tries to answer personally all these letters, petitions, and postcards, we were counseled, may be neglecting other legislative business. Conversely, any member, we were told, who does not delegate large amounts of his legislative research or who tries to read every line of every bill—especially outside his committee jurisdiction—cannot do justice to his other work.

Don't overreach on issues, we were told. Dozens of issues are interesting, provocative, important to the district, and challenging. Members who get involved in too many issues are usually effective in none of them. Become conversant on all issues, we were counseled. Be versatile, but pick only two or three to specialize in. As a member gains knowledge and skill about an issue, others will look to him for advice in that area. And, of course, in Congress knowledge is influence.

Much of what we learned centered around the collegiality of the House of Representatives. Get to know people in Congress; think of the membership in terms of spheres. Work with congressmen and congresswomen from your class, from your state, from your region, on your committees, even with those members whose offices are located nearby. Although the seniority system is very much in place, Congress is in many ways a merit system. Lyndon Johnson used to talk about "show-horses and work-horses." Members of Congress, especially those in powerful positions, notice who does the work; who sits through often excruciatingly boring, interminable committee hearings; who is willing to participate day after day in the less-than-glamorous work of the House.

Learn the rules of the House, and learn the reasons for them, we were told. And don't be a perpetual motion machine. As Tip O'Neill said, "The horse that runs fast early fades first." And we were cautioned to move slowly on hiring staff. A full staff is not necessary in the first couple of months because the legislative cycle is not yet in full swing. "Don't hire the mayor's son," we were told repeatedly; that is, do not hire someone that you cannot politically afford to fire.

There are assorted political landmines awaiting new members during the transition period and the first weeks on the job. One is the temptation to talk—and talk and talk—to national media. If the *Los Angeles Times* or *Wall Street Journal* or *Washington Post* writes something complimentary about the new member, the small number of people in the district who read it may applaud. A critical article in a national publication may get wide circulation in the district. Much the same can be said about two newspapers, *Roll Call,* a private, semi-weekly, and *The Hill,* a weekly, which write sometimes substantive, sometimes gossipy stories about members and staff. Congress must be the only workplace in America covered by two full-blown newspapers. All in all, it is much better for members of Congress, especially freshmen, to spend their time with local papers.

A more comical landmine exploded (without serious injury, fortunately) in the face of several incoming members in the early part of the 103d Congress. A reporter from *Spy,* a political humor magazine, for want of a better term, posed as a radio reporter and interviewed a handful of new members of Congress.

Spy: Bill Clinton has proposed lifting the ban on gays in the military. As your state's first openly gay congressman, do you support his position?

A Midwestern Democrat: As my state's first openly gay congressman? Who're you talking about?

Spy: Uh, the story in *USA Today* about—

Democrat: Who is this? This isn't me.

Spy: It's not you?

Democrat: No, no, no.

Spy: Is there another freshman who, uh—

Democrat: If that's true, that's something that's up at the other end of the state.

Spy then asked a series of questions about Fredonia, which, to the consternation of several freshmen, is not a country but in fact a fictional nation created by the Marx Brothers in *Duck Soup.*

> *Spy*: What should we be doing to stop the ethnic cleansing in Fredonia?
>
> A Midwestern Republican: I think anything we can do to use the good offices of the United States government to assist stopping the killing over there we should do.
>
> Another Midwestern Republican: My impression is we've gotta be very careful; that effort moving through the United Nations has a great deal of merit right now.
>
> Yet Another Midwestern Republican: Yeah. It's a different situation than in the Middle East.
>
> A Southern Democrat: Yes, and you know, I think all those situations are very, very sad, and I think we just need to take action to assist the people.

And my favorite:

> *Spy*: Are you a dog or a cat person?
>
> A Midwestern Republican: Basically, a dog person. I certainly, though, wouldn't want to offend my constituents who are cat people, and I should say that being, I hope, a sensitive person, that I have nothing against cats, and had cats when I was a boy, and if we didn't have the two dogs, might very well be interested in having a cat now.

And this guy is voting "yes" or "no" on the most important issues facing our country.

On a more serious note, however, I did learn a telling lesson about Congress and about power. In early December, the representatives-elect spent several days in Washington. One morning, Cincinnati Democrat David Mann and I were eating breakfast at a Capitol Hill hotel. Seated at the next table was former Speaker Jim Wright. No one petitioned him. No one approached his table. No one was even sitting with him. Three years earlier, he had been the most influential man in Congress and probably the most powerful Democrat in America. That December morning Jim Wright sat alone, largely unnoticed, a grim reminder to a new member of Congress that fame, attention, and power are fleeting. People's interest in you is directly related to your position and title; Washington is a tough, unforgiving town.

Government transitions from November to January are almost always more difficult than they appear. In an executive-level office—governor, for example—an entire management team of several hundred administering several thousand employees in several dozen agencies and departments must be hired and trained in a short period of time. Significantly, the hiring takes place without a particularly good understanding of specific job functions. Preparing to take over a congressional office, although of much less magnitude, is not easy. And far too many incoming members impose a deadline on themselves to have an entire staff in place by early January. There is also a great temptation for the new member to bring several people from the campaign to staff the office. Often, the key aide, or the person who will run the office, will be brought from the district; many freshmen bring their campaign manager to Washington with them. More often than not, that is a mistake; most campaign managers, although possessed with considerable political skills, simply do not know Washington and how it works. And if a new member wants to succeed, knowledge of the system is essential.

In the 103d Congress, each member was allocated annually approximately $550,000 for staff salaries for the district and Washington offices, $150,000 additional for postage, and another $172,000 for operation of the office, including computers, district office rental, stationery and office supplies, and travel around the district and between the district and Washington. In 1995 the Republicans changed the process by giving "global" budget to be dealt in any way the members determined. In 2002 the allocation was about $1 million for all office functions—salaries, mail, travel, supplies, rent, etc. Some members are allocated a little more or a little less based on their home district's distance from Washington and rental costs in their districts. Members may hire up to eighteen full-time employees, one employee for every 35,000 people in their districts. During my first term, we spent $265,943 out of $327,450 allotted to us in office expenses; $79,809 out of $304,695 allotted to us in mail allowance; and $1,096,821 out of $1,131,800 allotted to us for clerk-hire. We turned back $321,820, or 18.2 percent of our budget. Many other offices, especially those of new members, turn back some part of their budget.

Seventy Democratic members of Congress were leaving at the end of the year, which meant that a large number of very highly qualified staff people were looking for work. A special room had been set up in the basement of the Rayburn House Office Building with mailboxes and desks for members-

elect to process applications and interview potential staff. The mailboxes were stuffed with resumes. I received close to two thousand resumes; most of the new Democratic congresswomen, in this Year of the Woman, as the media termed Election '92, received as many as three thousand job applications. Hundreds of job searchers lined up hoping to meet potential employers, or to simply put their resumes in new members' mailboxes. Most of these jobs paid somewhere between $20,000 and $30,000 a year.

Soon after the November election, when I began interviewing for my chief of staff (most offices refer to the top position as administrative assistant, or AA), I asked three people whom I trusted and who had a good understanding of Washington—my brother Charlie, former attorney general of West Virginia; Steve Elmendorf, soon to be the top aide to Majority Leader Richard Gephardt; and Jackie Gillan, who had worked in Ohio's Washington office—to screen potential applicants. All three looked for potentially good AAs and interviewed those they thought most impressive.

I personally interviewed at least a dozen outstanding candidates for chief of staff and decided on Rhod Shaw, who was highly recommended by Jackie, Steve, and Charlie. Not yet thirty, Rhod had already served as an AA, perhaps the youngest on Capitol Hill, and he was hungry for the challenge of working for a new member, especially one who was going to sit on the Energy and Commerce Committee. He knew how to make things work for people at home—from obtaining a grant for Lorain City Schools to getting the Medina post office upgraded to getting an amendment to a bill in committee to getting quick action from the House Administration Committee for office supplies.

We had several people in place by January; in the district office, we retained three people from Don Pease's staff who did mostly casework, Debra McAfee from Elyria, Diana Milete from Lorain, and Barbara Flowers from Medina. They assisted constituents with social security problems, passports, and other individual matters involving the federal government. We also kept Joyce Edelinsky of Hamden in Geauga County, who had worked for Congressman Dennis Eckart. We brought on board Sam Betounes, a retired autoworker, and Deanna Hill, a math teacher, to run our district office. A few months later, Pat Rogala of North Ridgeville joined us to do casework and scheduling in the district. Ron Orlando, who was key to the Washington transition, had been Congressman Eckart's office manager and now served the same function with us. We also brought two peo-

ple from the campaign: Margaret Bosela, a campaign volunteer from Lorain County who had recently graduated from Oberlin College, and Tracey Bauer of Elyria, who was a paid campaign worker in the primary and general election. Steve Fought, an old friend from Ohio, put law school on hold and joined us to do press work as well as handle trade and foreign policy issues. Lorain Countian Nancy Ginesta, who worked in Cleveland for our consultant Bill Burges, joined us in Washington. Mary McSorley, the only person in our office with no Ohio connection, came on board to do health care issues, largely because of my assignment on the Health and Environment subcommittee.

For the Washington office, we looked for a blend of issue expertise, knowledge of the district, a sensitivity to people back home, and writing skills combined with a strong work ethic. Thousands of young people from around the country look for opportunities to come to Washington and work on Capitol Hill, and, as in nearly all offices, most Washington staffers are young, single, willing to work long hours, and relatively low paid.

In the end, I suppose smart politicians hire based on their intuition. Apparently, Abraham Lincoln did: President Lincoln was approached by a jobseeker about whom the president's advisers were enthusiastic. After a short interview, Lincoln told his advisers that he was not going to hire him, that he did not like the jobseeker's face. His disappointed advisers were incredulous, telling Lincoln that the man could not help what he looked like. Lincoln replied, "Every man over forty is responsible for his face."

The campaign for committee assignments is the most important task a new member performs between November and January. Every other activity is, in a sense, reversible. An unwise hire can be fixed, often with little damage; an inadequate understanding of House rules and procedures can be compensated for in the first few months of session; understanding of issues can be deepened by reading, studying, and talking with policy experts.

Soon after the November election (or earlier, if their general election races are not difficult), incoming members begin to think about committee assignments. Freshmen are usually appointed to two of the twenty-one full standing committees. During the 103d Congress (1993–94), the House was made up of twenty-three full committees and 118 subcommittees, each with its own jurisdiction and area of expertise. The full committees ranged in size from twelve members on the District of Columbia Committee to sixty-four

on Public Works and Transportation. Members from farm states are especially interested in the Agriculture Committee. Westerners think about Interior (renamed Natural Resources and Reserves in 1993) because of federal lands and water issues in their states. Former state legislators who were involved in education issues in their state capital might choose Education and Labor (which Republicans renamed Education and Economic Opportunity in 1995). Members from all parts of the country are interested in Appropriations, Energy and Commerce, Rules, and Ways and Means. These four are generally considered the most prized assignments and consequently generate the most competition for appointment.

Appropriations considers all spending legislation, but it is not quite as desirable an assignment as it once was because government spending is more restrained. It is considered an exclusive committee because none of its members may sit on any other committee.

Energy and Commerce (renamed Commerce Committee in 1995, and then Energy and Commerce in 2001) has "jurisdiction over anything that moves, burns, or is sold," according to the *National Journal*. It is the oldest committee, having been around in one form or another since 1795. It oversees and legislates energy, health care, environment, hazardous materials, recycling, telecommunications, consumer protection, and even toys and defense contracting. One staff person likes to point to a beautiful colored picture of the earth taken from the moon and comment, "That's our jurisdiction." Over 50 percent of all bills in Congress go through this committee, which referees battles among powerful industries, especially in the field of telecommunications. The ten-year fight over deregulation and its impact on AT&T, the Bell companies, newspapers, and cable television prompted Ohio congressman Dennis Eckart to remark that the Commerce Committee too often must choose between "the very rich and the extremely wealthy." The committee's last Democratic chairman, John Dingell of Michigan, is considered one of the most powerful members of the House, and the late Speaker Sam Rayburn was once chairman of this committee. Rayburn and Dingell are primarily credited for having expanded the committee's jurisdiction. In 1995 Commerce became an exclusive committee for newly appointed Democrats, meaning that those members could not sit on Commerce and another committee at the same time.

Rules has few substantive hearings on legislation and is the closest committee to House leadership. It has the power to schedule—or refuse to