

The original documents are located in Box D31, folder “Republican Governors' Association, Williamsburg, VA, April 19, 1971” of the Ford Congressional Papers: Press Secretary and Speech File at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.

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CONGRESSMAN
GERALD R. FORD
HOUSE REPUBLICAN LEADER

**NEWS
RELEASE**

--FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE--

April 19, 1971

Remarks of House Republican Leader Gerald R. Ford (Mich.)
to the Republican Governors' Association, Williamsburg, Va.

My report on the 92nd Congress must be brief. After three months there is little legislative progress to report. Not counting unfinished business from last year, the President since January has sent 46 specific requests to the new Congress. They include some of the most fundamental Federal reforms in a generation. Only one -- raising the debt limit and social security increases -- has become law. One other measure -- military pay boosts and the draft extension aimed at an all-volunteer force -- has passed the House of Representatives. The Senate -- well, the Senate is quite capable of speaking for itself.

The climate in the House is much different this year. Historically the House operates very much in the shadow of its Speaker. Barely mentioned in the Constitution, the Speakership has evolved into a very powerful and essentially partisan office. Every Speaker has his own style, and obviously that of Carl Albert differs from John McCormack's. Equally obvious is the differences in past and present Majority Leaders. At this stage I would prefer to leave any categorical conclusions to the Washington columnists and to Mr. Albert's and Mr. Boggs' own Democratic colleagues. But if you invite me back next year I may be more enlightened and more entertaining on this topic.

We also adopted some new House rules last year. Liberal critics of Congress belittled them as window-dressing, but they have already worked significant changes. More public committee procedures and the new method of recording teller votes have had the initial effect of reducing absenteeism, encouraging the tendency to play to the galleries, and increasing the difficulty of imposing party discipline. The crucial vote on the SST, for example, split Democrats and Republicans almost down the middle. Only 4 more Republicans stayed with the President and with me than were recorded against us. But on the other side, Democrats voted down their own House leadership by 132 to 114. We can expect more narrow margins in this session.

Even without any changes in procedure or personalities, the 92nd Congress would have been more politically-oriented than the 91st. We are headed into



another Presidential campaign season. The list of would-be Presidents grows longer in the Senate and we even have a few hopefuls in the House -- not all of them Democrats either.

So I think we are in for some rough weather. Generally, I predict the new Democratic Majority in the House will be a little more effective in its politicking, a little less resolute in standing up to Senate demagoguery, a little more responsive to its far-out liberal faction, a little less responsible in foreign and defense matters.

The Democrats in Congress already are coming up with a wide array of proposals to rewrite and raise the ante on major Administration programs, such as revenue sharing, health care and welfare reform.

Democrats undermining Nixon's goals on the domestic battlefield may be fair political game. But I'm proud to say that neither Senator Dirksen nor I ever undercut a Democratic President in his grave Constitutional role as the nation's foreign policy spokesman and Commander-in-Chief of its brave defenders.

On this I want to get something off my chest without pointing at anybody. I simply cannot comprehend how any American -- especially anyone with a claim to public leadership -- can stand up in this trying hour of our history to carp and criticize, snipe and sabotage, quarrel and quibble with a President who day by day and week by week and month by month is skillfully and successfully extricating us from the war in Vietnam.

In a little more than two years Richard Nixon has handled the immense and seemingly insoluble problem of Southeast Asia precisely as he promised in 1968 and has brought results beyond our wildest hopes. He has cut the American combat commitment in half already and will reduce it by two-thirds before this year ends. More importantly, American casualties that were once 500 a week are down to below 50. And President Nixon is going to end our involvement in Vietnam altogether just as fast as he can safely and honorably do so. He deserves our applause and all-out support.

Now what do his critics want? For what possible political advantage, for what momentary glow of publicity, can any Republican or Democrat insist that President Nixon handcuff himself in the final crucial months of this delicate and unprecedented realignment of America's power for peace?

What do the President's Vietnam critics hope to accomplish? To play numbers games with the calendar that could cost American lives and demean America's credibility before the world? Do they really want to embarrass the President of the United States, to force him to fail, to make him out a liar? I cannot believe it.

I have travelled the length and breadth of this country in the past few weeks and I am convinced the vast majority of Americans support President Nixon in his steady, measured march toward peace, not only in Southeast Asia but around the world. I am confident that Richard Nixon will be remembered -- and re-elected in 1972 -- for ending the American combat role in Vietnam not only with honor but with extraordinary skill and courage.

One final suggestion from a fellow Republican. When I met with the Members of the Republican Governors' Association in Colorado shortly after our spectacular comeback in the 1966 elections, I said jokingly that perhaps our Republican Party could survive anything except success. Now, after the 1970 elections, that joke isn't very funny.

We continued our gains in Congress and in the State capitals in 1968 and we elected our President and recaptured the executive branch of the Federal government. Then what did we do? We rode down Pennsylvania Avenue in the Inaugural Parade and proceeded to dismantle the very vehicle that carried us there.

One of the first enterprises with which I was associated after being chosen to lead the Republicans in the House in 1965 was the creation of the National Republican Coordinating Committee. On it were represented the former Republican candidates for President, the Republican Congressional leaders of House and Senate, representatives of the Republican Governors (there were only 17 then) and State legislators and the Republican National Committee. We met four times a year and we hammered out responsible and forward-looking Republican programs and policies. Furthermore, in the give and take of these regular get-togethers, seasoned Republican officials in close contact with the voters somehow attained a degree of harmony and unity which our Republican Party has never equalled before or since.

I don't know whose fault it was that the National Republican Coordinating Committee was allowed simply to wither away just when it proved its worth in 1968. We still had miles to go in winning back the Congress. We could have also concentrated on holding and increasing State offices so essential to redistricting after the 1970 Census. But we didn't.

True, the Republican Governors continue to meet and so do the Senate and House Republican Leadership, and we meet from time to time with the President and the National Chairman and with one another, but these bilateral visits are not enough. Republican program and policy leadership now, of course, is the primary prerogative of a Republican President. But regular consultation and cross-fertilization of ideas among experienced and elected Republican leaders, both to promote and to produce party unity, is today sorely missed. I suggest we should

revive the Coordinating Committee now and ready it for the needs of 1972 and beyond.

We meet here to talk about what President Nixon calls the New American Revolution, surrounded by reminders of the Original American Revolution. General Washington, in the dark winter of 1776, wrote privately to his brother that "if every nerve is not strained to recruit the new army with all possible expedience, I think the game is pretty near up."

Gentlemen, we are the field generals and the recruiters of the new army of voters that must be raised in 1972. The Republican Party across the country, in your States and in each Congressional district -- not merely at the Supreme commander's headquarters in Washington -- must be the hard professional core of that new all-volunteer army. If we do not rally and recruit it with all possible speed, the game will indeed be up for the New American Revolution.

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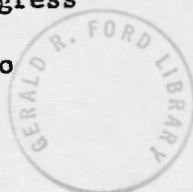
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