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01/31/73
Mr. Speaker, Colleagues of the 93rd Congress:

It is a great honor to stand before you as a sort of surrogate for the Speaker.

Of course, I am a little bit disappointed about losing this contest for the Speakership, but after five defeats you learn to grit your teeth and smile.


First of all, I want to wish you all a Happy New Year -- before somebody gets up and tells us differently.

I also want to express my thanks to those who voted for me over on this side of the aisle. Couldn't we have the same kind of minority solidarity for the next two years?

Finally, I'd like to congratulate our distinguished Speaker and to assure him that I'll support him -- one thousand percent!

As I look out over this historic chamber I see many old friends and familiar faces -- but also many new ones. Fifteen percent of you have just cast your first vote as Members of the House of Representatives of the United States Congress.

It is to that group of welcome new colleagues that I particularly say a few words at this time.



When I first came to Congress 24 years ago, I was under the handicap of having defeated in the Republican primary a very senior member in the Michigan delegation who naturally had many good friends in the House. I happened to sit down beside one of them the very first day, introduced myself and chattered away full of excitement and friendly spirit.

The senior member didn't say much, but finally he turned to me and asked:

"Young man, do you know the definition of a Congressman? A Congressman is the shortest distance between two years."

You will find, I hope, that we are a much friendlier bunch nowadays. For one thing, a bloc of 68 votes -- 15 percent of the House -- could be decisive if all you new Members would stick together. But, of course, you won't. You will vote according to your best judgment and the best interests of the country and of your constituents, which is how it should be.

But may I urge you to counsel with your colleagues in one important respect, and that is the consideration we all owe to the institution of the House itself. The longer you work here the better you will understand what I mean.

I'm sure that if my dear friend Hale Boggs were here he would say the same thing more eloquently. And Nick Begich, though he had served only one term, would have agreed. So I say this in a completely nonpartisan spirit.

This is truly the People's House, as Thomas Jefferson called it. It comes as close to being a continuous sampling of public opinion as any part of our government. Its powers are very great. Its traditions are very strong and deeply rooted in the lessons of history. You have been entrusted by the people who elected you -- by those who voted for you and also by those who voted against you or didn't vote at all -- to represent them in shaping laws and making decisions that profoundly affect their lives and the future of their children. This is a solemn responsibility and a high privilege.

The institutions of government are all under fire today, and among them the House of Representatives. This is not unique to our times; Congress has always been the target of humorists like Mark Twain and Will Rogers and Presidents from George Washington forward have not been above blaming most of the country's troubles on the legislative branch.

But I think it is fair to say that never before have we been under closer scrutiny by the public than today, with all the advances in communications

and instant analysis -- and with the liberalization of our own rules and procedures. So I urge you all, and particularly the new members, to bear in mind that you represent the House itself, in all that you do. I for one pray that we shall represent the House in this 93rd Congress with honor and with pride.

One Member, above all, represents the House as an institution more than the rest of us. The Speaker has been called the second most powerful official of our government and the Speakership is an office of great dignity and power demanding great diligence and ability. Only 49 Americans have occupied this Speaker's chair.

We have just elected one of my oldest and dearest friends to this high responsibility for the second time. He has shown himself to be a Speaker of scrupulous honesty and fairness, a staunch champion of the rights and privileges of all Members and of the great traditions of this body. I am deeply honored to present to my colleagues of the 93rd Congress a fine friend, a dedicated American and a distinguished son of Oklahoma, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Honorable Carl Albert.