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For Republican Leader

When I asked for your support earlier this year for the post of Majority Leader, I spoke of rebuilding a confident Majority that would set big goals but would also plan diligently and work together to achieve those goals. I spoke of a Majority that took responsibility for succeeding, that acknowledged obstacles but found ways to solve them, and that had complete faith that if we did our jobs right, we'd be successful.

We've just suffered a significant team loss. For the first time since 1994, we've failed to elect the 218 Republicans needed to control the agenda and calendar in the House. But the need and reason for acting like a confident team have never been stronger. ***We've lost but we haven't been defeated.*** We know that Americans support our principles of a smaller and more accountable government, responsibility, and freedom; that America is a much, much better place for the leadership Republicans have provided for the last dozen years, and that the world is safer because we've confronted major threats to peace and security instead of just sweeping them off the front page. And we know that the challenges ahead of us are still significant, and that only our party has the resolve to face them.

But confidence also means being willing to learn some hard lessons. The Democrats didn't win this race; we lost it. This wasn't a battle of ideas in which Americans embraced the values of Democrats over ours. In part it was a referendum on the Bush Administration and the war in Iraq, but those are factors now beyond our control. What we can control is the third part of our loss: the simple fact that we failed to live up to the expectations of voters who had supported us since 1994. This is something we can change, and that's good news: it means that ***our ability to recover our Majority is largely in our hands.***

The time for disappointment is over. To realize our full potential as a governing majority, we need to commit ourselves to the hard work of rebuilding a vibrant, sustainable majority. We need to bounce back, understanding that bouncing back is neither easy nor inevitable. And we need to do that not as individual Members, but as a team running on common principles, shared ideas, and a candid understanding of our loss and what we need to do to come back stronger than ever. That's what this document is about.

Taking Stock: Winning the Majority & the Election of 1994

When we won the Majority in 1994, it was because we'd finally translated the coalition that put Ronald Reagan in office to the Congressional level. A number of factors were in play. Wins in the statehouses in the early 1990s meant that Democrats lost the ability to protect vulnerable Members by drawing favorable district lines. Democrats from conservative seats, particularly in the South, had alienated many of their own voters by supporting Bill Clinton's tax increase and national health care plan.

But at least as important, Republicans had managed to convey the arrogance and high-handedness of House Democrats who refused even to debate popular and long-standing proposals like welfare reform, a line-item veto, regulatory and tort reform, or even holding Congress accountable to the same laws that governed the rest of the country. Voters heard about lavish dinners, Members bouncing checks at the House Bank, and Members cashing in unused postage stamps for their own personal enrichment, but they didn't see any action in Congress that would concretely improve their lives or reflect their values.

It was in this environment that we offered them a real alternative vision with the *Contract with America*. I was one of the then-renegades who believed we'd only win the majority when we were willing to earn it by showing America who we were and what we'd do if won. Largely a collection of ideas that conservatives had championed since President Reagan's administration, the *Contract* applied conservative principles to the concrete problems Americans were facing. We committed to voting on these measures; up or down, voters would know where their Members stood.

The first two factors created a huge group of disaffected independent Americans who had routinely reelected their Democrat Congressman but were growing skeptical. The *Contract* gave them a reason to support us. Its proposals made common sense to them because it reflected the application of basic, conservative values – freedom, personal responsibility, smaller and more accountable government – to challenges they faced and the problems they were seeing in the nation and their communities. Even Democrats who didn't want to vote on its proposals at all knew that support for them ran deep and wide.

And so was born the center-right coalition that put Republicans in control of the House for the first time since 1954. Republicans were elected where they'd never been elected before, and in many states like mine, which have historically been balanced between the parties if not tipped toward Democrats, Republicans dominated. And despite some setbacks in 1996 and 1998, the same coalition of Republicans and independents elected enough Republicans to give us a working majority in the House.

Taking Stock: Losing the Majority & the Election of 2006

This year we saw our coalition come apart. Independents left us in droves. Most of our losses came in districts where independent support was crucial for victory. This was the case particularly throughout the Northeast and Midwest, where we suffered our biggest losses, but was also true in many ultimately successful races throughout the country that were much closer than anyone expected, even with the challenging environment. In districts where a strong Republican presence could overcome our weak showing among independents, we won. But where independents made the difference – as was the case with many of the 52 seats we added in 1994 – we suffered.

Why did we lose the independents, beyond the war and the President's poor numbers? Perception of corruption was clearly one factor, but my sense was that the Cunningham, Ney, and Foley scandals mainly acted to confirm underlying concerns that voters had about us: they thought we were doing more to protect our jobs instead of applying our shared principles to a positive vision which would address real problems they face in their everyday lives. We didn't adequately take to heart the great lesson of Ronald Reagan: talk about the future, show how to achieve it, work tirelessly to get there, and never, ever stop.

I don't mean this as Wednesday morning criticism of anyone in our Conference, particularly of Members who fought and in many cases nearly pulled out extraordinarily difficult races. It's my own diagnosis for what went wrong, but it is backed up by post-election data. You will have your own views, and it's important that we as a Conference talk about those views. What's important is that we conclude those conversations with a shared understanding of how to learn from this election and move forward together toward putting that coalition together and restoring our majority. Do we need to recommit to our core principles of freedom, limited government, and personal responsibility? Absolutely. Do we need to renew our effort to change to make the federal government smaller, less intrusive, and more accountable? Certainly. But we need to do these things in a way which ties our philosophy to a vision of a better future for our country and our citizens. That's how we'll recover our majority, and that's how we'll be able to sustain it afterwards.

The good news is that we can regain our majority. Our 1994 success led many to correctly see a realignment toward conservative principles and Republicans. No one has mentioned a similar realignment this year. ***Democrats didn't win because of who they were, but because of how we were perceived.*** We've got a lot of work to do, but we should be absolutely confident that if we do our jobs right over the next two years, we can return to majority control stronger, and with a greater ability to sustain it, than when we left it.

And now, Action. Our fate is largely now in our hands. Here are some thoughts on what we need to do to reclaim our majority, and how I'd lead our conference.

What to Learn from the Contract with America – and What Not to Learn

Playing to Win vs. Playing not to Lose. The *Contract* represented the last time we ran on a bold, unified vision for the future. I've always believed that the *Contract* was more important for what it said about us as a team – that we embraced big ideas and were willing to hold ourselves accountable for advancing a vision which challenged the Washington status quo, which took on big problems.

Since then we've been gun-shy about big ideas and our focus gradually shifted toward using the tools of incumbency to exploit marginal advantages over Democrats, playing down to our opponent. That worked only because redistricting in some states made up for losses elsewhere. We need to take big ideas seriously again, not just as messages but as battles we intend to win.

A Vision, not an Agenda. Putting together a complete agenda for what Republicans stand for, with an eye toward 2008, would be neither effective nor even practical. For one thing, it's futile – by 2008, there will be a Presidential nominee whose platform will dominate the national airwaves. And we don't need an event on the Capitol steps to show Americans that we've learned our lesson and are ready to take up the fight again.

But we do need to return to the creativity, cooperation, teamwork, and recommitment to smaller, more accountable, and less intrusive federal government, and to the hard work and honest conversations among ourselves that's necessary to move forward together. We should embrace that aspect of the *Contract*. We need to show our vision of the future, and develop real proposals to reflect that vision. We need to reassert the role of Congress as a primary source of policymaking. And above all, we need to show voters that they can trust us again to lead the nation in a way that gives them better futures and respects their, and our, principles.

This year we started that process by developing a vision of a better, brighter American dream based on accountable government, freedom, and security. As I've said before, a vision is both a mechanism for seeing a better future and for building the common commitment within a team to that future. Our conference for the next 110th Congress needs to build on this. We need to think through, rigorously and creatively, what kind of futures we want for our country in health care, in energy, in national security, and in economic opportunity, and we need to show Americans how we'll achieve those. We need to build on the success of welfare reform by building strong, safe communities by unleashing the talent and compassion of engaged citizens. Americans are sick and tired of partisan sniping; they deserve and will respond to real leadership that shows them how to reach a brighter future. I will again lead this effort, making sure every Member has a voice in what the Conference ultimately produces.

Beating the Democrats in the Marketplace of Ideas: Priming the idea pipeline. In 1994 we had a full arsenal of compelling legislative ideas on a wide range of issues with which we took on the Democrat agenda. That arsenal needs replenishment. We are no longer gatekeepers; we have to be innovators. As Republican leader, I will manage policy development to contrast our philosophy of limited government and personal responsibility with that of the big-spending, tax-raising House Democrats. Together, we'll produce a next generation of great Republican ideas.

- ✓ Good ideas – good policy – equals good politics. We will be creative in developing new and innovative solutions to our nation's problems, while always adhering to our core principles: a smaller, smarter, less-intrusive federal government. We'll draw on the talents of **every member**, and look to the outside for solutions that will capture the nation's attention.
- ✓ As we did in 2006, we will win the debate on the floor. And while we'll lose more votes than we win, we will endeavor each and every day to win the news.
- ✓ We'll aggressively sell these solutions inside and outside the Beltway, using traditional and new media, and our network of friends and allies throughout the country. This will be hard work – we'll be competing against a biased press corps and the noise of a presidential primary season. No one Leader can do this – but working together as a team, we can get it done.

Holding Democrats Accountable on the floor and throughout the Nation.

We also won in 1994 by holding Democrats accountable – forcing vulnerable Democrats to choose between their constituents and their party leadership, seizing opportunities to beat their initiatives with our alternatives. This year, the Democrats' governing coalition is fragile. A number of Democrat freshmen won their elections by hiding from their national party and leadership. Come January 3rd, they cannot hide any longer. As Republican Leader I'll lead an effort to hold them accountable.

These Democrats will have two choices: defy their leadership their legislative victories, or betray their constituents. If many of these new Democrats find that Nancy Pelosi's House is simply too liberal, we'll welcome them into the Republican fold. But if they "go Washington" on their constituents, and support the liberal National Democrat agenda, we'll make them regret their duplicity. We can do this by building on our already existing communications and coalitions network, and continuing the aggressive media outreach I began as Majority Leader.

Holding Ourselves Accountable: Ethics. Nothing was more appalling to me than the fact that three of our own Members brazenly sold out our country, our Conference, and the fate of our colleagues for personal enrichment or in one case, personal perversion. In 1994 we made it clear we wouldn't tolerate such activity, and showed our differences with the Democrats, by changing our rules to deny prime leadership and committee positions from any Member who had been indicted.

The problem is that this isn't good enough any more. Voters correctly expect more from us, and we should expect more from each other. I'm dubious about simply changing ethics rules; Cunningham and Ney blatantly broke not just existing rules but federal law. And we've all seen the damage that a politically inspired local prosecutor can do to justice and to a reputation. But I do believe we need to make the existing Ethics Committee process faster and we need give it teeth. More to the point, I will simply not tolerate ethical misconduct within our conference. Clear likelihood of serious transgressions will lead to suspension from important committee positions; guilt will lead to immediate and severe consequences.

Protecting our Right to Be Heard

But doing all that I've outlined also requires that we protect our rights in allocating Committee ratios and assignments, in the legislative process, and in allocating resources. As Republican Leader, I'll be your relentless voice for fairness in Committee assignments, resource allocations, and process.

- ✓ Unlike a number of our colleagues, I've served in the Minority. I know the potential for abuse, and in the 1990s, I called out Democrats for it and held them accountable. We do not have many tools in the Minority, but I know what they are, I've used them before, and as your Leader I won't hesitate to use them again.
- ✓ I served on House Administration in the days when some Democrat Chairmen only gave Republicans 10 percent of their budgets. I fought hard for the one-third practice while in the minority, and I practiced that while a Committee Chairman. That puts me in a uniquely strong position to demand equitable treatment from Democrats.
- ✓ I'll fight for fair committee ratios and to protect your current assignments. This will be a top priority of mine, and I'll make sure Committee openings are filled fairly, not as the result of backroom alliances.
- ✓ In spite of the good words and magnanimity coming from Mrs. Pelosi and others, we know the Democrats' history on issues of fairness. And I'll be an advocate for each and every one of you in this narrow majority.

A Team Effort. But for our team to be successful, we'll all have to contribute. I served in the minority when several of my colleagues were perfectly happy staying in minority as long as they could keep their earmarks, their committee assignments, and their CODELs. I have no – ZERO – interest in reliving those days. If you believe we've still got a lot left to offer, that the challenges to this country's greatness still remain and that only we will be able to solve them, and that we can bounce back from our Election Day loss stronger and better than before, I want to work with you. I want to serve as your Leader.

The Job: To Make our Minority as Brief as Possible. Let me sum up by asking and answering a question we haven't had to deal with for 12 years: What is the job of Republican Leader in the Minority? It's to find policies that embrace our common vision, and blow the Democrats' shop-worn ideas out of the water. It's to hold every Democrat accountable for their promises and their policies. It's to fight for fairness for all Republican Members, in Committee Assignments, resources, and process. It's to look in every corner of every Democrat-held district to help recruit candidates to win back the Majority, and to ensure our candidates have the resources they'll need to compete and win. ***In short, it's to hold the job for as short a time as possible.***

We've got a lot of work and a lot of untapped potential ahead of us. I'm up for it if you are.