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REMARKS OF THE HONORABLE GERALD R. FORD UPON THE ELECTION  
OF THE SPEAKER OF THE 92ND CONGRESS  
January 21, 1971

Mr. Speaker,

My Colleagues of the 92nd Congress:

I am very glad to see so many of you again -- and so soon!

It seems only yesterday that the 91st Congress adjourned. History may record this period as two Congresses connected by a long caucus.

Seriously, I think all of us here sensed, as the last session ground interminably to a close, that we were somehow witnessing the end of an era.

Today we stand upon the threshold of a new era for the House of Representatives, which I love and our new Speaker loves and which I hope all of you will learn to love.

A new era not only for this House, but also for our country, which we love even more than we do this body and more than we do our respective political parties. I do not pass judgment on the past, of which I have been a part and in which I take some pride. But I look to the future, and to the job we have to do -- all of us together -- here in this historic chamber and in our districts at home.



Thomas Jefferson said that government is strongest of which every man feels himself a part. The only place where this is possible in our Federal system is here in "the People's House."

We know this. But increasing numbers of our fellow citizens doubt it, or just plain don't believe it. Let us remember, above all else, exactly what we are -- "Representatives." Not representatives of the Democratic Party or the Republican Party or of this or that faction but of the people who sent us here to represent them.

Millions of Americans must come to know, and to believe -- better than they do now, that this is their House, that we are their strong advocates in the national government, that this is their ready recourse for the redress of wrongs, their constant channel for constructive change, their entry into the so-called Establishment.

To make this even more true, and much more evident, is the task to which the new leadership on both sides of the aisle must dedicate themselves from this day forward and to which I pledge myself without reservation.

The mechanism by which the People's House operates, by which the raw power of numerical majorities is effectively harnessed for forward progress,



is of course the two-party system. The Constitution says nothing about this. The two-party system has prevailed through most of our history because it has worked. We could have ten or 12 parties in this body as many parliaments have -- and there are days when I imagine that we do.

I firmly believe in the two-party system, even though it has just ensured my fourth defeat for the office of Speaker.

But again, it is not merely our duty to make this system work, but to convince the American people that it is the best way to serve their real needs, to make their voices heard. At this moment they are not wholly convinced.

This proposition must be proved here in the People's House. This, I am certain, is the primary challenge before the 92nd Congress. As the leader of the minority party here, as the loyal friend of a President who is himself a product of the Congress and of the two-party crucible, and as the proven collaborator with our new Speaker in all that strengthens and sustains our country's essential interests, I pledge my best effort to this end.

Now let me say a few words about our new Speaker, with whom I have enjoyed the closest personal harmony on and off the floor of this House for the past six years and long before that.





It is curious that whenever we inaugurate a new President -- and only 36 Americans have held this high office -- we turn over the whole East Front of the Capitol and we clear the length of Pennsylvania Avenue and we parade and dance and celebrate for several days. But when we elevate a new Speaker of the House of Representatives -- and only 49 distinguished Americans have occupied this chair -- the second most important place in our government -- we content ourselves with a few simple speeches and a round or two of applause.

I hope, Mr. Speaker, that this will suffice to tell you of our pride in your succession and our prayers for your success.

A powerful former Speaker once declared that the best system of government is to have one party govern and the other party watch.

Speaker Tom Reed may have been right, but the voters in their wisdom have decreed otherwise for the 92nd Congress. And in any case he stopped short of the whole truth. We are going to be watching, Mr. Speaker; but we will also be working. We are going to work as hard as we can and win as many as we can.

There have been many great Speakers in our past, from Maine and Missouri, from Pennsylvania and Kentucky, from Texas and Tennessee, and of course from Massachusetts.



But until this hour there has never been a Speaker from Bug Tussle, Oklahoma.

I'm here to say that I like and admire the gentleman from Oklahoma who has just defeated me -- I like Oklahoma itself and I'm especially fond of the wonderful songs everybody associates with Oklahoma from the musical comedy by Rodgers and Hammerstein.

Why, only this morning while I was shaving I found myself singing:

"Oh what a beautiful morning,

"Oh what a beautiful day,

"With forty more votes in my pocket,

"Things would be going my way!"

Well, that's enough of my singing. I just wanted to make the point, Mr. Speaker, that any political office is temporary.

The only trouble is, when it comes to the Speakership, I have learned that "It's a Long, Long Way to Temporary."

I can't begin to enumerate all of our new Speaker's many achievements. We know he has been a champion debater since boyhood, a Rhodes scholar who turned out o.k., a tireless and effective legislator and a formidable floor leader. It's really a relief to know he will now be more preoccupied with



parliamentary matters.

But I have read in the papers that the gentleman from Oklahoma is thinking about new ways to present the case for the Democrats during the next two years, perhaps teaming up on television with the majority leader of the other body in something like the "Carl and Mike Show."

To show how sincere I am in my pledge of cooperation, Mr. Speaker, I stand ready to offer you all my old files from the "Ev and Jerry Show."

Confidentially, you may be able to use some of this splendid material without changing a word.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of all the minority members of the House, I congratulate you and express our confidence that you will cherish the great traditions of the House and be the guardian of the rights of all its Members.

The Speakership comes as a combination of the respect and friendship of your colleagues and the national fortunes of your party. I sincerely hope that the latter may last no longer than 22 months but that the former -- which you have in abundant measure today -- will endure as long as any of us remain here in the People's House.





To be Speaker is a great honor and privilege. Only slightly less of an honor and privilege is mine today -- to present to my colleagues of this 92nd Congress a great American, a great son of Oklahoma and my great and good friend, the 49th Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Honorable Carl Albert.

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