"REFORMING THE WAY WE DO BUSINESS IN THE HOUSE"
Honorable Mickey Edwards

How would Republicans run the House of Representatives differently than Democrats?

First of all, we would greatly reduce the size of the Legislative Branch. Democrats have been running the House since Eisenhower's first presidential term, but haven't controlled the White House for the last twelve years, so they have created on the Hill a massive separate bureaucracy—a bureaucracy that must be brought under control.

Republicans would open the books for a full accounting of the money spent by Congress on Congress. Besides the cost of Congressional staff and support, people who do things like maintain the buildings and provide security, there are expenses associated with special projects, renovations for example. It is very difficult to find out how this money is spent or what happens to any money left over. Republicans would change that. We would remove the cloak of secrecy that surrounds costly Leadership perks, like the Speaker's fund.

Too often, taxpayers face the same frustrations when trying to find out how their Congressman voted on a particularly important tax or appropriations bill. Why? Because each year a small but significant number of spending bills get passed without benefit of a recorded vote. For years, Republicans have called for a change in the rules to require each member of Congress to vote on the record whenever legislation is voted on to increase taxes, spend money, or increase the public debt.

Finally, a Republican-run House of Representatives would be much more reflective of the will of the people. Most people, if asked what the House of Representatives does, would respond that we debate and vote on the great public issues of the day.

In fact, too often, Members of Congress are expressly denied the opportunity to debate or vote on the great issues of the day by Democrat committee chairmen and the Democrat-controlled Rules Committee.

First of all, Republicans want to make it easier for a majority of Members of the House to bypass a committee chairman and bring a bill directly to the House Floor. Committee chairmen have a great deal of say over which bills to hold hearings on and which to report to the Floor. But when a committee chairman is opposed to even debating a particular bill that has the support of a majority of Members of the House, the will of the House
and the voters that those Congressmen and Congresswomen represent, must take precedence and bills must be brought to the Floor.

Secondly, we want to open the debate and amendment process on the Floor. The House Rules allow anyone to bring an amendment to the Floor on a bill being debated as long as it is relevant to the subject matter of the bill. But we rarely follow those rules. Usually, the Rules Committee, under the influence of the Speaker, decides ahead of times how many, if any, amendments will be allowed, which amendments they will be, how much debate time will be allowed, and the order in which they will be voted on.

The more evenly the House is divided on a particular issue and the more politically explosive the issue is, the greater the likelihood that the deck will be stacked in favor of the position taken by the Democrat leadership. In fact, for any bill brought to the Floor for a vote in 1991, the chances were better than 3 out of 5 that the Rules Committee picked and chose which amendments it would allow to be debated and voted on, circumventing the normal procedure that allows any relevant amendment to be debated and voted on. That reflects a significant change from when I first was elected to Congress. Then the chances were less than 1 out of 5 that a Floor debate would be restricted in some way by the Rules Committee.

Republicans would allow the process to work as it was intended, giving everyone an opportunity to offer and debate amendments of importance to the voters.

Under Republican leadership, the country could expect a reduction of the legislative bureaucracy, more votes on the record, an opening of the books on internal House business, and a restoration of democracy and fairness to committee and floor proceedings.