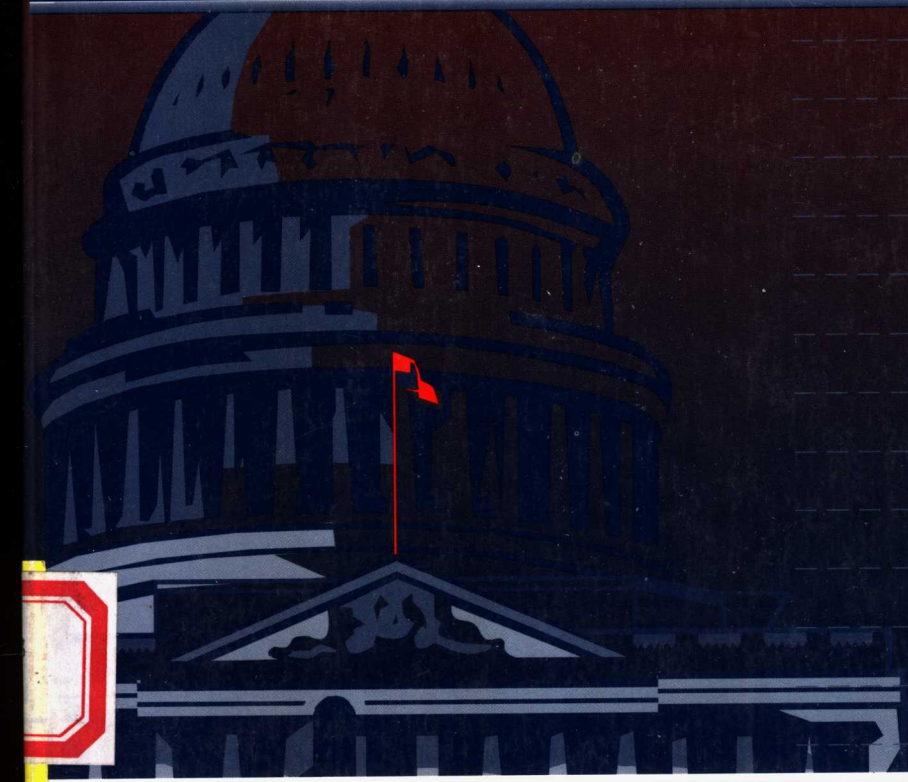
Fulfilling the Contract

THE FIRST 100 DAYS



JAMES G. GIMPEL

Fulfilling the Contract

The First 100 Days

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Preface

Much of the recent literature on the U.S. Congress has failed to distinguish that institution from the Democrats who ran it for forty years. Now that the Republicans are in power, many established "truths" may have to be revised. Basing their evaluations on the volumes of research on Congress drawn from forty years of Democratic rule, many political scientists and pundits would have insisted that something like the first 100 days in the 104th Congress could never happen. Now it appears that Congress is not just individuals, although there is still room for member autonomy. Political parties are not mere phantoms, although they are still not as strong in Congress as in most parliaments. Congressional party leadership has been dismissed to such an extent by the existing body of work that no serious scholar in 1994 would have imagined in mid-July 1995 that *The Washington Post* would run a front page story by David Broder titled, "AT 6 MONTHS, HOUSE GOP JUGGERNAUT STILL COHESIVE."[1]

Few would have predicted the redirection in the policy debate either. Who would have thought five years ago that the Washington policy community would be discussing a flat tax? Two years ago, no one would have predicted that Congress would take serious steps toward giving the president line-item veto authority, end a sixty-year-old federal welfare entitlement system, and restrict the capacity of the federal government to dictate state government policy. Who would have expected President Clinton to devise his own plan to balance the budget in ten years? And who would have guessed that the U.S. House of Representatives would enact the sweeping internal reforms adopted on opening day of the 104th Congress?

Reform-oriented proposals on welfare, crime, foreign policy, product liability, term limits, tax reform—ideas that the previous majority had kept off the agenda—suddenly surfaced in the first 100 days of the 104th Congress. Although they complained about their diminution of power, even many Democrats welcomed the high level of the policy debate. In the words of one senior Democrat, "[T]here is something to be gained institutionally by shifts in power. It's cleansing for our system."[2]

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[1]*The Washington Post,* July 17, 1995, p. A1.

[2]Interview with Congressman Paul Kanjorski (D-PA), 3/29/95.

Some Democratic staff interviewed for this book welcomed the new challenges of preparing their bosses to play the opposition role that Republicans had mastered after forty years in the minority.

The support of Senate Republicans (and a Democratic President) would be crucial for quick passage of the items in the "Contract with America," but the discussion of these measures has had a lasting impact on the policy debate regardless of whether they become law in this Congress. House leaders knew full well that little of the Contract would have become law at the end of their 100 day deadline. But to dismiss the first 100 days as irrelevant simply because some of the bills would either be ignored by the Senate or vetoed by the President is to suggest that the greater part of the complicated congressional policy-making process can be ignored. As Congressional Quarterly's Ronald Elving has pointed out in his recent work, *Conflict and Compromise* (Simon and Schuster, 1995), it took family leave legislation first introduced in 1984 a full nine years to generate the momentum to pass the U.S. House and Senate. But few would argue that the initial House passage of family leave was a trivial and insignificant event simply because it took the Senate several years to catch up. Only a fraction of the bills passed in one chamber ever make it to a vote in the other. But nothing becomes law if it is not passed in one chamber first.

The research for this book is based largely on over seventy personal interviews with members of the U.S. House of Representatives and their staffs during the spring and summer of 1995. I spoke with fifty-two members of Congress from both parties and twenty staff members. All but one of the members of Congress agreed to speak on the record. About half of the staffers agreed to speak on the record. The interviews were semi-structured. Certain general questions were asked of every member, and more specific questions were tailored according to the member's party, position in the leadership, areas of interest, and committee assignments.

The names of those interviewed who were willing to be identified for the sake of this very grateful acknowledgement are as follows:

Members of Congress: *Rick White (WA); Bob Ehrlich (MD); Charles Canady (FL); Mark Souder (IN); Lincoln Diaz-Balart (FL); Jerry Weller (IL) Floyd Spence (SC); Enid Waldholtz (UT); Carlos Moorhead (CA); Dick Chrysler (MI); Ray LaHood (IL); Sue Myrick (NC); Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (FL); Bob Ney (OH); Lynn Rivers (MI); Amo Houghton (NY); Steny Hoyer (MD); Albert Wynn (MD); Ben Cardin (MD); Peter Hoekstra (MI); Owen Pickett (VA); David Dreier (CA); Barney Frank (MA); Bill Emerson (MO); Jim Bunn (OR); Phil Crane (IL); Joel Hefley (CO); Barbara Cubin (WY); Paul Kanjorski (PA); Rosa DeLauro (CT); Chris Cox (CA); Andrew Jacobs (IN); Dana Rohrabacher (CA); Ron Coleman (TX); Dan Frisa (NY); John Boehner (OH); Tillie Fowler (FL); Bill Goodling (PA); Bob Inglis (SC); John Tanner (TN); Christopher Shays (CT); Bob Livingston (LA); Mike Parker (MS); Dave Camp (MI); E. Clay Shaw (FL);*

Scotty Baesler (KY); Jim Talent (MO); John Hostettler (IN); Roger Wicker (MS); Tim Hutchinson (AR); Bill Luther (MN); and Glen Browder (AL).

Staff and others: *Tony Blankley (Speaker Gingrich); Dan Meyer (Speaker Gingrich); Scott Reed (Republican National Committee); Kerry Knott (Majority Leader Armey); Ed Gillespie (Majority Leader Armey); Brian Gaston (Conference Chairman John Boehner); Barry Jackson (Conference Chairman John Boehner); Chuck Greener (Republican National Committee); Paul McNulty (House Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime); Katherine Hazeem (House Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution); Frank Luntz (Pollster); Daniel Mitchell (Heritage Foundation); Elizabeth Humphrey (Lincoln Diaz-Balart); Robert Woodson, Jr. (Bob Inglis).*

The idea of writing a book on the Republican takeover of Congress was originally that of David Mason, the Director of the Heritage Foundation's *Congress Assessment Project.* I owe a weighty debt of gratitude to Mason and the research support provided by the Heritage Foundation during the spring and summer of 1995. My research assistants at Heritage, Jennifer Hagen from Claremont McKenna College, Richard Moha from Hillsdale College, and Hans Nichols from Cornell University, ran errands and pulled together hundreds-of-pages-worth of information under my high-pressure deadlines and in spite of my occasionally sour disposition. My research assistants at Maryland, Aparna Srinivasan and Brian Crane, cheerfully undertook the tedious task of collecting and entering data. Two former Capitol Hill colleagues, Mike Boisvenue and Holly Harle, collected valuable insider information that found its way into the book.

I also thank my academic colleagues at the University of Maryland and elsewhere who read major sections of the manuscript and provided helpful comments. These include Robin M. Wolpert, Roger H. Davidson, Paul Herrnson, George Quester, John J. Pitney, William Connelly, Eric Uslaner, and Mark Graber. Intermittent discussions with my graduate school mentor, Mark Hansen, and my good friends, Robert Eisinger and Thomas Pavkov, clarified my thinking and redirected the project at key points. Thanks also to Allyn and Bacon's reviewers: Richard Hardy, University of Missouri; Clyde Wilcox, Georgetown University; Michael Malbin, State University of New York at Albany; and Michael Johnston, Colgate University for their part in improving the book. Steve Hull, Marjorie Payne and Sue Hutchinson made dealing with Allyn and Bacon a very pleasant experience.

Veronica deserves praise for loyally supporting me through one of the busiest times in our ten-year marriage. After a full day of her own work, and a long day of interviews on the Hill that sometimes ran late into the evening, she always made it feel so good to come home. Finally, but most important, the kind of cooperation I had in securing the interviews during such an intense period in the history of our national legislature can be explained only by divine intervention, for which I express my praise and thanks.

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1

Republicans Ascendant: The 1994 Elections in the U.S. House

November 8, 1994, was a landmark in American electoral history. Republicans walked away with their most spectacular gains since 1948. When network election coverage began that evening, well before polls had closed in most of the country, the surprised and sometimes somber tones of those anchoring election coverage suggested that something was up. Network pollsters had been collecting data throughout the day, and their research showed that a major electoral earthquake was underway. It wouldn't even be a long night in most places. Republicans were winning decisive victories almost everywhere.

One of the most stunning turnabouts came in Washington state where five established Democratic incumbents in the House of Representatives were defeated, including Speaker of the House Tom Foley. Another Democrat lost an open-seat race. Suddenly, the Washington state delegation had changed from nine Democrats and one Republican to eight Republicans and two Democrats.

Overall, Republican pick-ups across the states were remarkably even. A few seats here, a few seats there, totalling 52 new seats in all for a total of 230.[1] Not a single Republican incumbent was defeated. Democrats saw their majority drop from 256 to a minority of 204 seats. Thirty-four Democratic incumbents lost, the most since 1966. More important, Republicans would now control the House for the first time since the election of 1952.

In the weeks before the election, many had predicted a Republican takeover of the U.S. Senate. The Senate was more evenly divided, with Republicans holding forty-four seats. Democrats were defending twenty-one seats, compared with just

eleven for Republicans. Knowing that the president's party almost always loses some seats in midterm congressional elections, a Republican gain of six or seven Senate seats was not wildly implausible. By contrast, a Republican pick-up of the forty seats necessary for a House majority simply seemed beyond reach. Traditional models of midterm seat loss predicted that Democrats would lose only half that many seats.

EXPLANATIONS FOR THE ELECTORAL QUAKE

President Clinton's Performance

Several explanations account for the staggering Democratic defeats. Perhaps the most obvious is the public's dim view of President Clinton's performance. Although the president had not won a majority of the popular vote in 1992, his approval ratings were high at the beginning of his presidency (59% among men, 57% among women).[2] Just six months into his term, Clinton began to sag in the court of public opinion. For much of his second year in office, his approval ratings remained below 50 percent. Moderate Republican John Porter (IL) could say without much exaggeration that "If Ronald Reagan was the Teflon president, this president is the Brillo president..."[3]. Everything sticks to him.

President Clinton's record in passing legislation was solid. Year-end figures suggested that Congress went along with the president about 86 percent of the time—the best legislative record since Lyndon Johnson's nearly thirty years ago.[4] Of course, there were some significant and highly publicized defeats. The president put enormous effort into health care reform, only to see it flounder and die by August, 1994. At about the same time, a major piece of crime legislation was delayed when a large number of House Democrats sided with Republicans on a procedural vote.[5] Crime legislation eventually passed, but the set-backs overshadowed the victories on many smaller issues.

Then there were the lingering questions about the Clintons' partnership in the Whitewater land deal, kept alive by the flame-fanning of Senator Alfonse D'Amato (NY) and Congressman Jim Leach (IA), the ranking members of Senate and House Banking committees. This attack challenged the president's honesty and character as well as the integrity of certain highly visible administration officials. In the end, several key administration appointees were forced to resign.

The president's woes generated doubts among voters. Many had doubts about his character and competence to begin with and the troubles of 1994 only seemed to firm up these earlier assessments. Poll after poll showed the public's declining confidence in and respect for the president. Complaints surfaced about the president's appearing unpresidential—so much so that people were said to be ignoring him as he was passing through airports. By mid-October of 1994, the president's approval ratings had sagged to 38 percent among men and 44 percent among women.[6] All of this portended bad things for the president's party in November.

Voter Hostility toward Washington

A second factor underlying the electoral quake of the 1994 elections would have to be the voters' dwindling confidence in the institutions of national government.[7] Criticism of Congress had been particularly harsh and in March 1994, surveys by the Gallup organization showed that the percentage of citizens expressing "a great deal" of confidence in Congress was at a mere 18 percent, compared with 39 percent in 1985 and 42 percent in 1973.[8] The public's attitude was accurately described in President Clinton's post-election news conference, in which he claimed that the message sent in the election was that "We [the voters] don't think government can solve all the problems. And we don't want the Democrats telling us from Washington that they know what is right about everything."[9] The message, according to Democrats, was that the voters were expressing general unhappiness about those in control. The White House denied, however, that the election was a mandate for a shift to the right. The president voiced his conviction that the American people were simply upset with the pace of change in Washington.[10]

Republicans emphasized that the message was more specific: the people wanted less government intrusion and lower taxes. As a sophomore lawmaker saw it, "The elections reflect voters' basic disgust with Washington. The attitude of my voters is that government is burdensome and that people in Washington aren't serious about change."[11]

The truth varies by Congressional district and is probably somewhere in between these partisan assessments. Many of the highly attentive voters were casting a protest vote specifically against President Clinton's record and in favor of a Republican alternative. Voters who base their judgments on general impressions of government performance, on the other hand, were simply angry at whoever happened to be in the White House. Two years earlier, many of these same voters had supported Ross Perot.

The connection between Perot voters and Democratic losses in 1994 is probably not coincidental. Republicans had deliberately crafted their campaign appeals to attract the independent voters who wanted change. Table 1-1 presents some evidence of the influence of the Perot vote on Democratic defeats in the 1994 House races. These figures show the difference in Perot's 1992 vote share between the congressional districts Democrats won in 1994 compared with those where Democratic incumbents went down. In those districts where Democrats lost their seats to Republican challengers, Ross Perot ran substantially better in 1992 than he did in the districts of Democratic winners. Similarly, the seats the Democrats lost were much more marginally Democratic in the 1992 presidential election than were the remaining seats. Bill Clinton won an average of 40 percent in the congressional districts where his party's incumbents lost, compared with a much higher 51 percent in the winning Democrats' districts. In other words, the president was not very popular to begin with in the losing Democrats' districts. His performance in the interim did nothing to help convince Perot voters that the Democrats were the ticket in 1994.

Table 1-1 Differences in 1992 Perot and Clinton Support between Districts Where Democrats Lost and Those Where Democrats Won

Seat status	Perot % 1992	Clinton % 1992
Incumbents won	16.1 (n = 192)	51.4 (n = 192)
Incumbents lost	20.4 (n = 34)	39.6 (n = 34)
T-test	T-value = 4.40	T-value = –8.69
Significance	$p < .001$	$p < .001$
Cases	226	226

N reflects the Democratic Districts from the 103rd Congress where incumbents were defending their seats. Figures for incumbents who won include Vermont Independent Bernard Sanders who affiliates with Democrats on matters of House organization.
Source: Almanac of American Politics, 1994 and author's calculations.

Republican Opportunism with the "Contract"

Issues are important in democratic politics because they give voters an idea of what program of action a political party will pursue if its members are elected. If this program fails, incumbents supporting that program can be held accountable at the next election.[12] This is the classical statement of the party responsibility model of good government. In American politics party responsibility rarely exists in this form because candidates can rarely agree on a coherent program.[13] Constituencies and their interests vary widely from place to place. Popular issues in one area are unattractive in other areas.[14] Consequently, the American political system is highly decentralized and candidate-centered compared with other democratic systems. In cases in which the party platform and constituency preferences are at odds, members of Congress have a strong incentive to ignore the party. When the national parties do provide issue guidance, candidates freely ignore it. For these reasons, congressional elections are said to be local (rather than national) contests and party government is correspondingly weak.

In the context of a highly decentralized American political system, it was risky to attempt to nationalize the 1994 congressional elections on a set of themes that would bind all candidates. Perhaps the effort would have failed miserably had there not been such widespread unhappiness about government's size and ineffectiveness. Public opinion was unusually homogeneous on this issue. Little insight was needed to spot the prevailing dissatisfaction with government that was evident in polls throughout 1993. At the direction of two aggressive House Republican leaders, Newt Gingrich (GA), the Minority Whip, and Richard K. Armey (TX), the Conference Chair (*Conference* is the official name of the Republican party in Congress), House staff put together a package of legislative proposals calling it the "Contract with America". The Contract was designed to attract the attention of the increasing major-

ity of Americans who were unhappy with Congress, unhappy with the president, and dissatisfied with government. Many of these citizens were Perot voters who repudiated business as usual with their protest votes in 1992.[15] Key to the sales pitch was that Republicans would promise to place these agenda items at the top of their legislative calendars during the first 100 days of a Republican-led 104th Congress. Republican leaders were quick to point out that there was no explicit promise that these agenda items would *pass* in a Republican Congress, only that they would be debated and brought up for a vote. This would be an important qualification many Republicans would later call attention to as elements of the Contract ran into opposition and delay in the U.S. Senate. But even though House Republicans realized there was no guarantee their Contract would become law in this Congress, the successful effort to bring House candidates and incumbents on board a common agenda was a step away from the every-person-for-him/herself character of American politics.

Substantively, the Contract was a collection of ten bills and three resolutions dealing with a variety of issues (see Table 1-2 and Chapter 2) from term limits to

Table 1-2 Elements in the Republican "Contract with America"

Title	Bill	Focus of legislation
Congressional Accountability Act	H.R. 1	Apply anti-discrimination laws to Congress
Line-Item Veto Act	H.R. 2	Enhance president's recision authority
Taking Back Our Streets Act	H.R. 3	Crime control
Personal Responsibility Act	H.R. 4	Welfare reform
Unfunded Mandate Reform Act	H.R. 5	Reducing burden of federal mandates on states
American Dream Restoration Act	H.R. 6	Tax code reform
National Security Restoration Act	H.R. 7	Defense/military procurement
Senior Citizens' Equity Act	H.R. 8	Social Security reform
Job Creation/Wage Enhancement Act	H.R. 9	Deregulation/tax code reform
Common Sense Legal Reforms Act	H.R. 10	Product liability/tort reform
Family Reinforcement Act	H.R. 11	Child support/adoption
Balanced Budget Amendment	H.J. Res 1	Balanced budget
Citizen Legislature Act	H.J. Res 2	Term limits, 12 years for House members
Citizen Legislature Act	H.J. Res 3	Term limits, 6 years for House members

crime to welfare reform, deregulation and deficit reduction. Republican leaders deliberately stayed away from divisive social issues such as school prayer and abortion. They realized that it would be difficult enough to hold the party together without generating internal divisions on such controversial themes. If the Contract were to serve as a platform for all Republican House contenders, it must consist of proposals that would be overwhelmingly popular.

Contrary to popular myth, there was no public opinion polling conducted on the Contract before it was assembled by the Republican leadership. Gingrich and Armey were generally aware that specific items were popular, including term limits and the balanced budget amendment. But the legislation forming the core of the Contract was selected primarily because it was consistent with themes the Republicans had been emphasizing for years. All of the legislation had been introduced in the 103rd Congress in one form or another. The Republican National Committee (RNC) did commission focus-group research and polls once the Contract had been assembled to determine how best to describe the legislation.

Focus group research, or "concept testing" as pollsters describe it, is designed to probe more deeply into citizen responsiveness to political themes and issues than a public opinion poll does. Typically, a focus group is assembled by recruiting twenty-five to thirty people at random to come to a designated location to participate in a discussion about the issues of interest. Each participant is paid $30 to $40 for a two-hour discussion session. In the case of the Contract, focus groups were assembled in several locations around the country. The participants were given copies of the Contract in different forms and asked for their reactions. Pollster Frank Luntz was especially interested in the responses of the Perot voters. "The point was to ask them how they felt about the issues in the Contract. We allowed them to argue with each other. We wanted to know what stirred them up."[16] According to Luntz, focus groups are superior to ordinary polls because they allow people to express justifications for the positions they take. Luntz emphasized that the value of focus-group research is to tap into people's emotions and basic commitments. Polls do not reveal deep seated values and commitments because the format of a poll, conducted over a telephone at a rapid-fire pace, does not permit reflection and interaction.

Luntz's surveys were influential in helping to describe the Contract by asking people why they liked certain provisions. For example, respondents to opinion polls would be asked why they wanted term limits. "Is it because we need a citizen legislature?" or "Is it because professional politicians eventually forget who they represent?" In testing phrases such as these, Republican leaders were able to select the descriptions that had popular appeal. In this case, they chose the former, titling the Contract's term limits measure, "The Citizen Legislature Act."

In addition to the legislative thrust, the majority-to-be promised to pass ambitious internal reforms aimed at restoring the "faith and trust of the American people in their government."[17] These reforms included what was to be the first bill to pass both the House and Senate in the 104th, H. R. 1, to require all laws that apply to the rest of the country also apply equally to the Congress, including the 1964 Civil

Rights Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Other internal reforms that would pass as rules changes in the House included procedures to implement an audit of Congress to ferret out waste, fraud and abuse; to cut the number of House committees and cut committee staffs by one-third; to limit the terms of all committee chairs; to ban the casting of proxy votes in committee; and to require committee meetings to be open to the public. In the end, the legislative initiatives promised in the Contract would have both widespread public support and the support of 367 Republicans running for House seats.

None of the proposals in the Contract was truly brand new. Many ideas, such as term limitations and the balanced budget amendment had a long history extending decades into the past. Others, such as welfare reform, had generated momentum in recent years. As in most arenas of life, new ideas on Capitol Hill require acclimation as they compete for acceptance. Through the 1980s, Republicans repeatedly introduced such legislation, only to have it ignored by the Democratic leadership. By the 1990s, however, these ideas had gained substantial momentum and the sponsorship lists had grown quite long. H. J. Res. 1 (to require a balanced budget) had 170 Republican cosponsors and eight Democratic cosponsors at the time of its House passage.

Through the Contract, the Republicans sought to inject a strong measure of party responsibility into the campaign, actually inviting voters to "throw them out" if they failed to deliver on their Contract promises. The move was bold given the conventional wisdom that House races are local, not national. "There were many nay-sayers who thought the Contract strategy would fail," said Scott Reed, the RNC's executive director.[18] "Many Republicans in the consulting community were concerned that it wouldn't help their candidates. The conventional wisdom was that House elections are won on local themes." This was clearly the message from academic political scientists also: "It has become increasingly difficult to speak of House elections as national elections in any meaningful sense," wrote three prominent scholars in a 1992 article.[19]

In political circles, the debate about whether the party should emphasize national or local themes had been raging since the late 1980s.[20] But as early as 1990, most Republican elites were at least willing to concede that a mix of national and local themes was optimal.[21] It took the leadership of Gingrich and Armey to put together a coherent package. What the Contract provided both incumbent and novice candidates was a ready-made platform that the Republican leadership sensed would be a no-fail vote getter. "It gave those who were new to politics something to talk about," Reed reported. Candidates did not have to flounder about, casting here and there for popular messages and issues as they often do.[22] Republicans were not compelled to campaign on all aspects of the Contract and few voters on election day knew much about it as a document, much less its background. But they did know something about the issues associated with it. Most candidates chose the items in the Contract that they thought would resonate with their constituencies and tailored their messages to focus on specific items rather than on the document itself.

In a carefully orchestrated national media event, leadership staff, together with staff from the RNC and the National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC) organized a forum to highlight the Contract as a national campaign theme. The vast majority of Republican House candidates convened on the Capitol steps on September 27th to sign the Contract. This event generated national publicity for the party as a whole, but locally the Contract generated free publicity for challengers and incumbents alike. The public response in some areas was overwhelmingly favorable. Campaigns reported being deluged with telephone calls from voters requesting copies of the Contract. Two-hundred twenty-four of the 367 signatories to the Contract (61 percent) went on to win on November 8th. Notably, several Republican nonsignatories also won in November: Don Young (AK), Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (FL), Lincoln Diaz-Balart (FL), Ray LaHood (IL), Sam Brownback (KS), Jim Bunn (OR), Jim Longley (ME) and Tom Coburn (OK). In Chapter 2, I will deal more extensively with the background of the Contract and how it was used in congressional campaigns.

Marginal Seats

A marginal seat is one subject to frequent changes in party control. The seats most vulnerable to takeover by the opposition are those for which the incumbent won less than 55 percent of the vote in the previous election. In 1994, there were seventy-nine such seats, forty-five of them were in Democratic hands. One upshot of the comparisons presented in Table 1-1 is that Republicans won many of their upset victories by fiercely pursuing seats that were marginal for President Clinton and the Democrats in the 1992 election. Consider the closeness of the races between Republican challengers and Democratic incumbents who lost in 1994. Republicans who defeated incumbent Democrats did so with an average 54 percent of the vote. The remaining seats that were either left open by retirements or occupied by incumbent Democratic victors were much less marginal, with Democrats winning 66 percent (t-value = -7.35, $p < .001$). The success of Republicans in these competitive districts reflected the targeting strategy of party and interest group donors who tend to aim the bulk of their contributions toward viable candidates.[23]

Candidate Quality

Deficits in candidate quality have been considered a Republican scourge for several years now.[24] The notion is that Republicans have not done well in House elections because they have been unable to field credible challengers. Of course, there is no unanimity about what it means to be a "quality candidate," but most studies define the term to include political experience.[25] Previous experience is associated with the ability to field a better-managed and better-funded campaign as well as the capacity to draw upon established coalitions.

While the 1994 Republican class is notable for the number of freshmen without political experience, many of the new members do have some. Indeed, almost half (47 percent) had held prior elected office at some level. Several more had held

appointed positions or had served as political aides. Only twenty had no previous political experience of any kind. The victories of amateur politicians such as Fred Heineman (NC) over experienced Democratic veterans such as David Price suggests that political experience was a liability in some districts. In areas where voters were most dissatisfied with government performance, political experience was something to run from and conveyed no advantage in a year in which outsiders were preferred.[26]

The Republican Challengers' Financial Advantage

The relationship between dollars spent and seats won is not simple. For challengers and for those competing for an open seat, the effect is most direct: the more you spend, the more likely you are to win.[27] For incumbents, the relationship between money and votes is more complicated since they spend in direct proportion to the threat they face (Figure 1-1).[28] The stronger party in a given election should find its incumbents spending less and its challengers spending more than the opposing party. If this is our criterion, the role of improved campaign finance cannot be overlooked in the Republican victories. Although extensive campaign expenditure data were unavailable at the time of this writing, the finances of Republican challengers were up some 42 percent over 1992 and were significantly higher than the funds Democratic challengers were able to raise (see Figure 1-2). This is an important difference,

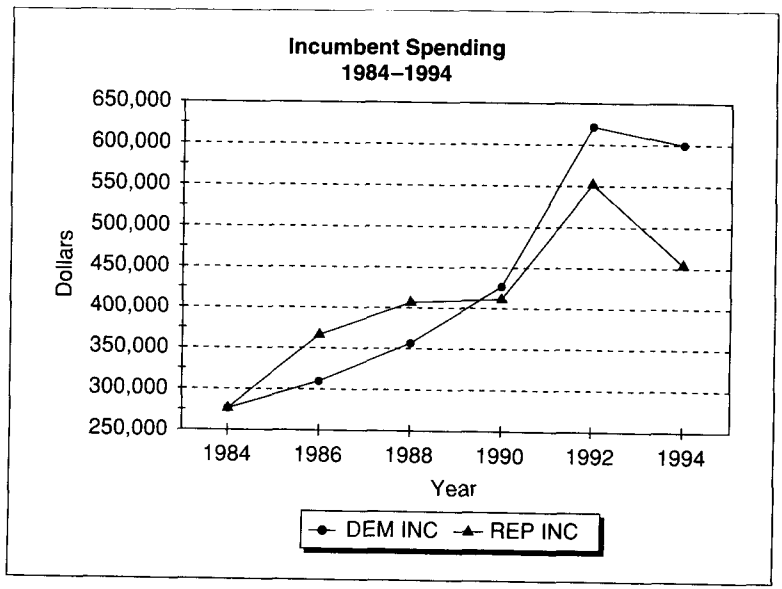

FIGURE 1-1 **Incumbent Spending in Congressional Campaigns, 1984–1994**

Source: Norman Ornstein, Thomas E. Mann and Michael Malbin, eds., *Vital Statistics on Congress 1995–1996,* Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1995.

since challengers are ordinarily disadvantaged and what they do spend clearly pays off.[29] The Republican average for dollars spent on open seat races was also slightly higher than Democratic spending, for the first time since 1988.

The average spent by Democratic incumbents was about 30 percent greater than the Republican average. This is not a trivial difference since incumbents tend to spend more when they have tough races. The bottom line is that Republican candidates were in a stronger financial position in 1994 than Democrats. They forced Democrats to spend more defending incumbents while launching a highly competitive bid for open seats. The success of Republican fundraising has much to do with Newt Gingrich. Together with Congressman Bill Paxon (NY) who headed the NRCC (National Republican Congressional Committee), Gingrich overhauled Republican fundraising efforts by involving each incumbent. He established a formula for voluntary contributions by each member. Unless they were in financial dire straits for their own campaign, they were expected to contribute. Teams went around to each member to solicit their fundraising capacity. Gingrich's press secretary, Tony Blankley, explained:

> *Many had never raised money before, except for their own campaigns. One member said, "I don't know how to do that." Newt said, "I'll teach you."*

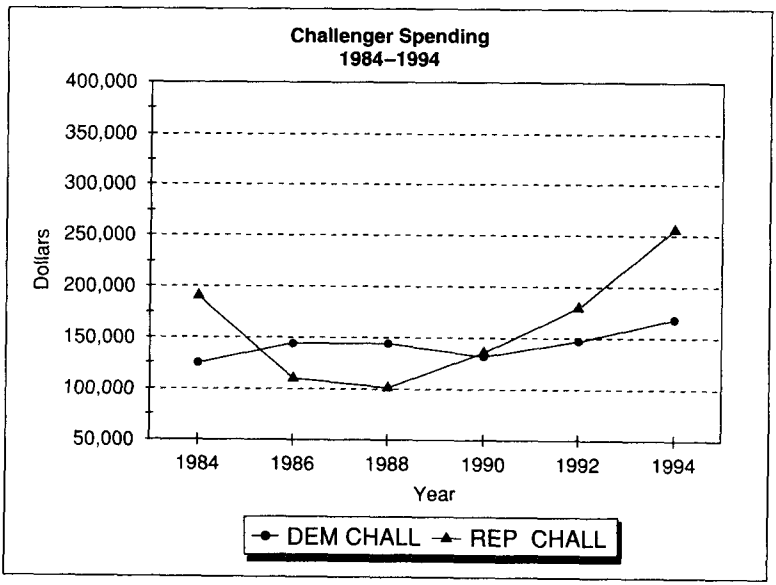

FIGURE 1-2 **Challenger Spending in Congressional Campaigns, 1984–1994**

Source: Norman J. Ornstein, Thomas E. Mann and Michael Malbin, eds., *Vital Statistics on Congress,* Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1995.