

Paul Ryan Cruises to Speaker of the House Victory

One of the big questions going into Day 1 of the 115th Congress was “How many Republicans will defect from Speaker Paul Ryan?”

The answer: one.

Rep. Tom Massie (R-Ky.) was the lone GOP “defector,” voting for his colleague, Rep. Daniel Webster (R-Fla.), in the Speaker of the House election that immediately followed the opening of the new Congress. Ryan easily won re-election, 239-189, over House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.).

Pelosi, on the other hand, was still feeling the impact of the Democrats’ humbling loss on Nov. 8. Four Democrats voted for someone other than her, including the leaders of two key “moderate” groups: the Blue Dog Coalition and the New Democrats.

After the victory, Ryan gave the following speech to his colleagues in the House:

You know, I’ve stood in this spot more than a few times. And yet today it feels completely different. Part of it has to do with all the new faces in the House. You look at all the proud spouses, the beaming parents, the kids looking their best. And it’s hard—if not impossible—to resist the rush of enthusiasm. There’s no sense of foreboding today. There’s only a sense of potential. Kind of reminds you no matter how long you’ve been here, you still haven’t seen it all. And so to all our new members, I want to say simply, “Thank you, congratulations and welcome.”

But there’s another reason for optimism. And that’s what we’ve already achieved by our very meeting here. Just months

ago, our country held a great electoral contest. And at times, it was a little ... intense. As you all know, when you're in the heat of it, you start to wonder: Will tempers cool? Will the system still hold? Does our old and rich tradition still have the old magic? Well, turns out, it does. The clash of opinions ... the hue and cry of campaigns ... the rancor and the dissension ... in the end, they all dissolve in the silent and peaceful transfer of power.

And so in just a few weeks' time, we will welcome a new president ... who offers us yet another new beginning—a new chance to work toward that more perfect union. For all our arguments and all our differences, we are all united by a deep, abiding love of our country. It is the slender but sturdy thread that holds us together. We always forget about it. But it has never failed us. That is why when the votes are counted, and the people have spoken, all of us accept the verdict. We come back from the campaign trail. We put away the yard signs. And today, as one body, we pledge allegiance to one flag: the red, white and blue.

And that's not the only thing we share in common. I don't care what your party is. Find one person in this House who doesn't want the best for America. Find one person who doesn't want to help the unemployed, or care for the sick, or educate the young or honor our troops. Who here among us does not want to open wide the door to opportunity? Who here among us does not want every American—of every creed and every color—to cross the threshold? You can't find one person—not a one. And that is a true cause for celebration.

That being said, this is no time to rest on our laurels, but to redouble our efforts. It's no secret that millions of Americans across the country are deeply dissatisfied with their current situation. They've looked to Washington for leadership, and all they've gotten is condescension. For years, they've suffered quietly—amid shuttered factories and shattered lives. But now they've let out a great roar. Now,

we, their elected representatives, must listen. And so I want to say to the American people, "We hear you. We will do right by you. And we will deliver."

It is not enough to say that the condition of your birth should not determine the outcome of your life—no matter how much we mean it. In a few years' time, I hope people will say of the 115th Congress that we didn't just pay lip service to this beautiful American Idea; we made it a reality. We are not here to be; we are here to do. We are here to improve people's lives. Grow our economy. Keep us safe. Improve our health care and our infrastructure. Fight poverty. Restore self-government. We've got our work cut out for us. And as your speaker, I intend to keep this place running at full speed.

When I came into this job, I pledged to restore regular order. Get the committee system working again. Hold regular House and Senate conferences—because only a fully functioning House can do the people's business. We've made great progress since then. Take our work on finding cures for deadly diseases ... or beating back the opioid epidemic ... or our work on mental health. These are all things we should be very proud of. These efforts were directed by the committees and crafted by the members—all through regular order. But there is still a lot of work to do—like a fully functioning appropriations process, for example.

And so to the minority, I want to say, 'We've never shied away from our disagreements. And I do not expect anyone to do so now. But however bright of a contrast we draw between us, it must never blind us to the common ground we share. We must never shy away from making progress for the American people, wherever we can. And so, as your speaker, I promise to uphold the rights of the minority. I promise to hear you out, and let you have your say. If I had to sum up my approach, it would be, "Agreement whenever possible, but at all times respect."

And to the majority, especially to our returning members, I want to say, "This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity." This is the kind of thing that most of us only dream about. I know—because I used to dream about it. The people have given us unified government. And it wasn't because they were feeling generous. It's because they wanted results. How could we live with ourselves if we let them down? How could we let ourselves down? I have for many months been asking our members to raise their gaze and aim high. Now, let us not be timid, but rather reach for that brighter horizon.

And so, this old chamber might look the same, but in the hushed whispers and whirl of activity, you can feel the winds of change. And as I stand here, next to the portrait of good old George Washington, I'm reminded of a line from one of his favorite plays: "'Tis not in mortals to command success; but we'll do more ... we'll deserve it."

And so my dear friends and colleagues, I say to all of you, "Good luck and Godspeed." Thank you very much. {eo2}