

Quotations from Bob Michel



compiled by
Frank H. Mackaman

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Table of Contents

Anecdotes.....	3
Budget.....	3
Chicago Cubs Baseball.....	4
Civility.....	4
Community.....	7
Constitution.....	8
Democrats.....	9
Government.....	11
House of Representatives.....	13
Ideas.....	15
Ideologues.....	17
Leadership.....	18
Lobbying.....	20
Michel on Michel.....	21
Minority Status.....	23
Politics.....	24
Representing Your District.....	24
Republicans.....	25
War.....	27
Women.....	28
Note on Sources.....	28



Anecdotes

Mr. Speaker. I want to protest an editorial appearing in today's *Wall Street Journal*. The editorial, "Czardine O'Neill," suggests that although the Speaker was once called the Czar of the House, his performance on the energy bill reduced him in stature—figuratively speaking, needless to say—and he is now a "Czardine" which the *Journal* says is what one wisecracker holds is diminutive of Czar. Czardine? There is something fishy in this. Did the *Journal* use this word on porpoise? If so, this is a whale of a story. Yet, there is salmon wrong in all this. Unless the *Journal* retracts what it said, its editors will soon be singing a different tuna. Trout history such journalism has been deplored. It is bass. As for the Speaker, eel have to defend himself. This strikes at the very sole of the House. For too long there have been charges that we flounder. So I say to the Speaker: Where there's a gill, there's a way!

Remarks made on the House Floor, October 28, 1977

At the beginning of my career, when I received such a great introduction, I used to say how embarrassed I was by all those nice words. I'd tell the audience I didn't deserve all that praise. I'd let them know what a humble guy I was. But one night, a fellow came up to me after the speech and said: "Congressman, don't try to be so humble—you're not that great!"

RHM Speech and Trip File, Lee County Ronald Reagan Day, February 19, 1993

I know that in politics, one minute you're a peacock and the next you're a feather duster.

RHM Speech and Trip File, Arlington County VA GOP, June 25, 1993

Budget

What this country needs is 1966 wages, 1940 prices, and 1913 taxes.

RHM Speech and Trip File, Sigma Nu Reunion, June 10, 1967

If you lose this moment, pick apart this agreement with a thousand points of spite, will we truly be able to govern? After years of passing out the goodies, we're in debt and we have to ante up."

Remarks made on the House Floor, October 4, 1990

This proposal will raise taxes, lose jobs, and slow the economy—what might be called a triple play of economic irresponsibility.

Remarks made on the House Floor, February 25, 1992



Chicago Cubs Baseball

Being a Chicago Cubs fan builds strong character, rids one of harmful illusions, and instills the lifelong virtues of humility, patience, and hope.

RHM Speech and Trip File, Commencement Address, MacMurray College, May 19, 1993



Civility

[Following Tip O'Neill's election as Speaker over Michel] I should like to feel ... that when the really big issues of great importance are considered in this House, there will be many occasions when partisanship will be laid aside and a significant number of you [meaning Democrats] will be so persuaded by our logic, good sense and compelling arguments that you will actually vote with us. You do have it within in your power, in this House, to give life and breath to the new President-Elect's proposals, modify them slightly or drastically, or to kill any one of them outright. I simply want to pledge to you Members of the Majority my desire as the Republican Leader to work with you in the best interests of the American people."

RHM Speech and Trip File, Introduction of the Speaker, January 5, 1981

[Presenting the Americanism Award to former Congressman Horace R. Kornegay] Horace typifies that spirit of comity and civility that transcends party labels. It is a spirit we desperately need particularly in this city and in our work if we ever expect to get something constructive accomplished. As someone who has been in the political arena for over thirty years, I am not afraid of a good, old-fashioned political fight. But when you lose that rock-bottom sense of mutual respect, political fights can degenerate into personal feuds. And that soon leads to vendettas and grudges that stand in the way of the people's business. Official Washington needs to preserve and protect that spirit Horace typifies. A spirit that can be partisan but never personal, critical but never crude, sometimes bellicose but never bitter.

RHM Speech and Trip File, Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, Washington DC, May 9, 1985

[Upon the death of former Republican Whip Les Arends] We are witnessing the passing of an age. There was no neurotic anxiety in Les, no need to prove himself, no obsession to appear tougher than the other guy, to dominate, to manipulate.

He had such a firm and clear set of values that there was no room in him for the kind of doubt and lack of self-confidence that so often results in bullying and shouting and a lack of civility. He had an inner integrity that shone through his every action.

RHM Speech and Trip File, In Memorium, Leslie C. Arends, July 19, 1985

Understanding the other person's viewpoint is the beginning of political wisdom. It doesn't mean we will always agree. But it does mean that when we disagree, it's a disagreement based on fact.

RHM Speech and Trip File, Women in Government Relations, July 16, 1986

[Tribute to Speaker Tip O'Neill upon his retirement from the House] It is the genius of our system that a good heart and good head in one member can bring him to different political conclusions than another member with the same virtues. That is why we have a middle aisle. But issues come and go. Bills that enflamed great passions in the hearts of one Congress are the dust of history to a future Congress. What remains, always, is the absolute necessity that this institution operates within a context of trust, of civility and comity.

RHM Speech and Trip File, Remarks on Speaker Tip O'Neill, October 1, 1986

I've done enough negotiating to know you don't shake hands with a guy with one hand and knife him with the other.

Journal Star, August 6, 1987

Bipartisan doesn't mean non-partisanship. It doesn't mean the artificial blurring of political distinctions in the name of some specious unity. Quite to the contrary: In order for bipartisanship to work, each side must be clear about the principles for which it stands. It is out of the clash of debate and discussion that true bipartisan solutions evolve.

RHM Speech and Trip Files, Convening of the 101st Congress, House Floor Remarks, January 3, 1989

We live in an age where some elected officials talk in sound bites, think in slogans, and form policy with bumper-stickers. In such a world of hype and PR, Tom Foley still believes the four major virtues of a legislator should be integrity, civility, hard work, and effectiveness. That's why I respect him. Tom and I are divided on most major policy issues. That's the way it should be. But we're not afraid to talk to each other candidly, and, when necessary, to compromise, because we are each confident in our own principles—and in each other's word. That's the legislative school in which Tom and I were educated, long ago.

RHM Speech and Trip File, Saints & Sinners Roast of Tom Foley, June 14, 1990

[How does one define Bryce Harlow's "gift?"—Harlow was well known for working with both political parties in a series of government positions] You know that raising the level of your voice doesn't raise the level of discussion. You know that listening with care is better than talking in sound bites and thinking in slogans. You know that peaks of uncommon progress can be reached by paths of common courtesy. Having this gift means being a knowledgeable professional—and being darned proud of it. It also means being serious without being somber, being tough without being mean, being shrewd without being devious, and being witty without being malicious. ... It has always puzzled me that in Washington we have no public vocabulary to describe civility, which I believe is among the highest public virtues. ... To be called "hard-nosed" or a "gut-fighter" or an "arm-twister" is in some circles the highest of praise. But civility has no similar public vocabulary.

RHM Speech and Trip File, Bryce Harlow Award to Howard Baker, September 26, 1991

Political debate in a democracy is often robust and harsh. It is no place for overly-sensitive souls. The clash of ideas can produce an unpleasant sound. And yet in a democracy there is a fundamental need for mutual respect. There is a need for a formal, public recognition of the ultimate dignity of those with whom we disagree—in a word, a need for civility ... the public embodiment of the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." ... The corrosive effects of the politics of anger is [sic] slowly destroying what I would call our civic environment...."

RHM Speech and Trip File, Commencement Address, MacMurray College, May 19, 1993

We Americans have developed a rich political vocabulary for the ugly side of public life. ... But civility seems to have no similar public vocabulary. ... Civility means knowing that raising the level of your voice doesn't necessarily raise the level of discussion. Civility means realizing that peaks of uncommon progress can be reached by paths of common courtesy. Civility means being tough without being mean, being witty without being malicious, and being principled without being fanatic[al]. Civility means believing in the power of reason to influence public debate while still being aware of the power of irrationality in public life.

RHM Speech and Trip File, Commencement Address, MacMurray College, May 19, 1993

Civility means knowing that raising the level of your voice doesn't raise the level of discussion. It means recognizing that

listening is a very good way of communicating. Civility means realizing that peaks of uncommon progress can be reached by paths of common courtesy. Civility means being tough without being mean and being principled without being fanatic[al]. Civility means believing in the power of reason to influence public debate and the power of the spirit to transform private lives. Civility is the public embodiment of the Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

RHM Speech and Trip File, Paul Henry’s Funeral, August 3, 1993



Community

The idea of community is one we have to get back to in the United States. The other week I was back in my hometown of Peoria talking about the idea of community. And folks back there told me they like to hear about that concept. That it has become lost beneath all our gigantic system of mass communications, big government and mass political movements. Community is a human-sized way of organizing. The idea of community is one that need revitalizing. We need the kind of energy and idealism and growth that comes from people banding together voluntarily.

RHM Speech and Trip File, Tobacco Institute, February 28, 1987

We in America are a nation of communities—ethnic, religious, philanthropic, social, professional. Out of that diversity comes our unique national strength. We Americans have always believed that love, concern and compassion comes [sic] from the people, from their individual communities, from the family, from a thousand and tens of thousands of different groups, forming our national life together. ... No bureaucratic organization, no matter how noble its motivations, can bring the same warmth and concern and individual tender, loving care to help the needy. Those qualities can come only through local and community efforts of individual human beings. And no government program, no matter how well-funded, can replace the mercy shown in the individual human face or the pity of the individual human heart.

RHM Speech and Trip File, National Enquirer, April 4, 1987

The Republican Party is built on the idea that this country is a “nation of communities.” We believe in supporting the diversity of American voluntary and professional associations. Our Democratic friends on the other hand believe in one, big “national community” led by Washington, guided by

Washington, in which Americans are supposed to enlist and follow Washington's direction. ... Democrats tend to believe government is there to lead and that communities and voluntary associations are there to help. Republicans tend to believe communities and voluntary associations are there to lead and government is there to help.

RHM Speech and Trip File, American Society of Association Executives, May 19, 1988

The real strength of our country does not begin in the Capitol building or the White House. It begins in homes like Lincoln's all over America. We sometimes tend to lose sight of that simple, profound fact.

Journal Star, April 16, 1989

Men and women, singly or as parts of larger families, living their lives in decency and love, working hard, quietly tending to their duties, are the very cornerstone of community life—and of true national greatness.

RHM Speech and Trip File, Commencement Address, MacMurray College, May 19, 1993

We are a nation of communities. Yes—we are one nation. But, at the same time, we are members of various communities: local, regional, ethnic, religious, racial, and professional, each bringing something unique and special to the life of our country. Our national diversity is not an impediment to progress but the very cornerstone of progress. ... It is only when humanitarian help comes from the community, from neighbors and organizations inspired by great religious truths, that it takes on the extra dimension government cannot provide.

RHM Speech and Trip File, Salvation Army, Pekin, Illinois, June 1, 1993

Constitution

It [the Constitution] is a document so tough it has lasted through the political storms of two centuries—and so delicate that it can dissolve before our eyes if are careless of it. ... That is the real glory of the Constitution—at least from the point of view of this Congressman—it doesn't promise utopia. All it promises is that Americans have the chance in free and open debate, in petitions to their government, to do the best we can. We can succeed or we can fail. Either way, our destiny is in our hands. In a sense, then, the Constitution is a document created for ordinary human beings who are capable, on occasion, of doing extraordinary things—both good and bad. And it is this recognition of the eternal battle we all face between acting like angels and acting like demons that makes the Constitution unique among the great political documents

of the world.

RHM Speech and Trip File, "In Praise of Compromise," American Bar Association Leadership Institute, March 19, 1987



Democrats

The State of the Union [by President Lyndon Johnson, 1965] outlined a plan for the creation of a land of milk and honey. It was also a blueprint for federalizing nearly every aspect of American life. LBJ prescribed a liberal dose of public pablum for each and every American. No problem is so difficult that it can't be cured with spending. Every program he proposed was designed to weaken the individual as an independent American, to weaken every unit of Government—except the Federal Government, which is described as the fount from which all blessing flow.

RHM Speech and Trip File, Ohio League of Young Republicans, January 16, 1965

It looks like the Great Society is going to make this a land of plenty—owe plenty, tax plenty, spend plenty, and waste plenty.

RHM Speech and Trip File, Lincoln Day, February 12, 1965

This will not be a traditional political kind of speech. I have no intention of promising the people that the Republican Party if returned to the White House will solve every problem overnight, increase every benefit, expand all existing programs and start a whole flock of new ones. Let's leave that onus of fiscal irresponsibility to the other major political party. They deserve it. They have been pursuing that course for the last seven and a half years and they haven't accomplished much except to run up prices, run up interest rates, run up the national debt and the interest on it to staggering proportions, nearly run us out of gold and run the dollar into the ground.

RHM Speech and Trip File, Lacon IL, May 24, 1968

We have had three years of earnest, sincere, well-written speeches enunciating American domestic and foreign policies. As well-intentioned as they might be, the people at the top in the Carter Administration have been unable to turn policy into practice. It has gotten so bad that the enunciation of Carter policy is no longer relevant, to the American people, to the Congress, and most importantly, to our allies and adversaries abroad. Now the time of crisis has arrived, and our gestures are empty, our words meaningless and our warnings without weight.

RHM Speech and Trip File, Peoria Rotary, January 25, 1980

I've been in Washington now for 30 years and I can say in all honesty, I've never witnessed a more frightening, more demoralizing situation than the disintegration of the present administration before our very eyes. There are no historic parallels. Never before in our history—never—have the American people been victimized by such a mismanaged, inept, incompetent, confused, blundering and downright dangerous administration as this one. Just before Jimmy Carter stealthily slipped out of the Rose Garden, the saying was making the rounds that the reason the President could not leave the White House was because it is unlawful to leave the scene of an accident.

RHM Speech and Trip File, Illinois State Republican Convention, May 10, 1980

This is not only a bad rule; it's a rotten rule that was shoved down our throats by a party of nincompoops.

New York Post, June 26, 1981

The Democrats we find have created a 51st state. It is the state of perpetual dependency. They have built a Berlin Wall of federal programs and regulations that today imprison tens of millions of Americans. Democratic programs over more than a decade have destroyed the only hope the poverty-stricken have of being free, of leaving the 51st state. And they call that compassion? I call it heartless and inhuman. The 51st state was created on a foundation of high inflation, high taxes, high interest rates, low productivity, and yes, even a degree of unemployment too high for the kind of inflationary economy we had.

RHM Speech and Trip File, Muskegon County Republican Dinner, June 15, 1982

Don't get me wrong. I think an opposition party should find fault—but the Democrats aren't finding fault—they are inventing fault [in criticizing President Bush].

RHM Speech and Trip File, Chemical Manufacturers Association, November 6, 1989

[In criticizing a Democratic bill which will raise taxes] The Democrats have got what it takes to take what you've got.

RHM Speech and Trip File, House Floor, February 27, 1992

The administration's economic proposals thus far have been fragmented, ad-hoc, with no discernable pattern, resembling one of those works of modern art that bears no representation to reality, but which [has] plenty of color and movement. We might call it Jackson Pollack economics.

RHM Speech and Trip File, Michel Response to Bill Clinton's State of the Union Address, February 17, 1993

I feel like I've walked the extra mile and the Democratic

Leadership are still in their bedroom slippers.

Remarks made on the House Floor, July 29, 1994

Government

“Big government is no substitute for little men. We cannot legislate ourselves free of all responsibility.”

RHM Speech and Trip File, “Needed: More Young Dynamic Exponents of Conservatism,” St. Louis University, St. Louis MO, May 6, 1960

I do not oppose Government. I oppose surplus Government. And that is what we have today—surplus Government. Our Federal Government has grown fat and flabby on high living. It tosses billions around like a drunken sailor. It invents programs, over-funds them, and then spends millions studying the programs it has invented.

RHM Speech and Trip File, Kiwanis Club Ladies’ Night, El Paso IL, August 29, 1966

Much of what is lacking in our society today is precisely what America was established to provide. Ours was conceived in the eloquent simplicity of Lincoln’s words, a government “Of the people, by the people, and for the people.” As we look back over the middle third of this century, we find that we have been getting more and more government FOR the people, but less and less government OF the people and BY the people. And in this, lies the root of much of today’s frustrations.

RHM Speech and Trip File, Woodford County Lincoln Day, February 13, 1969

We can act as free men and women and reap real benefits for that action, or we can act as sheep and turn our freedom over to the government and hope she shepherds us through the valley of death. We are surely sheep before God, but we are free men before government, and I say it’s time for us to stand up as Americans, Republicans and free men and say, “No more. I will make the decisions about my life. You protect me from foreign aggressors and domestic criminals and give me a stable currency and courts of law and I’ll do the rest.”

RHM Speech and Trip File, Joliet Young Republicans, April 18, 1975

[Following the 1976 election] We already have a Federal Government that is trying to (a) do more than its resources will permit, (b) do many things that it cannot do very well, (c) do some things that it should never do at all, and (d) do all of these things at the same time. As a result, we now have more government than we want, more than we need, and more than we can afford.”

RHM Speech and Trip File, Illinois Association of Manufacturers, November 11, 1976

Government is like fire—it makes a good servant but a bad master.

RHM Speech and Trip File, President's Day, Peoria County Republican Central Committee, February 16, 1987

The challenge we face is to have a federal government effective enough to meet its legitimate ends, but not too dominant to control.

RHM Speech and Trip File, Mike Oxley Lincoln Day Dinner, April 4, 1987

In the best of all possible worlds, government programs would be just like human beings—they'd be born, they'd grow, sometimes they'd need to go on a diet, and, eventually, they would lose their initial idealism and energy and die out in the natural order of things. But, as we all know, once a federal program becomes a reality, it is next to impossible to kill it off. It gains too many supporters. Too many people get used to it, and nobody wants to exercise his imagination in trying to come up with a better way of doing things.

RHM Speech and Trip Files, "Voluntarism: The Bush Approach," Tazewell County Lincoln Day Dinner, February 18, 1989

We Republicans believe in the wisdom of workers and businesses to craft appropriate benefits according to individual circumstances ... asking clumsy big government to handle this issue is like asking a gorilla to play the violin.

New York Times, October 1, 1992

It is said by some Republicans that "government is the enemy." I disagree. The American people don't believe that the government created by the Constitution is "the enemy." They believe—and our party has believed from Lincoln to the present day—that bad government, wasteful government, intrusive, bureaucratic, interfering government is the real enemy. We cannot allow ourselves to let the Democrats tell Americans that they are the party that is willing to make government work for the people and that Republicans don't care about government. The idea of limited, effective, responsive and responsible government is what the Founders envisioned—and it is one of the great legacies in the history of our freedom. We are the only party today with the vision and the ability to give it back to them.

RHM Speech and Trip File, National Federation of Republican Women, September 26, 1993

The Founders were conservative, and the Constitution they gave us created a government that is rooted in conservative beliefs about human nature and the absolute necessity to have government that is at once limited and strong. ...

Conservatives and Republicans of all stripes must understand

government is not the enemy—wasteful government, intrusive government, irresponsible government, corrupt government is the enemy. The people of the United States are not happy with government when it does not work well. But make no mistake about it: Americans from the beginning have realized that the government system left to us by the Founders is the best in the world.

The Washington Times, October 19, 1993



House of Representatives

The Democrat majority has been in power so long they look upon the institution like an old pair of slippers, a worn out robe or an old car. Even though the system is in dire need of mending and repair, and maybe should be scrapped altogether, they just can't bring themselves to do it. It's like the old golfer who resists throwing out that old putter with the crooked shaft.

RHM Speech and Trip File, "The State of the House," February 4, 1980

I guess we had some reservations about televising the House proceedings when it began. I think some of us worried that with all the hams in Congress there would be a lot of showboaters. But I have to confess that we have no more showboaters than we did in the beginning—about 435 members.

Congressional Correspondents Dinner, September 15, 1982

[Speaking about Speaker O'Neill's decision to bury aid to the Nicaraguan Contras in a supplemental appropriations bill sure to be vetoed by President Reagan] But I have to tell you that as a friend of Tip O'Neill, I am heartsick at what he is doing and he is wrong—dead wrong on this issue. I am appalled that an important foreign policy issue should be made hostage to parliamentary maneuvering of the most partisan political nature. The will of the House of Representatives is being thwarted by the Speaker's refusal to give us a free-standing, up-or-down vote on Contra aid. ... Yes, the Democrats control the legislative machinery of the House. They have a right to run that machinery. But they have no right—absolutely no right—to run that machinery in a way that tramples on the rights of the minority party and denies us the opportunity to openly debate and vote on issues cleanly without muddying up the water so much [that] the American people cannot discern what is happening.

RHM Speech and Trip File, American Medical Care and Review Association, April 14, 1986

I'd rather legislate through the inefficiencies of a democracy

than accept orders from a dictatorship.

RHM Speech and Trip File, "In Praise of Compromise," American Bar Association Leadership Institute, March 19, 1987

We have dillied and dallied, and dawdled and doodled long enough.

RHM Speech and Trip File, Remarks made on the House Floor, July 29, 1987

Two hundred years ago, when the first Congress met, Fisher Ames, a Member from Massachusetts, wrote a friend that "The House is composed of sober, solid folks. There are few geniuses. There are many who have experienced the virtues of the heart and the habits of business." I believe much the same can be said for our House membership today. Perhaps we are not the shining geniuses some others in this town think they are, but our Members in the main continue to be solid and hard-working, and we still bring to this House, from our hometowns, the virtues of the heart.

Remarks made on the House Floor, January 3, 1989

I've been in the House now for almost 33 years. And I've found there are three kinds of Congressmen. The first seeks victory without principles. These Congressmen don't care what side of the issue they support as long as they are on the winning side. Then there are those who invariably would sacrifice a victory to hold out for a principle. These are the ideologues of the left and right who proudly boast that they never compromise—but they seldom get anything done. And then there is the third kind of Congressman who combines adherence to principle with some political give and take to achieve a win.

RHM Speech and Trip File, "Leadership for the 90's," October 21, 1989

[From "Advice to New Members," *USA Today*, no date]

1. The folks back home sent you to the House to be a good legislator not a TV star or a political philosopher. Working hard to pass good bills, to defeat bad bills, and to amend bills that need improvement should take up most of your time and energy.
 2. As quickly as you can, learn the parliamentary rules. In the House, process can determine substance.
 3. Get to know your colleagues, on both sides of the aisle, because the human factor can play a major role in shaping legislation.
 4. When you have something important to contribute to a debate, stand up and say it, forcefully, briefly, clearly, and factually. If not, sit and listen—you learn much more that way.
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5. Find time to play a role in the deliberations of your party organization in the House. Intra-party debates can be as important (and as fierce) as debates between parties.
 6. Remember: all the folks in your district, even those who didn't vote for you, expect you to legislate with intelligence, debate with civility, and act with integrity. Don't let them down.
 7. When you are in doubt about the propriety of any action, personal or public, ask yourself: would I want my family to read about this in the pages of *USA Today*?
 8. If, after a bit of experience, you find that being a Congressman is a degrading, shameful thing (as so many seem to be saying these days), they get out of politics as soon as you can. But if you believe it to be a great honor (which I have believed for 38 years), then stop all this campaign-rhetoric against "the system" and do something positive to improve it.

RHM Speech and Trip File, National Press Club [not given], 1994

Ideas

The least interesting face in a sea of faces is the face that has none of the lines of travail and triumph, failure and fortitude. I know enough about war from having experienced its steel and its fire to know that I do not want it. But on the other hand, I do not want to have it said that I lived my life like a potato in a vegetable patch with other potatoes knowing from day to day the end [as] the beginning, and waiting only to be peeled, boiled and digested. That, you know, is the Communist design.

RHM Speech and Trip File, "Needed: More Young Dynamic Exponents of Conservatism," St. Louis University, St. Louis MO, May 6, 1960

Actually it is the philosophy of conservatism not to see every hair-brained panacea as the solution to the world's ills, but to see the problem as the great savants have seen it. We have to weigh in the balance the zeal of the crusader who has devoted his whole life to a special cause. He sees only the cause he himself is interested in; he has no other gods. I insist will all conservatives—and I hope a few true liberals—that the social problem must be evaluated as a whole. That is what I mean by keeping all the facets of our country's problems in focus. That is what I mean by conservatism.

RHM Speech and Trip File, "Needed: More Young Dynamic Exponents of Conservatism," St. Louis University, St. Louis MO, May 6, 1960

The Soviet Union has had to depend on our technology, our credits, and our wheat for over 60 years because the Soviet

values do not inspire individuals to risk and be innovative. Our ideas and our ideals, not just our material abundance, are proof of our system's superiority.

Remarks made on the House Floor, June 20, 1979

Anywhere that totalitarianism flourishes, the holocaust—in various forms—is a possibility. ... Anyone who believes in God and in freedom cannot tolerate totalitarianism of any kind.

RHM Speech and Trip File, Agudas Achim, Jewish Congregation, April 10, 1983

The ancient virtues which [Theodore] Roosevelt found at the heart of Americanism—courage, honor, justice, truth, sincerity, and hardihood have been and should continue to be the generating forces of our freedom and national security.

RHM Speech and Trip Files, Peoria Memorial Association, May 27, 1985

In practical politics—the kind the Founders engaged in—the words “principle” and “compromise” are not opposites. A principle is an idea. A compromise is an action. You can compromise politically—as the Founders did, as any great American political leader has to—and still fight for principle. In fact sometimes the only way you can fight for principle in a democracy is to compromise. There should never be compromise of principle. But in a democracy there must be compromise for principle. So despite what ideologues of the right or left say—and I have my critics on both sides—American democracy isn't a fight between principle and compromise. It never was. It never will be. It is a fight to see what kind of compromises you have to make in order to advance principles you hold.

RHM Speech and Trip File, “In Praise of Compromise,” American Bar Association Leadership Institute, March 19, 1987

I'd rather legislate through the inefficiencies of a democracy that accept orders in the efficiency of a dictatorship.

RHM Speech and Trip File, “In Praise of Compromise,” American Bar Association Leadership Institute, March 19, 1987

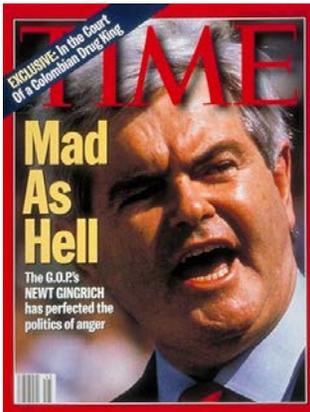
I realize I have the reputation of a nuts-and-bolts kind of guy not given to introspection. When it comes to legislation, I have been known to prefer the ugliest victory over the most beautiful theory. But as Leader of our House Republicans, I recognize the fundamental importance of ideas in the political and legislative process. Not just “politically correct” ideas that conform to the current wisdom but controversial ideas, unfashionable ideas, the kind of ideas that transformed our party and this country in the late 1970s and 1980s. Ideas are to political warfare what high-tech is to military warfare—fall

behind in either area and you eventually lose.

RHM Speech and Trip File, GOP Princeton Retreat, March 14, 1991

We cannot afford to go through that old American three-step dance of national defense. It goes like this: In time of danger, unity. In time of victory, euphoria. And in time of peace, amnesia! We just forgot what the world is like and we think that peace is just given to you. It's not just given. It has to be won, by sacrifice, by vigilance, by courage. Each generation has to be prepared to do the job.

RHM Speech and Trip File, Memorial Day, March 25, 1992



Ideologues

Ideological rigidity in a democracy is the political equivalent of the kiss of death. Demands for ideological purity in a democracy—especially among those who call themselves conservatives—is lunacy. ...The ideological thought police of the right or left tell the rest of us that defeat is better than victory so long as no compromise was involved. They love a loss better than a bit of progress. They see a slight deviation from some ideological abstraction as the first step on the road to political perdition. That's nonsense.

RHM Speech and Trip File, "In Praise of Compromise," American Bar Association Leadership Institute, March 19, 1987

It's one thing to be an ideological purist but that never gets any real significant adherents to the cause. That relegates you, in my judgment, to permanent minority status.

Roll Call, March 23, 1987

Ideological activists believe they know the truth and they don't want to negotiate or compromise or even talk about compromise. But in the House, the ability to strike a wise compromise is an essential part of leadership. Ideological activists don't understand that in the House, as on the battlefield, maneuver can often lead to eventual success where a frontal assault might fail.

RHM Speech and Trip File, Dirksen Congressional Center, September 1, 1989

Contrary to what some folks think, there is nothing wrong in government when there are strong disagreements about what is achievable, what is good, and what is acceptable in legislation. The very process of democracy exists because free citizens do have disagreements. Democracy doesn't always give easy answers—or quick ones. But it provides the forum in which everyone can have his or her say. The big problems begin when those normal disagreements cease to be differences and become dogmas, articles of political faith.

Then neither side can afford to budge from certain positions.
And you get what we now call “gridlock” in government.
RHM Speech and Trip File, Chautauqua Nature Trail Dedication, October 17, 1992



Leadership

We have our differences in the Party, among our own members and with the White House, but when you’re elected to a leadership position you’ve got to put it all together for a party stance or position. ... It requires swallowing hard sometimes—turning the other cheek more than you’d like—eating a good deal of crow—and biting the distasteful bullet.
RHM Speech and Trip File, Nomination of Les Arends for Republican Whip, January 3, 1973

When you are the Leader, you have to be able to take the heat.
There are too many nervous Nellies around.
Chicago Tribune, August 16, 1982

It so happens that my style of leadership, by personal preference, is the opposite of Mr. Sam and Joe Martin. They favored an autocratic, close-to-the-vest style. I favor a more collegial approach. My door is always open—and so, I trust is my mind. We have a super leadership team that, yes, at times, has its differences of opinion, but we do work well together. That’s the way I like it. But more to the point, that is the way leadership must operate in today’s House. The day of the congressional autocrat is over. Tip O’Neill doesn’t understand this—and that is his tragedy as a leader. This is not to say I favor what is called “leadership by consensus.” Consensus isn’t the same as leadership in my view. Leadership to me means being willing to take the point and take the heat. It means listening to learn. It means talking to persuade. Most of all it means making tough decisions and sticking to them. I’d rather be wrong through action than through passivity.
RHM Speech and Trip File, National Republican Congressional Committee’s Freshman Leadership Dinner, Washington DC, November 29, 1984

[After describing the divisions among Republicans in the House] Amidst this chaos the Republican Leadership must guide and cajole; flatter and reprimand; beg, borrow and deal in order to come up with a Republican agenda that is both principled and workable. ... As Republican Leader of the House I know from daily experience that there are different Republican traditions, each of them contributing to the inner dialogue of our party. I like it that way. I’d rather have the messiness that comes from diversity than the rigidity that has marked the Democrats in recent years. ... We House Republicans have to be pragmatic or else we can’t get

anything passed. We just don't have the numbers. We have to reach over to the other side and make our policies attractive enough to capture Democratic votes. ... But we must also stick to our principles because unless we do, getting something passed isn't going to benefit us or the country. ... That constant interplay between principles and pragmatism is the front line for any House leader. That's where I find myself every day. And that is just where I want to be. It is in the day-to-day decision-making that the Republican agenda in the House is created. Hanging in there for principle—yes. But also knowing when and what to give in order to get. ... In dealing with such a diverse group of individuals, I try, as leader, to use that old formula for success: On things we agree upon—unity. On things we disagree upon—freedom. But on all things—mutual respect and tolerance.

RHM Speech and Trip File, Ripon Society, July 30, 1985

And what is a political leader? I have my own definition. To me:

A leader is someone who can identify problems before they get too big and solve them before they get too bad.

A leader is someone who learns by listening and teaches by example.

A leader is someone who knows that political failure can sometimes be the beginning, not the end, of political wisdom—and that political success is not a goal, but an opportunity for service.

RHM Speech and Trip File, EXPO Peoria, November 8, 1985

I've come to learn that it [leadership] doesn't mean two hoots in hell to most of the folks back home, if it tends to distract you in any way from your primary concern for them.

Journal Star, January 11, 1987

You make a decision one day and then you forget about it. The next day the sun comes up, it's a bright day, and you go on.

Journal Star, March 23, 1989

If you go too far out ahead of your troops without looking back, they'll eventually pull you back.

Journal Star, March 23, 1989

Ideological activists don't understand that in the House, as on the battlefield, maneuver can often lead to eventual success where a frontal assault might fail. In the House, as on the battlefield, troops will follow a leader into danger if they

believe he is picking his fights shrewdly. But they will immediately withdraw their trust if they think for the sake of abstract theories you are sending them again and again into unwinnable battles.

RHM Speech and Trip File, Dirksen Congressional Center, September 1, 1989

Someone once said that leadership depends on three qualities—circumstance, character, and ability. Circumstance means you have to be in the right place at the right time if you want to lead. Character means you have to have the values and courage to do the right thing under great pressure. Ability means you have to get tough jobs done with skill and effectiveness.

RHM Speech and Trip File, "Leadership for the 90s," October 21, 1989

It is said that great leadership depends on three qualities:

First, the right circumstances—you have to be at the right place at the right time.

Second, temperament—you have to have the character and the fighting spirit to show the way and lead the way

Third, ability—you get the tough jobs done with consistency and effectiveness and a minimum of fuss.

RHM Speech and Trip File, Organization of Asian Americans, July 12, 1992

Leadership of either party is a constant exercise in trying to achieve some kind of balance between the ideals of the party and the complicated realities of political life. Go too far away from your ideals and you lose your dedication; go too far away from reality and you become a debating society.

RHM Speech and Trip File, Tobacco Institute, January 14, 1993

The job of political leadership is not to moan about what might have been but to work for what ought to be. The great task of political leadership is not to get caught up in factions and divisions but to transcend them and move forward.

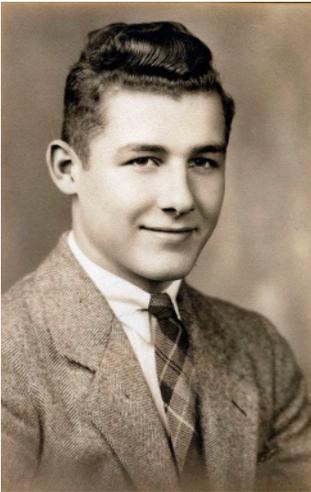
RHM Speech and Trip File, RNC Gala Leadership Breakfast, February 3, 1994

Lobbying

[Regarding the two rules for advocacy] Be informed. And be informative. By being informed, I mean not only knowing your side of the issue, your gripes, your fears, your concerns—and those of your customers. You also have to know the other side of the argument. Being informed means setting up a distant warning on environmental problems before they become subjects of proposed legislation. Remember: A law is a political issue that once was a

manageable problem. Deal with the problem early enough and it won't become an issue, and therefore will never result in a law.

RHM Speech and Trip Files, Ford Motor Company Dealers, May 23, 1989



Michel on Michel

Roll Call, in an article about “the Hippest Members of Congress” ... said: “Bob Michel is so square, he’s almost hip.” Shucks, to tell the truth, I’m so square I don’t even know what “hip” means!

RHM Speech and Trip File, Bryce Harlow Award to Howard Baker, September 26, 1991

I am a practicing politician and proud of it. I have faith in the free enterprise system, a belief in our form of government and a conviction, based on experience, that the American people can work themselves out of most problems, given half a chance.

RHM Speech and Trip File, Distilled Spirits Council, January 11, 1983



Most of my Congressional career was spent as a member of the Appropriations Committee. That is where the House determines how much will be spent on various projects and programs. So it is only natural for me to think of the cost of a given proposal. Whether it is an education bill, or a health bill or a highway bill, or a poverty bill, the first question that occurs to me is: How much is it going to cost? But the longer I have been in Congress, the more it occurs to me that the most precious thing[s] we have in this nation—freedom, opportunity, security—depend on something far more important than tax dollars. They depend on our spirit, our willingness to work, our fortitude in the face of tragedy and hardship.

RHM Speech and Trip File, Illinois College Commencement, May 26, 1985



I can't afford to be an impractical dreamer with no possibility of success; I do what is doable.

Journal Star, January 11, 1987

I'm not an ideologue of the left who sees the big government as the be-all and end-all of virtue. And I'm not an ideologue of the right who sees government as the be-all and end-all of evil. I'm just a plain old-fashioned Peoria boy who has been in government for well over thirty years. I know from that experience that certain levels of government, closest to the people, are the first and most important source we should turn to in solving problems. ... That's not ideology. That's American common sense.

RHM Speech and Trip File, National Conference of State Legislators, January 28, 1988

[Following a contested race for House Republican Whip won by Newt Gingrich over Michel's candidate] One characterization, however, I want to rid myself of is the old horse, the old guard, or even the old bull, the elder statesman or the soon-to-be-retired Leader. There is nothing old about our Conference or anyone in it. We are all young Republicans, some with slightly more seasoning than others. But we all think young. We all have young ideas. And we all have some of the rebellious turk in us, maybe some more than others. Let us emphasize the positive from now on. Let us close ranks and go on from here together.

RHM Speech and Trip Files, "A Call for Action; A Demand for Change," House Republican Conference, March 22, 1989

[Responding to a tribute on the theme of "what is really important in Washington"] It isn't what the media says about us. With them, one day you're a peacock and the next you're a feather duster. It isn't what history is going to say about us. History will take care of itself and there's not much any of us can do about it. It's not about power. Power in a democracy comes and goes with elections. What is important is getting the job done and doing it the best we know how. Taking a craftsman's pride in our work and setting a high standard of performance for it. That's what I've always tried to do. I guess you might call it the workingman's ethic. Something I inherited from my Mom and Dad.

RHM Speech and Trip File, Presidential Tribute to Michel, December 5, 1989

[For Michel's top-ten list "of the most interesting political events of my time in Washington," see RHM Speech and Trip File, National Press Club, 1994 (not delivered)]

[Michel's decision in January 1991 to lead bipartisan coalition to authorize President Bush to use force in the Persian Gulf] was a gut-wrenching experience, the single toughest decision I have ever had to make as a congressman

RHM Speech and Trip File, VFW Dinner Honoring Michel, March 1, 1994



Minority Status

Congress [is] made up of 535 egotistical, strong-willed men and women. All want to carve their own niche as sponsors and prime movers of every kind of program imaginable. For those of us in the minority who feel it has gotten out of control find ourselves sometimes very reluctantly in a mere “blocking” role to hold the line—particularly on these grandiose spending schemes.

RHM Speech and Trip File, Peoria Rotary, January 12, 1973

When you are in the minority, you learn there are three things you have to do: You have to stick to your principles. You do have to compromise. And you have to keep fighting. The temptation to abandon any of these is great. If you’ve been in the minority long enough you can get to the point where you start judging issues not from the point of view of your principles but from the point of view of getting something done. This can lead to a gradual abandonment of principle and you wake up some fine day and find you aren’t standing for anything anymore. You’ve become a cog in the great Congressional machine. But there is another, opposite, temptation. And that is to never, ever compromise, to generally accept defeat because it shows that you are not selling out. I find such a view nonsense. When you compromise in Congress, you don’t compromise principle—you compromise for the sake of principle.

RHM Speech and Trip File, “Effective Leadership when in the Minority,” Eureka College’s Ronald Reagan Scholars, May 12, 1987

Minority leadership isn’t a science. It isn’t an art. It’s more like being a tight-rope walker in the circus—without a net. You have to keep making these little adjustments, from one side to another, but not too much, because you’ll fall. And you have to keep moving forward very carefully, not looking back at what might have happened.

RHM Speech and Trip File, “Effective Leadership when in the Minority,” Eureka College’s Ronald Reagan Scholars, May 12, 1987

Those who have been kings of the hill for so long may forget that majority status is not a divine right—and minority status is not a permanent condition.

Remarks made on the House Floor, June 7, 1989



Politics

Now the lines are more clearly drawn and my good opponent and I find ourselves squared off against one another, not in personal animosity toward one another, but as advocates of our contrasting views and philosophy of our respective political parties.

Junior League, Peoria, IL, October 9, 1956

That's what victory in politics comes down to—not the complexities of big theories, not the drama of the evening TV news, not the sensational front-page headlines. It comes down to what we as individuals in our neighborhoods and our communities do by way of making that little extra effort. Ev Dirksen was once asked what was the most important thing in politics. And his answer was: "The most important thing in politics is the margin." That is where victory is won or lost—in that little, but extremely important, last effort. The effort you make when it seems you can't make another. The step you take when you're convinced you can't take one more. The energy you muster when all you want to do is rest.

RHM Speech and Trip File, Congressional Forum Fundraiser, September 13, 1986

The thing that burns me more than anything are the people who set themselves up as valid (conservative) spokesmen who, frankly, couldn't get themselves elected dog catcher.

Roll Call, March 27, 1987

The equation for political success is simple: Good candidates plus sound policies plus hard work minus divisiveness multiplied by generous financing means victory. Leave out one part of the equation and it doesn't work.

RHM Speech and Trip File, Arlington County GOP, June 25, 1993



Representing Your District

I didn't go to Congress as the apple polisher for any special interest group. I was quite well aware that I could never please all the people on any one individual piece of legislation. After searching inquiry on all sides of a question, I have taken the position which I believed to be right for the country and best for the district rather than the position which may be more popular at the time or politically expedient.

Opening remarks of 1958 campaign debate

Public service is serving the nation and the people you represent as best you can with honesty and integrity. We have followed that formula during our public life. It has been

fulfilling for me, and I believe it has been beneficial to the people of the 18th Congressional district.

Announcement of intention to seek re-election, December 4, 1987

Too often people get elected to the House and in a few years they are representing the Washington view to their community instead of representing their community view in Washington. When you get here, make government work for the community you represent. Don't become part of the Beltway mentality that says you need to play the Washington game in order to demonstrate that you care. You show that you care by making government work well, not simply by putting the bureaucracy to work.

RHM Speech and Trip File, National Republican Campaign Committee, Republican Candidate Workshop, June 6, 1988

One of the reasons—the major reason—we are sent here by the people is to find solutions to our problems. After all the rhetoric, all the posturing, all the media events, we are supposed to get something done! It's surprising that this obvious truth is so often forgotten. Given the angry public mood, it seems official Washington needs a reminder of this basic fact.

RHM Speech and Trip File, Associated Specialty Contractors, April 6, 1992

My constituents sent me to Congress not to pose or posture or preach, but to pass good bills, make bad bills more palatable through amendments, or to oppose bad bills that are not amendable. . . . I have committed the one political sin that ideologues cannot forgive: I do not hate government.

The Washington Times, October 19, 1992



Republicans

So here is Bob Michel's Rule Number One for continued political success for Republicans: Forget the fact that we did so well in 1980 but never forget the principles that led to that victory. If we do that we'll keep on working for those principles without the dangerous sense of contentment that can lull us into believing the job is done.

RHM Speech and Trip File, Republican Eagles, Washington DC, December 11, 1980

We have to have a vision of steady, growing and widespread economic improvement to offer the people. We have to be looking at the tomorrow of our country and not just at yesterday or today. If Republicans simply talk about the status quo, we're going to get our ears pinned back.

RHM Speech and Trip File, John Porter Fundraiser, June 15, 1984

In Ronald Reagan's America, we have:

- (1) Prosperity, because we've worked for it.
- (2) Growth, because we're investing in it.
- (3) Freedom, because we've preserved it.
- (4) Strength, because we've restored it.
- (5) Peace, because we've kept it.
- (6) Respect, because we've earned it.

RHM Speech and Trip File, National Association of Hosiery Manufacturers, Washington DC, September 25, 1984

And what are those principles that have inspired this party from Lincoln's day to the Reagan Revolution? They are few in number but all-important:

- a belief in human freedom, human rights and civil rights;
- a commitment to limited government, stressing family, community, state and regional activity instead of centralized, bureaucratic Washington DC domination;
- the love of justice, liberty and freedom joined with a determination to fight for the same and to assist those beyond our shores who likewise are willing to fight to acquire or defend those ideals;
- a belief that real progress for the individual and our families is achieved through a free market place, free enterprise, and individual opportunity.

RHM Speech and Trip File, Schuyler County Lincoln Day, February 14, 1988

We Republicans have to rid ourselves of the clichés and platitudes of yesteryear and realize that most Americans don't believe government is the enemy—most Americans believe bad government is the enemy. Our job is to make limited Government work for the betterment of our communities all across America. That should be our battle-cry.

RHM Speech and Trip File, "Change, Politics, and the Future of Congress of Tomorrow," Congressional Institute Trip to Houston TX, March 24-26, 1988

[Michel's "common sense philosophy" to guide the Republican Party] First, you can't tax people into prosperity, but you can tax them out of prosperity—and a job. Cut spending first. Second, traditional values, intelligently adapted to the problems of today and tomorrow, are the best long-term solutions to most social problems. Third, the family is still the most important social organization we have. It must be protected from government hostility, indifference and abuse. Fourth, we simply cannot allow ourselves to be seen by the

American people as a party of negativism and criticism, with no program of our own.

RHM Speech and Trip File, Arlington County GOP, June 25, 1993

Republicans are not here to bring the values of Washington to the rest of the country, as the Democrats have for forty years. Republicans are here to bring the values of the rest of the country to Washington.

RHM Speech and Trip File, Contract with America Announcement, September 27, 1994



War

It matters not who they were, whether they were rich or poor, whether they had college degrees or were uneducated. Death is a great equalizer.

Tribute to fallen fighters, June 1, 1954

These frail mementos of affection will soon wither. But let not the memory of these martyrs fail to inspire us in a purer, holier life.

Tribute to fallen fighters, June 1, 1954

As veterans of World War II and Korea, the awful imprint of those conflicts is still fresh in our minds, and no one appreciates more than we that we are at peace today. Just as the fate of our country and the freedom-loving nations rested on our shoulders in time of war, so are we obliged to shoulder the responsibilities of establishing and preserving a lasting peace.

State Convention, Illinois AMVETS, June 23, 1956

When patience and delay become foreign policy goals by themselves, they are no longer virtues. ... Patience at any price is not a policy, it's a cop-out.

Remarks made on the House Floor, January 10, 1991

As this debate opens, the United States of America has over 370,000 troops in the Gulf area. They are face to face with troops of a ruthless dictator. Our troops will be aware of every word we say in this debate. So will the dictator. The question we have to ask ourselves is this: When this debate is finished, will the House be seen as a tower of strength or a tower of Babel?

Remarks made on the House Floor, January 10, 1991

This is a question of high public policy. But it can be answered only in the private reaches of the heart where the still, small voice of conscience roars like thunder ... Our American troops in the Gulf have bound themselves by sacred

	<p>ties of duty, honor, and willingness to sacrifice. Can't we at least be bound by a binding resolution that will give their Commander-in-Chief what he has requested?</p> <p>Remarks on the House Floor, January 12, 1991</p>
	<p>Women</p> <p>When I came to Washington in 1949, you could probably have held a conference of Republican women office holders in someone's living room.</p> <p>RHM Speech and Trip File, Maryland Federation of Republican Women, May 21, 1987</p> <p>I still have old-fashioned respect for the femininity of a woman and nobody's going to take that away. Equal pay for equal work is the bottom line. There should be no discrimination in housing or the workplace. But damn it, men and women are different and I love the difference.</p> <p><i>Journal Star</i>, October 20, 1988</p>

Note on Sources

The Speech and Trip File of the Robert H. Michel Papers is the source for most of the quotations noted above. In other cases, the selections were published as "Quotations from Leader Bob" (no date) with no further information about the original source. This compilation does not include Michel's remarks in the House chamber.