

Restoring the Institution of the House

An Interview with The Honorable John Boehner,
Speaker of the House, United States House of Representatives



The Hon. John Boehner

EDITORS' NOTE John Boehner serves as Speaker of the United States House of Representatives and was elected to represent the Eighth Congressional District of Ohio for an 11th term in November 2010. Before he made his first run for elected office, he ran a small business in the plastics and packaging industry. Boehner previously served as the House Minority Leader from 2007 until 2011 and House Majority Leader from 2006 until 2007. On November 17, 2010, he was elected by his colleagues to serve as Speaker-designate. He graduated from Xavier University in 1977 with a bachelor's degree in business.

Over the past several years, there has been a growing sentiment that Washington is broken. Do you agree with that and, if so, what needs to be done to improve it?

Absolutely. In the House of Representatives, too often in the past, we've had bills written in the Speaker's office in the dark of night and then rushed to the floor within hours, so 400 or 430 out of 435 Members of Congress didn't even know what they're voting on. That's wrong. Each Member of Congress represents 600,000 to 700,000 Americans, and each one deserves to have his or her voice heard and his or her constituents represented.

So we're going to do things differently. Whenever possible, we're going to allow the House to work its will under an open process – from the committees to the House floor – so that we have a true battle of ideas and the best possible legislation becomes law.

What are some of the key things that you hope to achieve in the House of Representatives over the coming years?

I want to restore the institution of the House, so that it listens to the American people, and it is – as it was meant to be – the legislative body most reflective of the American people. The goal is the best possible legislation and the best policy for the American people. We also have to rein in federal spending and address the fiscal challenges we face because it's important for the economic future of our country. We're focused on creating jobs, and one of the most important ways we can help is to cut spending to create more certainty, encourage investment, and increase confidence in the private sector.

What do you feel are the most important qualities needed to be successful as House Speaker?

Before I came to Washington, I was a small businessman – a salesman. Most people think to be a good salesman, you have to be a good talker, but the truth is that you really need to be a good listener. That is exactly the same as the job of Speaker – most of the time your job isn't to speak, it's to listen.

Are young people today interested in careers in politics and are we attracting top talent to public service?

I don't know. I'm enormously proud of the talented people who serve in Congress and the talented people who work on their staff. But I also think there's value to smart, energetic people working out in the real world.

How does your business experience impact the way you govern?

My experience as a small businessman defines everything I do in Washington. When I was running my business, I saw firsthand how government discourages private-sector job creation, and punishes innovation and investment. That influenced my view of the issues and it also shaped how I run my office.

I work with our House Republican Conference – our team – the same way I ran my small business. My goal is to get everyone to agree on a set of common goals and then move towards those goals together. In this case, that goal is a smaller, more accountable government in Washington.

Many feel that more needs to be done to support entrepreneurship and small business to ensure long-term economic

growth. What policies will you push to assist small business growth and job creation?

Everything we do is focused on helping create an environment for businesses – especially small businesses – to grow and create private sector jobs. We've voted to repeal ObamaCare, which with its burdensome mandates, tax hikes, and higher costs is making it tougher for employers to hire.

We've voted for serious spending cuts, because we know that Washington's spending spree is increasing uncertainty for job-creators and that every dollar that the government spends is a dollar that isn't available for the private sector to invest. We're going to stay totally focused on listening to the American people and helping to create jobs.

What are you most proud of in your career to date?

Honestly, the trust and confidence my colleagues, my friends, showed in me by electing me Speaker. That was a pretty powerful moment.

Also, the work I've done to help kids from tough backgrounds get a better chance at a quality education. That's something that means the world to me.

What political figure, past or present, do you most admire?

I've been lucky. I've been inspired by a lot of great leaders. Ronald Reagan is probably the reason I became a Republican and his example continues to inspire me. When I came to Congress, a man named Henry Hyde, who never stopped fighting for his principles – for protecting innocent human life – was a real hero to me. The leader I've been thinking about most recently is the last Speaker of the House from Cincinnati, Rep. Nick Longworth. As Speaker, he took an approach that was different from that of his predecessors and let members of Congress be legislators again. That's my goal, too.

If you were not in politics, what might have been your career?

I'm lucky enough to know the answer to that. I had a career before I came to Washington: running my business. Frankly, I never thought I'd stay in Congress as long as I have. I always figured I'd go back to my business – as I said, at heart, I'll always be a small businessman. ●