

# Chief officer gets the House in order

By Richard Wolf  
USA TODAY

Scot Faulkner's office is an orderly oasis off the tourist-infested corridors of the Capitol.

Computers' screen-savers spit out the names of six management gurus. A sign on the wall says, "IT CAN BE DONE." Another defines the office credo: "We are serving our country by serving our Congress."

It could be an executive's suite at a Fortune 500 company. But Faulkner, 43, isn't in business. He's in politics.

As the chief administrative officer for the House of Representatives, Faulkner represents the calm in the eye of the storm. All around him, politicians may rant and rave. But inside his tidy digs, books are balanced.

That in itself is historic. The first outside audit of the House since 1789 last year found its books in such disarray that Price Waterhouse could not render an opinion.

Today, Faulkner says, "It has business financials, it has business procedures, it has business terminology ... We're now almost completely decoupled from politics." A new audit found enough progress to merit a grade of "qualified."

The House that Republican Speaker Newt Gingrich is building is one steeped in the nomenclature of Total Quality Management. Both Gingrich and Faulkner, a lifelong Republican



By Tim Dillon, USA TODAY

**Means business:** Scot Faulkner, chief administrative officer for the House of Representatives, says the House is 'almost completely decoupled from politics.'

hired from the private sector to run the business side of the operation, are true believers in TQM.

While the talk outside his office ranges from balanced budgets to

Bosnia, Faulkner speaks of "market needs" and his "customer base."

That would be 435 House members, and their staffs and committees and leadership offices. In all, Faulk-

ner has about 10,000 customers who need phones and furniture, carpets and computers, pencils purchased, restaurants run, health benefits handled.

All that was done in the past, but it didn't look like IBM. The operation Faulkner inherited lacked everything from inventories to job descriptions.

"You had books that were still handwritten ledgers that had the format and the shape and size from the Continental Congress," he recalls. "Almost \$800 million a year being done as one big checkbook ledger, with different colors of ink and different handwritings."

Democrats who ran Congress until last year made some changes. They hired the House's first "director of nonlegislative and financial services" in 1992, partly as a response to embarrassing overdrafts at the old House bank and criminal embezzlement at the House post office.

But their appointee, Leonard Wishart, a retired Army lieutenant general, quit after a year, claiming his shop could not be a "truly nonpartisan administrative structure." By contrast, Faulkner notes, "I'm still in here and planning for the 105th (Congress)."

He has tried to make the business side of the House nonpartisan, although Democrats cite a number of Republicans hired for top jobs. While cutting his own staff from more than

1,000 to 600, Faulkner says, Democratic patronage appointees were kept if qualified.

Some offices, like the doorkeeper, were abolished.

Others, like the mail folding room, were privatized. Still others, like the state-of-the-art day care center, were retained.

Then there were what Faulkner calls his scavenger hunts. In one case, Republicans discovered a warehouse rented by the House for \$235,000 annually, "filled with furniture no one knew we had." An auction produced \$141,000, and the lease was not renewed.

Democrats and even some Republicans complain about continuing problems with their offices, including bills not paid on time and other computer glitches. "It's not working without problems," says Rep. Ron Packard, R-Calif., chairman of the House legislative appropriations subcommittee.

During an interview in his office, Faulkner looks up to see Rep. Vic Fazio, D-Calif., top Democrat on the House floor, complaining on the House floor that lawmakers are not "getting what we paid for."

That "trip-wire environment" keeps Faulkner true to his credo of serving Congress — lest lawmakers bite the hand that feeds them. "If their computer systems lock up," he laments, "they can go to the microphones on live TV."