

Understanding Newt Gingrich

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This paper analyzes the writings and public statements of Speaker Newt Gingrich, from his doctoral dissertation, "Belgian Education Policy in the Congo 1945-1960," to his 1995 book, To Renew America. It explains that he has drawn ideas from diverse sources, and that no single label suffices to characterize his thought. All at once, Gingrich is an unconventional conservative, futurist, warrior, executive, lecturer, institutional transformer, and pragmatist.

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Understanding Newt Gingrich

I know perfectly well my own egotism,
And know my omnivorous words, and cannot say any less,
And would fetch you whoever you are flush with myself.

Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass

Newt Gingrich likes to present his audiences with a well-worn puzzle: draw three parallel rows of three dots, and without lifting pencil from paper, draw four lines that cover all nine dots. This problem often baffles people. They try to solve it by drawing the lines within the perimeter of the nine dots, but that approach never works. After they quit in frustration, they are surprised to learn that one can solve the puzzle easily -- by going outside the box. In a House floor speech, Gingrich once explained that the exercise drives home the need to change habits of mind: “[Y]ou say to them, pointing back to the original nine dots, you say, ‘What box? What perimeter? What limits? Suddenly they begin to realize that in hundreds of ways in their own lives almost every day we trap ourselves in the nine dots’”¹

Newt Gingrich is always trying to go outside the dots. When other politicians respond to a problem by choosing among a fixed set of alternatives, Gingrich tries to rethink the issue, redefine the question, and rearrange the choices. For him, every job means a set of opportunities, not a set of constraints. During his first year (1970-71) on the faculty of West Georgia College, he scorned the customary activities of novice professors: scholarly research and circumspect silence. Instead, he sent the college’s presidential search committee a memo with “some general thoughts on the nature of our changing world and a way we might deal with it.” In this memo, he said: “[S]ince the key problem in facing the future is turning away from the past, could we seriously challenge every single thing we do traditionally?”²

A quarter-century later, he showed the same expansive attitude toward the speakership. Previous occupants had usually focused their energies within the chamber, and even when they “went public,” they still regarded themselves mainly as legislators seeking to influence floor votes. Accordingly, Tip O’Neill called his autobiography Man of the House. Gingrich, by contrast, called his 1995 book To Renew America. As the title suggests, Gingrich came to the speaker’s

1 Congressional Record (daily), November 3, 1983, H9201.

2 Newt Gingrich, “Some Projections on West Georgia College’s Next 30 Years,” February 7, 1971, on: Hotwired Web site: http://www.hotwired.com/wind/3.08/special/newt_knew.html (accessed August 4, 1996).

rostrum with a mission that reached far beyond the institutional context of the House of Representatives. A year into his speakership, he said: "I had set out to do a very unusual job, which was part revolutionary, part national political figure, part Speaker, part intellectual."³

Gingrich's detractors believe that such statements reveal him as undisciplined and egotistical. His admirers prefer to think of him as "Whitmanesque" (Walt, not Christine). Either way, anybody who wants to understand Newt Gingrich has to go outside the "nine dots" of traditional legislative studies. Gingrich is not just a legislative horse trader, but a man who tries to do many things, and who draws his inspiration from many different places. A student of Gingrich should look at his unconventional ideology, his futurism, his study of management, his applications of military thought, his professorial aspirations, his attitudes toward institutions, and of course, his political pragmatism, which often leads him to make exceptions to his own exceptionalism.

Newt Gingrich is hardly going to push John Rawls or Robert Nozick off the short list of great contemporary political philosophers. By scholarly standards, his speeches and writings lack rigor. But far more than most political leaders, Gingrich roots his actions in books and ideas: he actually reads the works that other politicians only quote. "In the field of American history, Gingrich is the best-read politician I've ever interviewed," says historian Stephen Ambrose, "although his knowledge runs wider than it does deep."⁴

Gingrich's creativity and eclecticism enabled him to lead the House Republicans to a stunning victory in 1994. But during the 104th Congress, these qualities proved insufficient to keep him out of trouble. Through the aggressive way he helped solve the 40-year puzzle of minority status, he had created problems for his own speakership. And in the world of governance, he found that neat answers do not always lie just outside the nine dots.

The Un-Conservative

I find one side a balance, and the antipodal side a balance;
Soft doctrine as steady help as stable doctrine;
Thoughts and deeds of the present, our rouse and early start.

Newt Gingrich is not a conservative, at least as people ordinarily define the term. Although he has often applied the label to himself, he does not fit neatly into any of the major schools of conservative thought, and he has often criticized the conservative movement. In explaining the moral of his favorite puzzle, he said in 1983 that "just as the liberals have been

3 Adam Clymer, "Firebrand Who Got Singed Says Being Speaker Suffices," New York Times (national edition), January 22, 1996, 1.

4 Stephen Ambrose, "The Newt Frontier," George, August 1996, 72-74.

trapped in the nine dots of bureaucratic solutions of Washington, so conservatives have been trapped in the nine dots of penny-pinching and negativism.”⁵

In that statement, Gingrich may have been thinking of one specific part of the movement, traditional conservatism. With a distinguished ancestry ranging from Edmund Burke to Russell Kirk, traditional conservatives emphasize incremental change. Although they are people of principle, they warn against acting on a zeal for abstract concepts. According to Kirk, “change may not be salutary reform: hasty innovation may be a devouring conflagration, rather than a torch of progress.”⁶ The most articulate of today’s traditional conservatives, George F. Will, says that “statecraft is soulcraft,” meaning that democratic government “must be a tutor as well as a servant to its citizens,” and that “statecraft should gently pull in the direction in which the needle of human nature points.”⁷

Gingrich would agree that government should nurture habits of good citizenship, and he praises the “little platoons” of families and voluntary associations that Burke and Tocqueville described. But he dismisses gentle change, seeing himself as a revolutionary instead of an incrementalist. “Revolutions have to occur fast or not at all,” he scolded budget director David Stockman in 1984. “Revolutions have to occur fast because they represent a fundamental break with the paradigm and power structure of the past. You have to focus the debate on your new ideas, new language, new programs and new allies and hold it there or you lose the effort to revolution.”⁸ Such language comes more from Thomas Paine than Edmund Burke.

In this respect, Gingrich has plenty of company. Since the rise of Ronald Reagan, American conservatives have increasingly embraced boldness instead of balance, passion instead of prudence. Fittingly, Reagan’s favorite quotation came from Paine’s Common Sense: “We have it in our power to begin the world over again.”

If traditional Burkean conservatism has gone out of fashion, social conservatism has grown in influence. Social conservatives, who seek guidance from Scripture or the philosophical concept of natural law, often speak of great ideas and grand changes. Although they quarrel among themselves on many points, social conservatives generally believe in standards of right and wrong that transcend time and culture. On issues ranging from abortion to school prayer, Gingrich has often sided with social conservatives, but he is more a fellow traveler than a true

5 Congressional Record (daily), November 3, 1983, H9201.

6 Russell Kirk, The Conservative Mind, 7th ed. (Chicago: Regnery, 1986), 9.

7 George F. Will, Statecraft as Soulcraft: What Government Does (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 19, 24, 42.

8 Newt Gingrich, “A Grand Compromise Would Smother Peaceful Revolution,” Washington Post, November 11, 1984, D8.

believer. Paul Weyrich, a leading activist among social conservatives, explained the distinction in an interview for a PBS documentary.

The point is, we start at different points. When I hear about an issue, or when I'm considering a policy, the first question I ask is, 'Does this conform to the Judeo-Christian teachings on whatever subject it is we're talking about?' Does it conform to the Scripture and tradition, because those are the twin rails upon which I ride. He does not start at that point. He starts at a different point. Is this good for the country? Is this good for the Republicans? Is this going to strengthen his majority? You know those sorts of questions. Often times you come to the identical conclusions when you start analyzing at that point as opposed to the point that I'm analyzing at. But there are times when you do not.⁹

Gingrich seldom quotes the Bible. His sympathetic biographer Dick Williams says: "To listen to Gingrich's lectures and speeches is to hear a deist in the mold of Thomas Jefferson, a believer in a Creator but one who is leery of sectarian beliefs."¹⁰ He lauds the Judeo-Christian tradition, not because it offers a revealed truth, but because it has historically given rise to good works. When arguing for school prayer, he makes no reference to biblical commands; rather he says that prayer reminds us of the spiritual dimension of our existence and the intrinsic worth of all human beings. Such reflections, he says, will change behavior. "It goes to the core of why Alcoholics Anonymous starts with the belief in a Supreme Being."¹¹

For a Republican who backed legislation to withhold federal recognition of homosexual marriage, Gingrich has long voiced remarkable tolerance for differences among cultures and lifestyles. In his 1971 doctoral dissertation on Belgian education policy in the Congo, Gingrich criticized an influential 1921 book by a Catholic priest, who called for strengthening African families by abolishing adultery. "His definition of adultery was Christian and therefore monogamous," Gingrich wrote. "Yet the very basis of some African societies was polygamy. Eliminating the incredibly complex family relationships meant destroying the essence of tribal stability in many regions of Central Africa."¹² Gingrich was not practicing radical relativism but

9 Interview of Paul Weyrich by Peter Boyer and Stephen Talbot, November 1995, on PBS Web site: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/newt/newtintwshtml/weyrich.html> (accessed July 20, 1996).

10 Dick Williams, Newt! Leader of the Second American Revolution (Marietta, Georgia: Longstreet Press, 1995), 177-178.

11 Newt Gingrich, "Religion and Politics: The Legitimate Role," address to the Heritage Foundation, Washington, DC, October 5, 1994 (Heritage Lecture # 507).

12 Newton Leroy Gingrich, "Belgian Education Policy in the Congo 1945-1960," Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, Tulane University, 1971, 34.

neither did he automatically condemn African polygamy

Gingrich has also expressed his tolerance on a more personal level. In his 1989 race for whip, he enlisted the support of Rep. Steve Gunderson (R-WI), whose sexual orientation was not a secret on Capitol Hill. Gingrich has remained closely allied with Gunderson, much to the displeasure of the socially conservative weekly, Human Events: “Rep. Newt Gingrich’s recently glowing endorsement of an AIDS march -- in which he extolled the efforts of homosexual Rep. Steve Gunderson (R-Wisc.) and his boyfriend -- has some pro-family advocates wondering whether the House speaker is slowly embracing `Homosexual Correctness.’”¹³

Economic conservatives, who make up a third major wing of the conservative movement, also wonder about Gingrich. Their philosophy, as explained by Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman, calls for limited government, with lower taxes, less spending, and fewer regulations. On one level, their hesitancy seems odd, because Gingrich has always made common cause with them. In 1978, he first won election to the House by supporting the Kemp-Roth tax cut proposal. Two years later, he played a crucial but little-noticed role in developing the Reagan economic message. David Gergen has often gotten credit for Reagan’s famous line, “Are you better off than you were four years ago?” But the line may well have started with Gingrich. In an August 26, 1980 memo to Jack Kemp, Congressman Tom Evans, and de facto campaign chief Paul Laxalt, Gingrich suggested that Reagan use the following line in any debate with Jimmy Carter:

You measure in your pocketbook whether or not what he's just said has been true these past four years. If your life is better, you should vote for him; he is the President and he's responsible. If your life is worse you should vote against him; he is the President and therefore he's responsible.¹⁴

During the Reagan and Bush years, Gingrich was quick to condemn breaches of the low-tax position. And since assuming the speakership, he has pursued an aggressive agenda of tax cuts and budget savings. Yet it is not completely accurate to label Gingrich as an economic conservative. The contrast with Majority Leader Dick Armey illuminates this point. Armey’s policy stances flow explicitly from background as a free-market economist; for instance, his legislation setting procedures for military base closures represents a clear application of public-choice theory. Gingrich, unlike Armey, has little use for formal economics: Hayek and Friedman are conspicuously absent from his many lists of required readings. In his 1984 book, Window of Opportunity, Gingrich questioned the entire discipline: “The economy is more psychological and cultural than current economic models admit, with the result that much of our economic advice is

13 “Gingrich Upsets Pro-Family Advocates,” Human Events, May 10, 1996, 5.

14 Newt Gingrich, “Re: Carter’s Strategy and Reagan’s Options,” memorandum to Tom Evans, Paul Laxalt, Jack Kemp, Washington DC, August 26, 1980 (photocopy).

closer to reading chicken bones than to serious science.”¹⁵

Furthermore, Gingrich has often acknowledged the benefits of government, at least in certain cases. In 1983, he said:

Let me say this can involve very activist government. The era of Republican domination back between 1856 and 1932 was a period of tremendous government experimenting, a period of building the transcontinental railroad without having a Department of Railroad, a period of encouraging homesteading through the Homestead Act, a period of the agricultural college and the Morrill Act which led to the land-grant colleges and the agricultural agent system.

The test I always give conservatives is to say “How many of you wanted to save the Panama Canal?” Most of my conservative friends promptly raise their hands. But the fact of the matter is that the Panama Canal was built by government engineers, because government doctors cured yellow fever. It was run by a government corporation and it was constructed by government, Army and Navy, the largest public works project in history at the time it was set up.¹⁶

When a liberal interviewer asked him if there were problems with private enterprise, he said: “Oh yeah. But see, I’m not a libertarian. I say it pretty clearly in the book [Window of Opportunity], I am not for untrammelled free enterprise. I am not for greed as the ultimate cultural value.”¹⁷ When a libertarian interviewer asked what would keep his vision from becoming an industrial policy, he said that the answer was in “restricting government to setting up very large systems” and emphasizing decentralization.¹⁸ The interviewer was not satisfied, and libertarians continue to doubt his free-market credentials. Llewellyn H. Rockwell, Jr., president of the Ludwig von Mises Institute, in 1995 belittled the scope of Gingrich’s economic proposals and damned his failure to “give a black eye to the Leviathan State.” He concluded that Gingrich had always been “a big spending, big taxing, big regulating, welfare-warfare statist.”¹⁹

15 Newt Gingrich, Window of Opportunity (New York: TOR, 1984), 175.

16 Congressional Record (daily ed.), November 3, 1983, H9200.

17 Quoted in: David Osborne, “Newt Gingrich: Shining Knight of the Post-Reagan Right,” Mother Jones, November 1984, 53.

18 Quoted in: Tom Miller, “Congress’s Conservative Young Turks,” Reason, April 1985, 44.

19 Llewellyn H. Rockwell, Jr., “Newt Gingrich: A Liberal’s Conservative,” Los Angeles Times, August 8, 1995, B9.

Rockwell was exaggerating. But if Gingrich is not a traditionalist, a social conservative, or an economic libertarian, then what is he?

In a 1989 interview with Ripon Forum, Gingrich suggested the answer: “There is almost a new synthesis evolving with the classic moderate wing of the party where, as a former Rockefeller state chairman, I’ve spent most of my life, and the conservative/activist right wing.”²⁰ Seven years later, Rep. Don Young (R-AK) reinforced the point: “The moderates like Newt, because Newt has always been a moderate.”²¹ Most House Democrats would loudly disagree with Young’s observation, since Gingrich leans well to the right of his partisan foes. But Young was measuring him against other Republicans, and by that yardstick, the “moderate” label makes more sense. His background differs from that of many conservatives: he never joined the Young Americans for Freedom, nor did he grow up reading National Review. Traces of his youthful involvement with Rockefeller still show up, and in several ways, the Gingrich Republicanism of the 1990s echoes the liberal Republicanism of the 1960s.

In the GOP politics of that decade, the liberal Republicans stood out by their commitment to civil rights. This position appealed to Gingrich. Even as an undergraduate political activist at Emory University, he denounced the racism of Georgia Democrats and urged Republicans to reach out to black voters. As a graduate student at Tulane, he sent his daughter to a mostly black Head Start program and invited “Dutch” Morial, who would become the first black mayor of New Orleans, to speak at a departmental discussion group.²²

Running for the House in 1974 and 1976, he clearly contrasted himself with the segregationist Democratic incumbent Jack Flynt. He won the seat in the 1978 election, and on January 15, 1979, he made his first entry into the Congressional Record: an “extension of remarks” marking Martin Luther King’s birthday and endorsing John Conyers’s bill to make it a national holiday.²³ During the 1980s, Gingrich supported sanctions against South Africa’s apartheid regime as a way of showing the GOP’s good faith to black voters.

Civil rights leaders attack Gingrich for opposing initiatives such as the 1990 civil rights bill, and they complain that his rhetoric about crime and welfare contains racial code words. But in his speeches and actions, one can still detect signs of a 1960s liberal attitude toward racial

20 Quoted in: Bill McKenzie, “A Conversation with Newt Gingrich,” Ripon Forum, May 1989, 4.

21 Quoted in: David Grann, “The New Newt,” The New Republic, May 6, 1996, 10.

22 Judith Warner and Max Berley, Newt Gingrich: Speaker to America (New York: Signet, 1995), 30, 37.

23 Congressional Record, 96th Congress, 1st sess., January 15, 1979, 392-393.

issues. In his inaugural address as speaker, he said: “The greatest leaders in fighting for an integrated America in the 20th century were in the Democratic Party. The fact is, it was the liberal wing of the Democratic Party that ended segregation . . . Every Republican has much to learn from studying what the Democrats did right.”²⁴

As speaker, he squelched a full-scale assault on affirmative action in the 104th Congress, and at a 1995 dinner for conservative journalists, Gingrich struck back at his GOP critics by saying that the party would regret a race-based campaign in 1996.²⁵ Soon afterward, he made the same point in a public interview: the GOP should spend “four times as much effort reaching out to the black community to ensure that they know they will not be discriminated against, as compared to the amount of effort we’ve put into saying we’re against quotas and set-asides.”²⁶ The term affirmative action does not even appear in To Renew America, though one short chapter (one and a half pages) offers a general discussion of individual and group rights.²⁷

Environmental issues also point up Gingrich’s political roots. Governor Rockefeller was a national leader in conserving natural resources and building pollution-control facilities, and when the environmental movement gained prominence, he and his allies gladly signed on, citing the GOP tradition of Theodore Roosevelt. Gingrich had a special reason to like this aspect of liberal Republicanism. Even as a boy, Gingrich had been fascinated with nature, and he seriously considered a career as a zoo director or vertebrate paleontologist. As a professor, he coordinated his college’s environmental studies program and often took students on ecological field trips.

Gingrich carried his environmental concern to Congress. A free-market analyst described Gingrich’s career though the late 1980s: “When it came to wildlife and natural resources issues, Gingrich’s voting record was among the greenest in the GOP.”²⁸ Between 1979 and 1988, his average vote rating from the League of Conservation Voters (LCV) was 39.5 percent, rather high for a Republican. When he joined the GOP leadership in 1989, he tempered his environmentalism in an effort to hold the support of his conservative colleagues. Between 1989 and 1994, his LCV

24 Congressional Record, daily ed., January 4, 1995, H6.

25 Robert D. Novak, “A Testy Newt Is At War With the Troops,” San Francisco Chronicle, August 3, 1995, A21.

26 Jennifer Corbett, “Gingrich Cautions GOP on Ending Preferences,” Los Angeles Times, August 8, 1985, A3.

27 Newt Gingrich, To Renew America (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), 153-154.

28 Robert J. Smith, “Gingrich’s Green Record Concerns Conservatives,” Human Events, April 12, 1996, 3.

rating averaged only 7.0 percent.²⁹ Behind the scenes, however, he worked to soften the party's anti-green image. During the 104th Congress, while Republican Whip Tom DeLay (R-TX) led the effort to roll back environmental laws, Gingrich tried to accommodate GOP environmentalists. In an interview with Greenwire, Gingrich said diplomatically: "I think that Tom at times represents a different view of the environment than I do."³⁰

Gingrich says that Republicans should foster environmental protection through more effective and less intrusive methods than are now in place. This tack is reminiscent not just of the liberal Republicans' environmentalism, but of their overall approach to public policy problems. They faulted the Great Society not for its lofty aims but for the unanticipated consequences of its unresponsive bureaucracies. They argued that Washington technocrats had shattered communities and failed to serve anyone except for themselves and the corrupt urban machines. Rather than merely decry the other side, however, the liberal Republicans proposed nonbureaucratic alternatives. Some sought to replace the entire welfare system with a negative income tax, while others offered reforms such as "sweat equity" and the sale of public housing units to tenants. The Ripon Society suggested tax credits for locating businesses in poor areas — a direct forerunner of Jack Kemp's "enterprise zone" concept.³¹

In his intellectually formative years, Gingrich was already thinking along these lines. He began his doctoral dissertation by saying that "Belgian colonialism was in fact a model of technocratic government" and concluded that "the dream of technocratic planning had all too many hidden limitations and so became a nightmare."³² Substitute "the Great Society" for "Belgian colonialism" and you have the makings of a Gingrich floor speech.

During the 1960s, Ripon Republicans said that their proposals would lead to an "opportunity state." In the 1980s, Gingrich changed the term to "opportunity society" and used it to sum up his guiding principles:

- * Decentralization, the return of power and programs to states and localities;
- * Market orientation, the privatization of government functions wherever possible, and the replacement of command-and-control regulations with economic incentives;

29 Author's calculations from Almanac of American Politics, various years.

30 Greenwire, April 29, 1996, via PoliticsNow (<http://www.PoliticsNow.com>).

31 John J. Pitney, Jr., "Republican Alternatives to the Great Society," in Politics, Professionalism, and Power: Modern Party Organization and the Legacy of Ray C. Bliss, ed. John C. Green (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1994), 205-217.

32 Gingrich, "Belgian Education Policy," 4, 283.

- * Economic empowerment, substitution of individual tax credits or vouchers for government-controlled service delivery;
- * Political empowerment, the reform of government procedures to make information more accessible and political officials more accountable;
- * Goal emphasis, the evaluation of government programs by means of outcomes rather than inputs, by the satisfaction of citizens rather than by the demands of government workers.

Throughout his political career, Gingrich has remained a fairly consistent advocate of these principles, and they account for his support of such specific measures as welfare reform, school vouchers and the publication of congressional information on the Internet. These ideas have also informed his critiques of the Democrats, enabling him to cast himself as a populist reformer fighting liberal elites. In Window of Opportunity, he wrote: "Liberals generally like large government structures and grandiose systems that give power to specialists: the nature of such large structures guarantees that ordinary citizens will come to feel impotent and will not participate . . ." ³³

In practice, Gingrich's principles run into difficulty. Gingrich ally Christopher Shays (R-CT) admitted to reporter Elizabeth Drew: "One problem we have as a party is we have some conflicting interests and we want block granting and freedom for local and state governments when it fits our agenda and we want restrictions when that fits our agenda." ³⁴ As anyone can see from the implementation of the Clean Air Amendments of 1990, policies that use market incentives may actually create miles of red tape. And Gingrich's critics contend that his reformism waxes and wanes in inverse proportion to PAC contributions to the GOP. Yet for all these shortcomings, Gingrich's ideas do represent an attempt to escape the "nine dots" of old-style negative conservatism. In 1990, he wrote:

Our challenge is to make the difficult transition from an opposition conservatism to a governing conservatism, from advocating anti-left-wing government to advocating conservative government . . . Republicans really don't know enough about America. We've never thought much about how to improve life for people who have never been our constituents . . . If we care whether an eight-year-old girl in the ghetto says the Pledge of Allegiance, then we have to care about the rest of her day and the rest of her life." ³⁵

33 Gingrich, Window of Opportunity, 132.

34 Quoted in: Elizabeth Drew, Showdown: The Struggle Between the Gingrich Congress and the Clinton White House (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 101-102.

35 Newt Gingrich, "Life of the Party," Policy Review 51 (Winter 1990), 7.

The Futurist

Chanter of Personality, outlining what is yet to be,
I project the history of the future.

Gingrich is both historian and futurist, and he sees the two roles as complementary. In high school, he read Toynbee's A Study of History whose tragic view of the rise and fall of civilizations, he later said, liberated him "from any sense that we inevitably know how to keep America strong."³⁶ Around the same time, he read a work of fiction that helped him make the connection between yesterday and tomorrow. In the Foundation trilogy, Isaac Asimov reset the decline and fall of the Roman Empire into a space-based civilization centuries in the future. As a House member, Gingrich made it required reading for his aides. Frank Gregorsky, who served as his administrative assistant in the early 1980s, recalled:

Of course, I read it and I came and I said, "I don't understand this reading assignment. I mean, I don't understand what I'm supposed to get out of this." I mean it was an interesting book, but what does that teach us about Republican majority or balancing the budget or reforming Social Security? He said, "It may not teach you anything about those things, Frank, but what I'm trying to convey to you is that I'm a figure who thinks in terms of 100-year increments and I think in terms of civilization's rising and falling over 500-year increments and that's the level of thought and change that I would like you to get in sync with."³⁷

And as with many readers, the trilogy stimulated him to think about the whole process of prediction. The main figure in the trilogy, Hari Seldon, is a "psychohistorian" who could forecast his civilization's decline and devise a way to hasten its renewal. Gingrich accurately summed up the underlying concepts: "The premise was that, while you cannot predict individual behavior, you can develop a pretty accurate sense of mass behavior . . . [Yet] Asimov did not believe in a mechanistic world. Instead, to Asimov, human beings always hold their fate in their own hands."³⁸ And one of Seldon's lines may have stuck in Gingrich's memory: "He is a very clever politician and politicians by the very nature of their work must have an instinctive feeling for the

36 Gingrich, To Renew America, 23.

37 Interview of Frank Gregorsky by Peter Boyer and Stephen Talbot (1995, no month given) on PBS Web site: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/newt/newtintwshtml/gregorsky.html>, accessed July 20, 1996.

38 Gingrich, To Renew America, 24.

truths of psychohistory.’’³⁹

Perhaps seeing a bit of Hari Seldon in himself, Gingrich has long supported the space program. In Window of Opportunity, he defended spending for projects such as a manned space station: “We must not be penny wise and dollar foolish, setting a small budget and losing the opportunity to shape the future of all mankind.’’⁴⁰ In the 104th Congress, budgetary constraints forced cutbacks in science funding, but Gingrich helped protect NASA space exploration from severe damage.

Another important influence on Gingrich has been the work of Alvin Toffler, author of Future Shock (1970) and The Third Wave (1980). Gingrich devoured Future Shock as soon as it came out, and he taught a course on the future at West Georgia College. In 1971, he made a special trip to Chicago to meet Toffler, and he later cultivated the relationship as a junior House member. He incorporated many of their ideas into Window of Opportunity, for which Toffler wrote a cover blurb. A chapter of To Renew America is titled “America and the Third Wave Information Age.”

Toffler argues that technology is accelerating the pace of social and economic change. Just as the world had shifted from agricultural civilization (“The First Wave”) to industrial civilization (“The Second Wave”), now it is shifting to a civilization based on knowledge and information (“The Third Wave.”). The shift may daze many people (i.e., they suffer from “future shock”) but it can also empower them by giving them a vast array of choices in news, education, entertainment and culture. Cable television, satellite dishes, computer networks and other technologies are “de-massifying” the mass society of the Second Wave.

According to Gingrich, these concepts show his governing principles are not only desirable, but historically necessary. “Everywhere on the planet, we are saying that the information age means more decentralization, more market orientation, more freedom for individuals, more opportunity for choice, more capacity to be productive without controls by the state.”⁴¹ In a demassified society, government simply has to abandon the behemoth bureaucracies of the Second Wave. But it is slow to change. As a visual illustration, Gingrich frequently compares an obsolete vacuum tube still in use in the air traffic control system with a computer chip that has the processing power of three million vacuum tubes.⁴² He blames liberal Democrats

39 Isaac Asimov, Foundation (New York: Bantam, 1991 [1951]), 43.

40 Gingrich, Window of Opportunity, 67.

41 Newt Gingrich, remarks to the Progress and Freedom Foundation Conference, Washington, DC, January 10, 1995 (Federal News Service transcript).

42 Gingrich, To Renew America, 58.

for hanging onto Second Wave structures that block important innovations.

One phrase in Future Shock is especially important to understanding futurism's political value to Gingrich: "As we move from poverty toward affluence, politics changes from what mathematicians call a zero-sum game to a non-zero sum game . . . A system for generating imaginative policy ideas could help us take maximum advantage of the non-zero opportunities ahead."⁴³ Technology will not just settle problems, but it will help us transcend them — a relatively painless solution to the nine-dot problems of public policy. Applying this idea to health care, Gingrich says that telemedicine and artificial-intelligence systems will launch an "entrepreneurial and scientific revolution that will lower health costs for more and more patients."⁴⁴ Taking futurism to the inner city, he proposed providing free laptop computers to poor teenagers. (He quickly withdrew the idea.)

These examples, however, highlight problems with the futurist approach. According to Charles Krauthammer, a centrist commentator who holds an M.D. degree, Gingrich's optimism about health costs is "nonsense on stilts."⁴⁵ High-tech medicine extends lifespans, thereby increasing the ranks of the elderly, who require more frequent and expensive medical treatments. As for the ghetto laptops, Reason editor Virginia Postrel sees a contradiction with Gingrich's stated principles: "Gingrich is always in danger of falling into the technocratic traps that built the regulatory state — the notion that government planners, like engineers designing widgets, can build a good society from the top down. His futurism is out of date."⁴⁶

The Executive and Entrepreneur

IS reform needed? Is it through you?

The greater the reform needed, the greater the personality you need
to accomplish it.

Gingrich has often acknowledged his intellectual debt to the works of management scholar Peter Drucker, especially The Effective Executive (1966). By executives, Drucker means all knowledge workers in every field, including politics; and by effectiveness he does not mean "doing things right" (the minor virtue of "efficiency") but doing the right things. Gingrich first read this book during his dissertation field work in Brussels. From that point on, he says, "It

43 Alvin Toffler, Future Shock (New York: Bantam, 1990 [1970]), 465-466.

44 Gingrich, To Renew America, 167.

45 Charles Krauthammer, "A Critique of Pure Newt," Weekly Standard, September 18, 1995, 55.

46 Virginia Postrel, "Future Tense," Reason, March 1995, 5.

shaped my entire life.” During one of his “Renewing American Civilization” lectures at Reinhardt College in 1995, he rhetorically asked how he do so many things at the same time.

And the answer is this book. This book taught me a quarter century ago how to systematically discipline, plan, think through, delegate, trust others to build a system. Now, the day we were sworn in, when I got down as speaker after my speech and I spent about -- I spent I think about 40 -- an hour, I think, on the house floor, I left. I had other things to do. I did not go back to the house floor until 2:15 in the morning, and for 14 hours I just worked. Why did I work? Because of this book. That's how powerful I think this book is.⁴⁷

Anyone familiar with Gingrich's career will find familiar terms and concepts amid the pages of The Effective Executive. For instance, Drucker's “rules for identifying priorities” embody much of Gingrich's operating style:

- * Pick the future as against the past;
- * Focus on opportunity rather than on problem;
- * Choose your own direction — rather than climb on the bandwagon; and
- * Aim high, aim for something that will make a difference, rather than for something that is “safe” and easy to do.⁴⁸

Gingrich took these rules to heart as soon as he read them. His 1971 memo to the West Georgia search committee, he wrote: “Problems are past oriented . . . How much of your time do you spend haggling over the problems of the past and how much do you spend developing the opportunities of the future? [W]hen you move to take advantage of opportunities, aim big but look for initial small victories.”⁴⁹

Between 1979 and 1994, Gingrich aimed big. Rather than following climbing on the bandwagon of the “minority mentality,” he constantly sought ways to make the House GOP the majority party. He preached that the party had to replace its dour, problem-oriented attitude with one emphasizing hope and opportunity. After the 1982 elections, he helped form the Conservative Opportunity Society, a new kind of congressional organization that sought to sharpen partisan distinction and communicate the GOP message to the world outside Capitol Hill.

47 Newt Gingrich, “Renewing American Civilization,” lecture at Reinhardt College, Waleska, Georgia, January 21, 1995. On CPAC site: <http://www.cpac.org/pff/renew/trans395.html> (accessed July 15, 1996).

48 Peter Drucker, The Effective Executive (New York: Harper Colophon, 1985 [1966]), 111.

49 Gingrich, “Some Reflections.”

Whereas members had previously used floor debate to argue with one another or to enter material into the Congressional Record, Gingrich and his COS allies were reaching for the C-SPAN audience. And the group's name was part of a deliberate effort to change the Republican lexicon from one of dourness and austerity to one of hope and opportunity. Gingrich was not merely tinkering with partisan tactics, but creating a new, Gingrichian style of congressional politics. "There are two ways to rise," he once said. "One is to figure out the current system and figure out how you fit into it. The other is to figure out the system that ought to be, and as you change the current system into the system that ought to be, at some point it becomes more practical for you to be a leader than somebody who grew out of the old order."⁵⁰

Gingrich could accomplish this goal because he observed another Drucker maxim: "Know thy time." That is, simply stop doing things that eat up workdays without yielding results.⁵¹ As a backbencher, Gingrich chose to forgo the legislative detail work that consumes so many other members. Since the majority Democrats ignored GOP ideas anyway, Gingrich reasoned, why go through the motions? This decision freed his time for his innovative party-building activities. Committee-oriented "workhorses" belittled him as a "showhorse," but failed to see that he was reinventing the concept of workhorse. While they were scratching for ever-smaller victories in committee, he was striving to change the entire power structure of the institution.

After he achieved this goal, however, he let his self-confidence and zeal eclipse his devotion to Drucker's advice about time. He took on too many duties, and when he got over-scheduled and over-tired, he made serious mistakes. Thus he illustrated another Drucker saying: "Strong people always have strong weaknesses, too. Where there are peaks, there are valleys." Later on, he tried to rise from the valley by delegating more duties to Majority Leader Armev.

The first year of his speakership saw harsh partisan struggles over the budget and social policy. Why did he begin by taking such a hard line? Why did he not moderate the Republican agenda before getting into such bitter fights with the Democrats? A passage from The Effective Executive may explain much:

One has to start out with what is right rather than what is acceptable (let alone who is right) precisely because one always has to compromise in the end. But if one does not know what is right to satisfy the specifications and boundary conditions, one cannot distinguish between the right compromise and the wrong compromise — and will end up by making the wrong compromise.⁵²

50 Quoted in: Dan Balz and Ronald Brownstein, Storming the Gates: Protest Politics and the Republican Revival (Boston: Little, Brown, 1996), 115.

51 Drucker, The Effective Executive, 36.

52 Drucker, The Effective Executive, 134.

In 1996, Gingrich and the Republicans did compromise with President Clinton on issues such as health and welfare reform. Because of their initial firmness, they would argue, they ended up with the “right” compromises. As the next section explains, Gingrich did lose some important battles and sustained deep political wounds. Nevertheless, he had established himself as a genuine entrepreneur, defined by Drucker as one “doing something different rather than doing better what is already being done.”⁵³ Drucker himself has said: “It doesn’t matter whether I approve or not — and I have grave doubts — but the most visible innovator and entrepreneur in this country today is neither in business nor in the social sector. He is in government. It’s Newt Gingrich. If I’ve ever seen a real entrepreneur, he’s one.”⁵⁴

The Warrior

Adieu, dear comrade!
Your mission is fulfill'd--but I, more warlike,
Myself, and this contentious soul of mine,
Still on our own campaigning bound . . .

Although Gingrich never served in the armed forces, thoughts of the military have always buzzed in his mind. His adoptive father, an army officer, once took him to the ossuary at the Verdun battlefield. Gingrich later said that this confrontation with the horrors of war persuaded him to change his career plans from science to statesmanship. His academic studies included military history, and when he taught at West Georgia College, he learned still more from colleague Albert S. “Steve” Hanser, a military veteran. In the House, he helped found the Military Reform Caucus and often spoke at the war colleges as a way of making contact with the best military minds. He even wrote the introduction for a military text on strategic vision.⁵⁵

Like everyone, Gingrich uses military terminology in discussing politics. (After all, words such as campaign and strategy were born on battlefields.) Unlike most other political figures, he seriously thinks about applications of military principles. Someone who understands this corner of Gingrich’s mind is political consultant Eddie Mahe, who calls military strategy “the only ‘quasi-scientific’ area that is remotely translatable to politics.” According to Mahe:

He's a historian and he knows about any battle or related military history. He understands that. His area of expertise, I assume, is domestic history, U.S. history because he seems to

53 Peter F. Drucker, Innovation and Entrepreneurship (New York: Harper Perennial, 1986), 26.

54 Quoted in: “The Hottest Entrepreneur in America?” Inc., May 1996, 11.

55 Perry M. Smith, et al, Creating Strategic Vision (Washington: National Defense University Press, 1987), xvii-xviii.

know about every election and why, and what happened there. And you bring those two bodies of knowledge together, and he has an instinct for strategy on top of that and you get a perspective. You get a perspective that you don't get from anybody else that I'm aware of right now.⁵⁶

In his first successful congressional race, Gingrich made it clear that he did not take the military analogy lightly. He told a group of College Republicans:

Every one of you is old enough to have been a rifleman in Vietnam. A number of you are old enough to have been platoon leaders, or company commanders, depending on the situation, and how rapidly you move up in rank. This is the same business, we're just lucky, in this country, we don't use bullets, we use ballots instead. You're fighting a war. It is a war for power.⁵⁷

As speaker, he has expressed much the same sentiment: "Politics and war are remarkably similar systems."⁵⁸ In an address at the Library of Congress, he put it more colorfully by paraphrasing Mao Zedong: "War is politics with blood; politics is war without blood."⁵⁹ This mind set manifests itself in very concrete ways. Throughout 1995, Gingrich sent House Republican leaders and their aides to the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command centers in Virginia and Kansas.⁶⁰ In 1996, he asked military congressional fellows to aid in an "after-action review" of why the GOP's budget plan nearly lost on the House floor.⁶¹

His model for long-range planning — "vision, strategy, projects (or operations) and tactics" — comes from military literature. Civilians may not always associate "vision" with olive-

56 Peter Boyer and Stephen Talbot, interview with Eddie Mahe, November 1995, on PBS Web site: <http://www2.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/newt/newthomepage.html>.

57 Newt Gingrich, speech to College Republicans, Atlanta, June 24, 1978, on PBS Web site: <http://www2.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/newt/newthomepage.html>.

58 Quoted in: Howard Fineman, "The Warrior," Newsweek, January 9, 1995, 28.

59 Quoted in: Benjamin Sheffner, "Gingrich: 'Politics Is War Without Blood,'" Roll Call, May 29, 1995, 9.

60 David Rogers, "GOP's Rare Year Owes Much to How Gingrich Disciplined the House," Wall Street Journal, December 18, 1995, A1.

61 Damon Chappie, "Gingrich Mobilizes Pentagon Troops for Post-Mortem on Razor-Thin Budget Vote," Roll Call, June 24, 1996, 1.

drab uniforms, but the concept is essential to soldiering. Clausewitz wrote that an indispensable quality for a military leader is “an intellect that, even in the darkest hour, retains some glimmerings of inner light which leads to truth . . .”⁶² General Perry M. Smith, a Gingrich acquaintance, says that leaders “do not really serve the long-term interests of the institution unless they plan, set goals, and provide strategic vision.”⁶³

In the context of the partisan struggle, Gingrich’s strategic vision reflects the influence of the ancient Chinese warrior Sun Tzu, who taught that skilled warriors “bring the enemy to the field of battle and are not brought there by him.”⁶⁴ Gingrich’s interprets this passage to mean that a political party must always stay on the offensive, and not get trapped into responding to the other side’s initiatives. But instead of a full frontal assault, Sun Tzu said, a general should employ subtler, more psychological methods. “Anger [the opposing] general and confuse him . . . Keep him under a strain and wear him down.” These proverbs encouraged Gingrich in his one-on-one battles with Democratic leaders. Tip O’Neill’s famous 1984 outburst on the floor, a reaction to Gingrich attacks, confirmed ancient advice: “If the enemy is obstinate and prone to anger, insult and enrage him, so that he will be irritated and confused, and without a plan will recklessly advance against you.”⁶⁵

Verbal attacks serve another purpose as well. Clausewitz taught that great strength “is not easily produced where there is no emotion.”⁶⁶ Military leaders try to fire up their troops by telling them about the evils that the enemy has committed, and the even greater horrors that the enemy would perpetrate if it won. In the long march to the speakership, Gingrich took this approach against the Democrats. In 1988, he said that leaders such as Jim Wright and Tony Coelho “will try by their chameleon-like actions to destroy our country.” He said that Robert Bork’s nomination to the Supreme Court went down to defeat because of a liberal smear campaign, and he added:

[U]p until the Bork nomination, all of us failed to appreciate that the Left in this country has come to understand politics as civil war. The Left at its core understands in a way Grant understood after Shiloh that this is a civil war, that only one side will prevail, and

62 Carl von Clausewitz, On War, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 102.

63 Perry M. Smith, Taking Charge: A Practical Guide for Leaders (Washington: National Defense University Press, 1986), 9.

64 Sun Tzu, The Art of War, trans. Samuel G. Griffith (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 96. This is the translation that Gingrich quoted in Window of Opportunity.

65 Sun Tzu, The Art of War, 67. (From Chang Yu’s commentary.)

66 Clausewitz, On War, 105.

that the other side will be relegated to history. This war has to be fought with the scale and duration and savagery that is only true of civil wars. While we are lucky in this country that our civil wars are fought at the ballot box, not on the battlefield, nonetheless it is a true civil war.⁶⁷

Such language did stir Republican blood. Gingrich's defenders would argue that it was not just politically useful, but descriptively accurate, since the Democrats did indeed wage an intense partisan assault against Bork and other Republican political figures. Democrats would reply that Gingrich was actually describing his own political methods, and that his ethics battle against Speaker Wright displayed the "duration and savagery" of which he spoke.

Whichever side is right, there is no question that Gingrich's style angered members of the other party. It is no exaggeration to say that many learned to hate him. When he became speaker, therefore, the House already had a high level of bad blood. In 1995 and 1996, the most confrontational members of the Democratic Caucus took every possible opportunity to attack his ethics — a payback for Wright — and undercut his leadership. In describing this strategy, George Miller (D-CA) himself used a military analogy: "Newt is the nerve center and the energy source. Going after him is like trying to take out command and control."⁶⁸

The Lecturer

Who learns my lesson complete?

...

Draw nigh and commence,

It is no lesson . . . It lets down the bars to another lesson,

And that to another . . . and every one to another still.

Especially since the early 1980s, House leaders have pursued "outside strategies" for influencing the public climate of congressional debate.⁶⁹ But Gingrich takes the concept much further, as he once told CNN: "I am the most seriously professorial politician since Woodrow

67 Newt Gingrich, "Building the Conservative Movement After Ronald Reagan," address to Heritage Foundation Resource Bank, Chicago, Illinois, April 21, 1988 (Heritage Lecture # 167).

68 Quoted in: Drew, Showdown, 75.

69 Barbara Sinclair, Legislators, Leaders and Lawmaking: The US House of Representatives in the Postreform Era (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), ch.11, "Setting the Agenda and Shaping Debate."

Wilson. I believe the purpose of my speeches is didactic. They're supposed to be educational.”⁷⁰ In part, this element of the Gingrich style is an obvious outgrowth of his background as a college teacher. But it also connects back to his interest in the military, for he has learned that great generals are also great teachers. In Window of Opportunity, he wrote of George C. Marshall:

[He] related part of his success in World War II to his years with the Illinois National Guard. He had learned there, he would recount in later years, that the American soldier will fight well, but he has to be given the big picture; he has to feel that he knows what is going on. That led General Marshall to develop an in-service education and information program which ensured that the American soldier could understand, to a degree unparalleled in history, why he was fighting.⁷¹

Training and education foster coordination as well as motivation. During the 1980s, Gingrich told aides to read the memoirs of General Heinz Guderian, who wrote that members of the German General Staff Corps “were trained to judge events and make appreciations, both operational and tactical, according to a definite and uniform system. From this basic uniformity of reaction it was hoped to create a wide uniformity of decision.”⁷²

For Gingrich, these examples provided political lessons. During the 1970s and 1980s, the customary carrots and sticks of congressional leadership proved insufficient to unify and energize the House Republicans. One way out of this nine-dot problem was to mold the minds of the members, preferably before they even got to Congress in the first place. And this is what Gingrich did. Though his C-SPAN speeches and his GOPAC training tapes, he helped teach a generation of activists how to think and talk about political strategy. Senator Rick Santorum (R-PA), elected to the House in 1990 and the Senate in 1994, said: “I listened to the tapes all the time driving around in the car. They taught tactics you should use, basic philosophy, how to discuss the issues. I was a disciple.” And according to Paul Weyrich: “Many members have told me, ‘Until I heard Newt explain this, I never understood the context of my beliefs. I knew, of course, what I believed in -- but I didn’t understand the crusade we are involved in.’”⁷³

Gingrich’s schoolhouse does not stop at the Capitol doors, because he wants to influence the entire country. In Window of Opportunity, he explained his aim by citing one of his role

70 CNN news transcript, February 20, 1995.

71 Gingrich, Window of Opportunity, 133.

72 Heinz Guderian, Panzer Leader, trans. Constantine Fitzgibbon (New York: DaCapo, 1996 [1952]), 460.

73 The Santorum and Weyrich quotations are from: Connie Bruck, “The Politics of Perception,” The New Yorker, October 9, 1995, 62-62.

models: “Margaret Thatcher, the conservative leader of our time who best understands the importance of educating as well as administering a country, asserts that you can’t just win the vote, you also have to win the argument.”⁷⁴ More specifically, he wants to change the very terms of debate, reaching beyond the “nine dots” of ordinary politics. In 1988, he said:

We are in many ways more analogous to Wesley's “Methodism” and its impact on Britain in the 18th century than we are to a purely political movement. Because when you say “let's talk about voluntarism”; when you say “let's talk about privatization”; when you say “we need the work ethic”; when you say “we need tougher penalties and sanctions for unacceptable behavior like selling cocaine,” you are talking about a cultural value shift far more fundamental than a change in politics.⁷⁵

In 1996, he claimed victory, citing welfare reform and President Clinton’s declaration that the “era of big government is over.” He said that “we will in two short years have changed the rhetorical context of the American political system.”⁷⁶ Others would regard that judgment as premature. There is no question, however, that he had profoundly affected the newer House Republicans. Steeped in his lessons about winning a majority, they stormed the House with an eagerness to do political battle and a reluctance to craft old-style political deals. Gingrich, on the other hand, started the 104th Congress with the “right” position on policy issues (a la Drucker) but was willing to compromise in the end. He had a hard time bringing his followers along. As a leader of the opposition, he had trained his troops to fight Democrats, not bargain with them.

Toward the end of 1995, he must have wondered whether he had trained them too well.

The Institutional Transformer

I hear it was charged against me that I sought to destroy
institutions;
But really I am neither for nor against institutions;
(What indeed have I in common with them?--Or what with the
destruction of them?)

For years, Democrats said that Gingrich was trying to destroy the institution of the House. Although at times he warned of obstruction and disruption — much as Democratic leaders did in

74 Gingrich, Window of Opportunity, 199.

75 Newt Gingrich, “Building the Conservative Movement After Ronald Reagan.”

76 “On a Historic Scale, We Won,” Investor’s Business Daily, July 31, 1996, A1.

the 104th Congress — he replied that he sought to bring down the decades-old Democratic control of the House, not the institution itself. He did, however, aim to transform the way the chamber works.

In graduate school, Gingrich studied contemporary European history and developed an admiration for parliamentary government. When Margaret Thatcher became prime minister of Great Britain in 1978, Gingrich concluded that the GOP should try to follow her example by turning American elections into clear referenda on partisan differences. In 1980, he helped organize “Governing Team Day,” the precursor to the Contract With America fourteen years later. In this event, Ronald Reagan joined with House and Senate Republicans to pledge their support for a conservative policy agenda. In a floor speech before the event, Gingrich said: “The real story is that this is the first step toward a de facto constitutional amendment that will give us accountable party government by giving us accountable party campaigns and accountable party records.”⁷⁷

The frustrations of the Reagan and Bush administrations later caused him to temper his expectations about systemic reform. By 1989, he no longer spoke of turning America into a parliamentary democracy.

[T]he American system of government and power is remarkably diffused. Not only do we have a Legislative branch separate from the Executive, we also have state and local governments with their own power bases. And within local governments we have a further separation of administration . . . Thus a Thatcher Parliamentary victory can change Britain more rapidly. In America, never as union-dominated and socialist as Britain, it takes longer to turn government and culture away from the left and toward conservatism.⁷⁸

Within the confines of the American system, however, he did try to move the GOP in the direction of the responsible-party model. During the 1980s, he supported changes in House Republican Conference rules that strengthened the hand of the party leader. He took such steps less for the sake of then-leader Bob Michel than for his vision of vigorous and accountable House GOP — led in the future by someone such as Newt Gingrich.

When he became speaker, he brought this vision ever closer to reality as the GOP conference adopted new party rules that gave him an impressive array of powers, including strong influence over committee assignments. The Republicans also moved to de-fund the taxpayer-supported caucuses called Legislative Service Organizations. Democrats complained that the GOP was gunning for the Congressional Black Caucus; but for Gingrich, the key outcome was the abolition of the Republican Study Committee, a well-staffed conservative group

77 Congressional Record 126, part 19, 96th Congress, 2d sessions, September 8, 1980, 24682.

78 Newt Gingrich, “Toward Majority Rule,” Conservative Digest, January/February 1989, 31.

that could have undercut his standing as the voice of the House GOP.

Gingrich used his powers to influence congressional committees: for example, he disregarded seniority in selecting deficit hawk Robert Livingston (R-LA) to chair Appropriations. And in various ways, he also tried to bypass the committee system, which should have come as no surprise to Gingrich-watchers. As early as 1981, he spoke highly of leadership task forces and other devices that transcended old structures: "The US Congress is increasingly becoming an 'adhocracy' in which effective members are powerful and productive and ineffective members have dramatically less influence."⁷⁹ Fourteen years later, explaining his efforts to make policy through leadership task forces instead of the committee system, he used similar language: "The hierarchical, centralized structure is no long completely effective. The post-bureaucracy model is 'adhocracy.'"⁸⁰ Rep. Jim Nussle (R-IA), who helped Gingrich manage the transition of power, described their aspiration: "Let's throw everything out in our mind, let's go outside the nine dots!"⁸¹

Gingrich was not completely successful in the 104th Congress: by the end of 1996, the nine dots of the committee system continued to restrain the reformers. Yet adhocracy was slowly making headway.

Gingrich has also tried to change the institution of the speakership. As we have already seen, he went much further than his predecessors in turning the office into a national podium. And coming from a newer generation than previous speakers, he has enthusiastically embraced the "therapeutic" style of leadership that other speakers had only reluctantly accepted. He espouses this style in his leadership model of "Listen, learn, help and lead." As he told reporter Connie Bruck: "I want every member of this Conference to listen better to each other. They will know better what they're saying, they will appreciate each other more. This is a giant extended family." Recalling Gingrich's fascination with the military, Bruck dubbed his approach "Rommel at Esalen."⁸²

He thus confirmed a prediction by Ronald Peters: "Would the Republicans also succumb to the tastes of the therapeutic generation and elevate the role of their party's conference, hold retreats, and hold hands in order to hold power? Yes. The therapeutic culture is a product of

79 Newt and Marianne Gingrich, "Post-Industrial Politics," The Futurist, December 1981, 30.

80 Newt Gingrich, "Leadership Task Forces: The 'Third Wave' Way to Consider Legislation," Roll Call, November 16, 1995, 5.

81 Quoted in: Bruck, "The Politics of Perception," 72.

82 Quotation and "Rommel at Esalen" from: Bruck, "The Politics of Perception," 52.

modern culture and not of the Democratic Party.”⁸³

The Pragmatist

Do I contradict myself?
Very well, then, I contradict myself;
(I am large--I contain multitudes.)

“I think Newt's always been supremely pragmatic,” says former COS ally Vin Weber, “I just think that the definition of pragmatism in the Congress, at least for the Republican Party for a long time, simply meant keeping your mouth shut and going along. If pragmatic is defined more literally as doing what it takes to succeed, Newt's always been pragmatic.”⁸⁴ Newt Gingrich is a risk-taker, but he is also a practicing politician. He believes in ideas, but he also knows that implementing those ideas requires winning elections. In 1986, he acknowledged that “you can trim some programs and you can kill some programs, but the first duty of a political coalition is to sustain its majority.”⁸⁵

This pragmatism has cropped up on a number of issues.

In Window of Opportunity, he singled out the United Auto Workers as a praiseworthy, progressive union. He also wrote: “There are times and places when specific protectionist steps are appropriate: protectionism can defend an industry vital to national defense, can buy time for an industry to make adjustments to a sudden change in its environment, and can bludgeon a trading partner to force it to engage in fair trade.”⁸⁶ These comments, which clashed with GOP skepticism toward unions and its free-trade ideology, reflected local concerns: Gingrich’s district at the time included two auto plants, and protectionist sentiment was running high in Georgia.

Gingrich had also supported “domestic content” legislation for the auto industry, which prompted Sen. Bob Dole to question whether “new ideas” were really driving Gingrich. “Ask Newt about domestic content . . . Is that a new idea . . . a Republican idea?” Gingrich responded: “I represent two auto plants. I always ask him, ‘Bob, what's your position on

83 Ronald M. Peters, Jr. The American Speakership: The Office in Historical Perspective (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 292.

84 Interview of Vin Weber by Peter Boyer and Stephen Talbot (October 1995) on PBS Web site: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/newt/newtintwshtml/weber.html>, accessed July 20, 1996.

85 Quoted in: Miller, “Congress’s Conservative Young Turks,” 45.

86 Gingrich, Window of Opportunity, 85.

wheat?"⁸⁷

In 1985, Gingrich persuaded Delta Airlines to take reservations for Air Atlanta, the largest black-owned airline. Reporter Nicholas Lemann said: "Many conservatives would recoil in horror at the thought of politicians pressuring a company into a decision for reasons of race rather than efficiency; in the conservative movement racial quotas, minority business set-asides, and the like are at the top of the list of evils right now."⁸⁸ In this case, Gingrich's intervention served two practical purposes: improving the GOP's image in the black enterprise community, as well as serving a local business interest.

In 1989, as a new member of the GOP leadership, he broke with the "Young Turks" to endorse a congressional pay increase. "I don't think he was totally comfortable on that vote, said Rep. Robert Walker (R-PA), "But he did feel he had a responsibility as an elected leader of the party to support the consensus position."⁸⁹

In 1992, during a difficult primary in a new district, he argued that Republicans should support him because he could bring home more federal benefits. Columnist George Will observed: "With that argument, made while this is being written, Gingrich may have saved his career as a professional legislator, but he ended his career as the scourge of the 'corruption' of the welfare state in the hands of career legislators."⁹⁰ His supporters would argue that if he had lost the primary and left the Congress, the GOP might not have won a majority in 1994

When an interviewer presented him with such examples of position-shifting, he responded:

Oh, you can find more examples of chameleon-like behavior like that. Look, I believe in pragmatism. But it's tautological. Conservatism works. The work ethic works. Strength works. The free market works. Focusing on learning works. Preventive health works. So can tell you with a straight face I am pragmatic, and as a result I am driven to conservatism. But I am not dogmatic. I think if non-conservatism works, I'll look at it,

87 Quoted in: Helen Dewar, "Republicans Wage Verbal Civil War," Washington Post, November 19, 1984, A5.

88 Nicholas Lemann, "Conservative Opportunity Society," The Atlantic, May 1985, 33.

89 Quoted In: Richard L. Berke, "As Guerrilla or General, Gingrich Has a Mission," New York Times, July 19, 1990, A 18.

90 George F. Will, Restoration: Congress, Term Limits and the Recovery of Deliberative Democracy (New York: Free Press, 1992), 99.

too. It just doesn't work as well.⁹¹

According to former aide Frank Gregorsky, Gingrich told his staff in April 1983: "There are consistencies of pattern, but not consistencies of process. You can't predict from day to day what I'll do, but you can predict from day to day what, in a general way, I'll be doing."⁹² Gregorsky says that Gingrich fits Carl Jung's psychological category of "Extroverted Intuitior." Among other things, people in this category have clear visions but do not necessarily pursue them in a linear manner. Jung's conclusion about the Extroverted Intuitior type thus provides an apt means for closing a study of Gingrich: "Such a type is uncommonly important both economically and culturally. If his intentions are good, i.e., if his attitude is not too egocentric, he can render exceptional service as the initiator or promoter of new enterprises."⁹³

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91 Quoted In: Peter Osterlund, "A Capitol Chameleon," Los Angeles Times Magazine, August 25, 1991, 74.

92 Frank Gregorsky, "Want to Know What Makes Gingrich Tick? Ask Carl Jung," Roll Call, December 12, 1994, 5.

93 Gregorsky, "Want to Know," 23.