

Newt's Comeback Tour

Whether the former speaker is planning a White House bid or just seeking to raise his lecture fees, figure that he's got a five-point plan.

By W. James Antle III

THE MOST STRIKING THING about Newt Gingrich is how little he seems to have changed since relinquishing the speaker's gavel eight years ago. His trademark helmet of gray hair has gone white and his suits are a bit more slimming, but his overall appearance and bombastic speaking routine remain much the same. "I want to thank every member of the College Republicans who are here today," Gingrich beams, as students who were still in elementary school during his 1994 "revolution" chant "Newt! Newt! Newt!"

Gingrich retains his fondness for revolutionary rhetoric and grandiose historical analogies. He proceeds to rattle off an itemized catalog of his main points—"the three big principles of where we are now"; two steps toward reforming our campaign-finance laws; the "five basic principles that form the heart of our civilization"—with such alacrity that you have to pay close attention to figure out if he actually makes it to the end of each list. Gingrich at the podium is part policy wonk, part motivational speaker. He sees himself as a successor to Ronald Reagan but may actually be the Right's Tony Robbins.

In the course of a 20-minute speech, Gingrich proposes to "transform litigation, regulation, education, taxation, health, and energy" to give our grandchildren a better tomorrow. His website—newt.org, since we're all on a first-name basis—has sections on "Winning in a Global Economy" and "Promoting Active Healthy Aging." Gingrich's new

book is called *The Art of Transformation*. It isn't the kind of title Robert Taft or Barry Goldwater would have chosen.

Gingrich's gift of gab made for an easy transition from Mr. Speaker to Mr. Speechmaker, reportedly pulling in \$50,000 an address on the lecture circuit. Now he hopes to use his motivational skills to persuade people to do something bigger than attend the next Republican convention—make him leader of the conservative movement again and perhaps even president.

The former speaker is still guarded about whether he actually has designs on the top job. Gingrich huffily told *Fortune*, "I am not 'running' for president. I am seeking to create a movement to win the future by offering a series of solutions so compelling that if the American people say I have to be president, it will happen." Asked about such potential Republican competitors as former New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and Sen. John McCain, he told the business magazine they are "nice people" who are "not in the same business" as he is: "They're running for president. I'm running to change the country."

When *Fortune's* Washington bureau chief reasonably concluded that these remarks meant the Georgian was "running, only without yet formally saying so," a Gingrich spokesman demurred. "Gingrich has been consistent and clear," the statement said. "He has no plans to run for president and will not even make a consideration about running until later next year." Indeed, he has told reporters

he won't make a determination about the presidential race until September 2007. Nor are these presidential flirtations anything new. Maureen Dowd described the former House speaker as "a chubby little boy" in "a frisky game of hide-and-seek with reporters about his presidential plans"—back in 1995.

But Newt is clearly positioning himself for something. Gingrich made a stir with his recent Kissinger-like proclamation that the Iraq War is a "failure." He recently turned up at a Politics and Eggs breakfast in Ohio and lectured chastened Republican state legislators in New Hampshire after the midterm elections. (The *Concord Monitor's* headline read: "Humble GOP students heed Gingrich.") At the second event, he pointedly defended the Granite State's first-in-the-nation primary status.

Increasingly, Gingrich has demonstrated a willingness to criticize the Bush administration and current Republican leadership. At a fundraiser in Virginia, he called GOP consultants' efforts in the 2006 elections "stupid." *Human Events* quoted him as saying that the last two years of Bush's presidency would be as good as Gerald Ford's at best and perhaps even as bad as Jimmy Carter's.

It takes a big ego to anticipate a spontaneous draft movement will spring up to demand your presidential candidacy. Nothing similar has been undertaken since Ross Perot's independent bid in 1992—and even that was less spontaneous and more organized than the Perot campaign wanted voters to think.

Yet a candidate who believes, as Gingrich wrote in his 1995 book *To Renew America*, that his ideas on public education can create a “Third Wave Information Age learning system that is as different from the current bureaucratic model as the space shuttle is from an 1845 stage coach” is not lacking in confidence.

On its face, a Gingrich presidential bid seems like a nonstarter. When Newt slunk away from Capitol Hill after the GOP came perilously close to losing its majority in 1998, he was a widely disliked public figure. His unfavorable ratings approached 70 percent, and relatively few of the colleagues he had helped lead to power four years prior were sorry to see him go. Democrats campaigning in swing districts gleefully mocked their Republican opponents as Gingrich clones.

Even leaving the House didn't cause all of Gingrich's negatives to go away. In 1999, it was disclosed that an affair with a House aide led to the breakup of his second marriage—a stunning contradiction of his party's family-values message, especially at the same time Republicans were working to impeach Bill Clinton over the Monica Lewinsky scandal. Gingrich married the staffer, but that may not be enough to make him appealing to social conservatives who are worried about the institution of marriage.

Yet Gingrich's speaking tours and stints on Fox News demonstrate that he still has a dedicated national following. Commenters at his website encourage him to make a White House run, posting “We need you Newt!” and other entreaties. National polls consistently place him third among potential GOP candidates for 2008. Gingrich rarely does better than the high single digits, but conservative aspirants like Mitt Romney or Sam Brownback would be lucky to have those numbers.

The vacuum on the right of the presidential field is Gingrich's best asset.

Giuliani is pro-choice, supports gun control and gay unions, and has his own troubled marital history. McCain is distrusted by most conservatives on both economic and social issues. But no credible conservative has emerged who has either the popular or financial backing to wrest the lead away from the two frontrunners. Activists running out of options hope that Newt can.

Gingrich also looks good compared to his troubled, less articulate successors. Many conservatives are ready to reclaim the enthusiasm and ideological vigor that suffused the early days of the first Republican Congress in 40 years. And with Republicans now out of

teamed up with Hillary Clinton on health-care initiatives and sounded off on tax rates. Yet there is considerable truth to Bob Dole's memorable quip: “You hear Gingrich's staff has these five file cabinets, four big ones and one little tiny one. Number one is ‘Newt's Ideas.’ Number two, ‘Newt's Ideas.’ Number three, number four—‘Newt's Ideas.’ The little one is ‘Newt's Good Ideas.’”

In the little file sit Gingrich's complaints about Republicans' exorbitant federal spending habits and criticisms of bureaucracy, but his four big cabinets of bad ideas are overflowing. Newt's nostrum for Iraq is to launch another “third stage” campaign. And he advocates trying in

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power, some GOP activists may be willing to bet that the man who led them out of the wilderness in 1994 could be the right one to do it again. “If you make a mistake,” Gingrich argued in a recent speech, “you need to stop and go to battle against the mistake.”

The Gingrich comeback tour is based on more than nostalgia. It is also a predictable reaction to the intellectual decline of the Republican leadership. Today's GOP may have both skilled operators and ideological true believers but no one who combines a red-meat message with the former speaker's penchant for adroit tactical maneuvers. After Dennis Hastert, many conservatives will be open to the appeals of a smooth talker with eccentric ideas.

And ideas are a commodity Gingrich can claim to have in abundance. From his perch at the American Enterprise Institute and as chairman of his own communications and consulting firm, he has staked out detailed positions on a wide variety of policy questions. He has

Tehran what he believes was a “failure” in Baghdad. Domestically, Gingrich doesn't seem to have lost his enthusiastic view that paying poor schoolchildren to read books and giving them free laptops constitutes an education “revolution.”

Even Newt's good ideas might need some tweaking. The collapse of Republican fiscal discipline and faltering of the Congress's reformist spirit all began under Gingrich's watch. He says remarkably little in his polished speeches that he couldn't have said in the 1980s, except for replacing references to communism with warnings about radical Islam.

On the lecture circuit, it all sounds deceptively uncomplicated. Gingrich likes to tell crowds, “I think the correct vision of the future is simple as Ronald Reagan taught us—we win, they lose.” He probably already has his five-point victory plan ready. It will be a new plan—but the same old Newt. ■

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Hidden Costs

The Iraq War bill is higher than taxpayers realize—and Congress is still signing checks.

By Ivan Eland

IF TAXPAYERS FUND an annual budget of a federal department with a particular function, shouldn't they wonder why that department needs billions of additional dollars when it is asked to perform the function? Such is the case with the Department of Defense.

Each year, Congress gives the Pentagon by far the world's largest military budget—in fiscal year 2007 a whopping \$447 billion—as large as the combined defense expenditures of the next highest dozen or so nations. Yet in FY 2007, the Bush administration is likely to request an additional \$100-\$128 billion in “emergency” supplemental spending to fight the war on terror. Last fiscal year, the Pentagon requested \$66 billion in emergency funding; in 2005, the request was \$82 billion; and in 2004 and 2003, respectively, the requests were \$72 billion and \$74 billion. The Department of Defense's job is to fight the nation's battles, but when a war actually arises, it seems to need added largesse to carry out its mission.

Many conservatives, who regularly gripe about the federal government's ineffective and inefficient use of taxpayer dollars, give the Pentagon a free ride on its profligate spending habits. And when troops are engaged in combat overseas, the general public is wary of questioning massive military expenditures. That chariness should cease.

The first question any informed taxpayer should ask is how the same emergency can be unanticipated for five consecutive years of budgeting. The Iraq War has now lasted longer than World

War II, and the war on terror has a longer duration than that. During the Korean War, about 77 percent of the expenses were funded through regular Department of Defense appropriations; in Vietnam, about 72 percent. In contrast, at least 70 percent of the cost of the war on terror has been financed by emergency funding.

To military budget bureaucrats and members of Congress and their staffs—always keen to game the system for advantage—the emergency-funding route offers several advantages over the standard appropriations process. The military services provide much less detail in a supplemental request than in a regular application for funding about how they will spend the money. In one recent supplemental request, the Pentagon distributed its rationale to only a few lawmakers, and justification for the funding was not made public, raising suspicions that the Pentagon had something to hide. Of course, fewer details mean less constitutionally mandated congressional oversight and media coverage.

In contrast to the congressional oversight of the executive branch envisioned by the founders, the modern military-industrial complex fosters collusion by the two branches to finance items through the more opaque emergency-funding process that should be funded through the more open regular appropriation procedure.

Even if the average taxpayer agreed that defense expenditures for the five-year war in Afghanistan or the three-

and-a-half-year war in Iraq continue to be unexpected—a dubious concession—some of the things funded in the supplemental bills are only tangentially, if at all, related to fighting the war on terror. On Oct. 25, 2006, Deputy Secretary of Defense Gordon England wrote a memo to the services encouraging them to widen what they consider to be items required to fight the war on terror. This wink and nod apparently accounts for the huge jump in the request for emergency funding from \$66 billion in FY 2006 to a likely \$100-\$128 billion in FY 2007. Congress has also added items to the supplemental request that were not unforeseen, for example, part of the funding for the futuristic but accident-prone V-22 tilt-rotor transport aircraft.

Another reason that Congress likes to fund non-emergency items in supplemental bills is that they do not count toward the congressional budgetary spending limits. If some non-emergency items can be shifted to the supplemental bills, more military spending can be funded in the regular budget while still staying at or under the caps. Thus members of Congress get more pork for their districts, and the military gets more goodies too.

For instance, if the Army can offload some of its peacetime expenditures into the supplemental bills, it has more money for projects like the \$160 billion Future Combat System—a family of robotic tanks only good for countering competent tank armies from a nonexistent competing great power. If the Pentagon would eliminate unnecessary