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Jim DeMint And David Addington, Former Dick Cheney Aide, Poised To Make Heritage Relevant Again

By: Jon Ward – January 7th, 2013

WASHINGTON -- Jim DeMint's recent move from the U.S. Senate to The Heritage Foundation got lots of attention. What has been less noticed is that DeMint isn't the only high-profile political player in charge at the suddenly reinvigorated conservative think tank.

The number three spot at Heritage has been filled since May by David Addington, the chief of staff to former Vice President Dick Cheney during the administration of President George W. Bush.

Addington, is deeply admired by friends and allies, and wholeheartedly vilified by his critics and political opponents. During his time in the White House, he was a central player in the internal legal battles over the Bush administration's policies on interrogation, torture, indefinite detention and domestic surveillance.

He was "a very, very forceful presence" during those fights, said Jack Goldsmith, the Justice Department attorney who as head of the Office of Legal Counsel in 2003 threw out a number of legal memos and opinions undergirding the policies that Addington had helped craft, and bore the full brunt of Addington's wrath as a result.

Addington joined Heritage in 2010, and was promoted in May to oversee Heritage's four non-policy related "promotional units": communications, marketing, government services and external relations. The Heritage release at the time indicated that Addington had joined the top leadership of Heritage. And Mike Gonzalez, Heritage's vice president for communications, confirmed to The Huffington Post that Addington was at that time made third in command at the \$80 million-a-year organization.

Addington was recently named the head of Heritage's legal center, replacing former Reagan-era Attorney General Edwin Meese. He will no longer oversee the four promotional units, according to Gonzalez, but his overall position in the chain of command will remain unchanged.

DeMint and Addington "are two big heavy hitters," Gonzalez said.

Addington, in an e-mailed statement sent through Gonzalez, said that he "expects to address the legal aspects of a broad range of dynamic issues in the coming years, including how to: restore legislative, executive, and judicial adherence to the Constitution; restore respect for the traditional role of States in our federal system;

expand economic freedom and opportunity; reduce federal spending, taxing, and borrowing; protect traditional American values such as marriage, life, and religious liberty; and maintain the government's ability to protect America and its interests around the globe."

"The Meese Legal Center, like The Heritage Foundation of which it is one part, will continue to address issues by advancing five conservative principles: free enterprise, limited government, individual freedom, traditional American values, and a strong national defense," Addington wrote.

Heritage's number two is Phillip Truluck, a 30-year veteran of Heritage who was brought on years ago by outgoing president Ed Feulner.

Truluck is described on Heritage's website as a chief of operations who has overseen the organization's physical infrastructure. But a Heritage source who could not talk about Truluck's role on the record said that his influence on policy is significant. The policy vice presidents report directly to Truluck and meet with him at least weekly, the Heritage source said. But there is a sense, at least among some in the building who spoke to HuffPost, that DeMint and Addington are the two who will have their hands most firmly on the helm.

It is a noteworthy turn of events for a large and storied organization that rose to prominence in the early 80's as part of the "Reagan Revolution," but struggled to maintain the influence it had during its initial rise. Feulner came to Heritage in 1977, four years after the group's founding, and built it into a powerful D.C. presence, in part through pioneering the use of policy memos aimed at influencing legislation and federal branch policies.

Heritage also made a huge mark with its "Mandate for Leadership," a 1,093-page manifesto for Reagan's first 100 days, which it released in January 1981, the same month that the new Republican president took the oath of office. Heritage staff and contributors had been working on the more than 2,000 policy proposals since the summer of 1980, "when all eyes were fixed on the Presidential campaign and 'transition' was not quite the household word it has become," wrote Charles L. Heatherly in the digest's preface.

Many of the proposals were implemented by the Reagan administration in the president's first year in office, and Bill Bennett, who worked on the "Mandate," was recruited into the administration and subsequently rose to become secretary of education.

But since the Reagan years, even as Heritage grew in size and its budget continued to expand, its influence struggled to keep pace.

"Republicans, once they took the House and the Senate in the 90's, had their own staff. They were able to hire the equivalent of a Heritage or an [American Enterprise Institute] or a Cato Institute inside their [congressional] committees. So the need to have someone put together a chart for you wasn't there," said one influential conservative activist who has been active in Washington since the 80's, and asked not to be named in order to speak frankly about Heritage.

In recent years, Heritage suffered a political hiccup when President Obama adopted the idea of a mandate for individuals to obtain health insurance, a proposal that Heritage had supported.

"They've sort of walked away from that but it was hugely embarrassing. Romney wouldn't have made the mistake he made if he didn't think he had conservative cover," the conservative activist said.

When the news broke in December that DeMint was going to leave with four years left in his second term as a South Carolina senator to become president at Heritage, conservative author Ben Domenech wrote in his daily newsletter "The Transom" that the think tank with the staff of nearly 300 "could have gone in another direction, toward the increasingly ineffective and irrelevant old ways of writing white papers no one reads, criticizing a conservative view just to get in the papers, or regurgitating what the Republican Party nominee thinks about something, except with more numbers and charts."

"Faced with a decision between existing as an event planner for bored journalists or redoubling their efforts to alter the course of the nation's policy and politics, Heritage chose wisely," Domenech wrote.

DeMint will be the public face of the group, and will set strategy. Addington will, by all accounts, be highly influential from his legal perk, and will add a level of rigor that has not always been present. For example, a handful of Heritage staffers recently laughed with one another about the fact that their briefing memo on the fiscal cliff came out after a deal on the cliff had already been reached, and the legislation passed by Congress and signed by the president.

Juleanna Glover, who worked with Addington at the White House and is now a principal at former Attorney General John Ashcroft's firm in D.C., had high praise for her controversial ex-colleague.

"I know a lot of people who are not Addington fans, but I credit that a little to the fact that he is a very formidable adversary, and if he is not on the same side as you that would complicate your life considerably," Glover told HuffPost. "In the last few years I do think [Heritage] has waned a little bit. But Addington going there a few years ago meant to me that it was on its way back."

Glover noted that to expand their influence, Heritage staff have to "expand their policy briefing capability" and become less insular.

"You shouldn't walk into that auditorium in Heritage and find only right wing media types. What they need to do is start inviting the New York Times and others from the mainstream media and to produce arguments that will be the most impactful," Glover said. "Fox News running the material is not going to be ultimately impactful."

Whether DeMint and Addington bring that kind of change remains to be seen. The Republican activist said that what is clear is that the two men bring a battle-proven knowledge of how Washington works.

"Addington knows the inside the executive branch. DeMint knows the inside of the Senate, intimately," the Republican source said. "So what those two people bring is an

understanding of how you can move legislation, ideas through the bulky mechanisms of government, which is not always obvious to guys who write intellectual briefing papers."