

## Presidential Hopefuls: Newt Gingrich

**Former Speaker of the House of Representatives, a convert to Catholicism, has evolved on life issues.**

by CHARLOTTE HAYS 12/29/2011 [Comments \(1\)](#)

WASHINGTON — Newt Gingrich got in hot water with pro-lifers when he expressed his belief that human life begins after the implantation of an embryo, not at conception.

In a now famous interview on ABC News, Jake Tapper persisted, asking the Catholic convert if “implantation is the moment for you.” Gingrich went even further afield from the Catholic and pro-life position: “Implantation and successful implantation,” he replied.

As might be expected, the reaction from pro-lifers was intense and instantaneous.

The [Gingrich campaign](#) responded quickly to the controversy, issuing an early December statement that did not refer to the interview but affirmed that the candidate believes that human life begins at conception.

“I believe that every unborn life is precious, no matter how conceived,” the former Speaker of the House of Representatives said in the statement, putting himself on record as being against exceptions in the cases of rape or incest.

Georgia Right to Life president Daniel Becker took note of the candidate’s re-stated position. Becker told the Register that in the past his organization had never been able to support Gingrich — who represented Georgia’s 6th congressional district in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1979 until 1999 — because Gingrich previously allowed exceptions in the cases of rape and incest.

“This is a significant move for him and a tremendous thing for the right-to-life movement,” Becker said.

People familiar with the situation said that Gingrich held serious and substantive discussions with Catholic and pro-life leaders in the aftermath of the ABC interview.

“It strikes me that what happened [in the interview] was a bit of backsliding to his pre-Catholic self,” said Matthew Franck, director of the Simon Center on Religion and the Constitution at the Witherspoon Institute, which studies the moral foundations of free and democratic societies. “The position on implantation was a very longstanding one, and his reversion was reflexive and habitual. As soon as he was reminded of Catholic teaching, he came back to his Catholic sense of self. He’s getting better [on the life issues], and I believe his coming into the Church is part of the reason why.”

While serving in Congress, Gingrich attained a 98.6 favorable rating from the National Right to Life Committee. He has pledged to sign two pro-life executive orders his first day in office if elected to the presidency. One order would reauthorize President Ronald Reagan’s “Mexico City Policy,” which bars U.S. aid to non-government agencies or charities abroad that perform or promote abortion. The other would be the “conscience clause” to protect health professionals from performing “any action or procedure that he or she finds morally or ethically objectionable.”

Gingrich has signed the Susan B. Anthony List’s Pro-life Presidential Pledge, which calls for defunding Planned Parenthood, as well as signing into law a Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act, and nominating candidates for the Supreme Court who will apply the “original meaning” of the Constitution.

Gingrich has also signed Personhood USA’s Personhood Republican Presidential Candidate Pledge, which supports “the unalienable personhood of every American, from the moment of conception until natural death.” Signers promise to support a human life amendment to the Constitution and “endorse legislation to make clear that the 14th Amendment protections apply to unborn children.”

## **Marriage Issues**

Gingrich also appears to have reversed his previous stand on embryonic stem-cell research. In 2001, when President George W. Bush was weighing the issue, Gingrich said to reporter Paula Zahn on Fox News that he hoped Bush would “draw a sharp distinction between research on fetuses, which I think would be abhorrent and anti-human, and research on cells that are in fertility clinics that have never been in anyone’s body.”

However, at the GOP debate in December in Sioux City, Iowa, Gingrich said, “I am against any kind of experimentation on embryos,” which “should be considered life because by definition they’ve been conceived.”

A month before the Sioux City debate, *National Review*’s Ramesh Ponnuru noted a “different rhetorical emphasis” in Gingrich’s 2011 campaign pronouncements and

previous statements regarding embryonic stem-cell research but called for Gingrich to be more specific about the issue.

While Gingrich has recalibrated his position on pro-life issues, his approach to same-sex “marriage” has remained unchanged.

Back in 1996, he sponsored the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), upholding traditional marriage. And this year, when a homosexual activist challenged his position at a campaign rally, Gingrich responded that if same-sex “marriage” was a voter’s defining issue, Barack Obama was their candidate.

Gingrich opposes adoption by homosexual couples. But he does believe that certain practical “accommodations” can be made. In 2002, he told *Time Magazine*, “There are a lot of practical relationships that we ought to find a way to accommodate. If your partner ends up in the hospital, there ought to be some ability to visit that partner. But I am not in favor of creating the notion of gay ‘marriage’ or gay adoption.”

Gingrich has signed the National Organization for Marriage’s pledge to preserve traditional marriage. The pledge includes support for a Constitutional amendment defining marriage as the union of one man and one woman. Meanwhile, the candidate’s sister, Candace Gingrich-Jones, has announced that she is supporting President Obama.

Brian Brown, director of the National Organization for Marriage, notes “that Speaker Gingrich has thought deeply about the issue of same-sex ‘marriage’ and has spoken out about the effects of redefining marriage on religious liberty and the courts and has released a proposal on religious liberty that is very comprehensive and shows what is at stake, that people of faith have been targeted and religious organizations have suffered.”

Indeed, Gingrich has vowed that, if elected, his first executive order would be to establish a commission on religious freedom. Echoing the fears of the U.S. bishops, he has argued that the First Amendment is “being twisted” to “fit a post-modern world” and that “public expressions of faith in some quarters have gone from being normal to unacceptable.”

## **Stewardship Issues**

As the Republican hopeful with the longest history in the public spotlight, Gingrich’s economic plan and a voting record provide insights into his likely priorities as president.

While a member of Congress, Gingrich led the “Republican Revolution” of 1994, which ushered in the first Republican majority in the House in four decades. He famously tried to convince President George H.W. Bush not to renege on his “read-my-lips” promise and raise taxes. His voting record between 1979 and 1998 earned him a 61% favorable score (out of a possible 100%) from the National Taxpayers Union, which supports lower taxes. The average score for Republicans of that era was 56%.

Today, a cornerstone of his economic platform is halting the 2013 tax increases that would result from the end of Bush-era tax cuts. Gingrich believes that stopping the tax increase will promote stability in the economy and notes that job creation improved after the cuts were extended by Congress. Gingrich would make the rates permanent.

The free-market-oriented Club for Growth describes Gingrich in a presidential white paper as being “excellent on tax issues, except when he’s not.” While Gingrich has always favored lower taxes and a pro-growth agenda, he has also supported what the group calls “gimmicky” tax credits, including one to help people buy computers and another to help those who wanted to travel after 9/11, to promote desired behavior.

Gingrich’s economic policy proposals included an optional flat tax of 15%. Taxpayers who want to file under the current tax code (which would include the Bush tax cuts) would have that choice. But others could file their taxes “on a postcard,” as the campaign website puts it.

“The flat tax would generate growth,” American Enterprise Institute economist Kevin Hassett said. Hassett is critical of Gingrich’s plan to make the flat tax optional, however.

“I think a proposal like that is a bad idea because it doesn’t address the complexity of the current tax code. The flat tax should be mandatory. However, other than that, this is a solid proposal that would really help the economy,” Hassett added.

The Tax Foundation, which seeks to educate taxpayers about tax policy and the burden borne by them, gave Gingrich a C minus, partly because of the uncertainty generated by an optional flat tax plan.

William McBride, an economist at the Tax Foundation, pointed out that the Gingrich flat tax option preserves the earned income tax credit, the credit for charitable giving and the child credit.

“That amounts to a huge tax cut for everybody,” said McBride, who was critical of Gingrich for not being specific about what government cuts he would make to offset this.

One of Gingrich’s economic advisers is author Peter Ferrara, a senior fellow for entitlement and budget policy at the Heartland Institute and former staff member of the White House Office in the Reagan administration and an Associate Deputy U.S. Attorney General in the George H. W. Bush administration.

“Gingrich has a bold and specific vision that is a modernized version of Reaganomics and embodies the supply side agenda,” Ferrara told the Register. Indeed, economist Arthur Laffer, considered an architect of the Reagan economic policies, has endorsed Gingrich.

“Newt has the best plan for jobs and economic growth of any candidate in the field,” Laffer argued, when he announced his endorsement on Dec. 27. Supporters of supply-

side economics contend that tax cuts, including low individual and corporate taxes, will promote investment and create prosperity.

Ferrara said that Gingrich's plan for entitlement reform rests on "structural reforms, no benefit cuts, and market incentives."

### **Pie in the sky?**

Gingrich supports reducing regulation, which he believes are obstacles to economic growth. He advocates repealing both the Sarbanes-Oxley Act, which he blames for discouraging investment, and the Dodd-Frank Law, which he says is harming small banks.

Like all GOP candidates, Gingrich has pledged to overturn the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act — known as Obamacare. He has attacked former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney, a frontrunner in the Republican field for president, because the health-care program he created in Massachusetts has a mandate that requires citizens to purchase health insurance. It is often considered a state-level version of the similar mandate in Obamacare.

Gingrich was embarrassed recently when *The Wall Street Journal* unearthed a 2006 newsletter published by Gingrich in which he praised the Romney plan he now criticizes. Gingrich hailed the Romney plan as "the most interesting effort to solve the uninsured problem in America today."

Gingrich, however, was not without criticism of the plan even in the 2006 newsletter, including his concern that the "exhaustive" list of conditions that must be covered could bankrupt the program.

Still, Tad DeHaven, a scholar at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, isn't sold on Gingrich's commitment to small government. "I don't see him as someone who can be trusted to pursue a limited government agenda," DeHaven said.

Kevin Hassett of the American Enterprise Institute disagrees.

"The one thing Newt brings to the table that the others don't have," said Hassett, "is that he would have the understanding of Congress not only to get Obamacare repealed but to get an alternative passed. It is going to take a lot of strategizing, and Newt is the guy to do that."

*Register correspondent Charlotte Hays writes from Washington.*

*The Register has been profiling candidates who are vying for the White House in 2012: [Michele Bachmann](#) [Ron Paul](#) [Rick Perry](#) [Mitt Romney](#) [Rick Santorum](#) The series has also included these candidates, who have since suspended their campaigns: [Herman Cain](#) [Tim Pawlenty](#)*

