



[Newt Gingrich is no conservative](#)

By [Gene Healy](#)

November 15, 2011

Has it really come to this? Newt Gingrich as the conservative alternative to Mitt Romney? That's what many in the punditocracy have proclaimed as the former speaker of the House has surged recently in the polls. Yet a look at his record reveals that Newt is hardly the "anti-Mitt" -- he's Mitt Romney with more baggage and bolder hand gestures.

Every Gingrich profile proclaims that he's a dazzling "ideas man," a "one-man think tank." It seems that, if you clamor long enough about "big ideas," people become convinced you actually have them. But most of Gingrich's policy ideas over the last decade have been tepidly conventional and consistent with the Big Government, Beltway Consensus.

Gingrich's campaign nearly imploded this summer when he dismissed Rep. Paul Ryan's, R-Wis., Medicare reform plan as "right-wing social engineering." But that gaffe was a window into Gingrich's irresponsible approach toward entitlements.

In 2003, Gingrich stumped hard for President George W. Bush's prescription drug bill, which has added about \$17 trillion to Medicare's unfunded liabilities. "Every conservative member of Congress should vote for this Medicare bill," Newt urged.

And in his 2008 book "Real Change," he endorsed an individual mandate for health insurance. In a 2006 piece for Human Events, Gingrich offered House Republicans "11 Ways to Say: 'We're Not Nancy Pelosi.'" Point seven proposed a Solyndra-on-steroids industrial policy devoted to "developing more clean coal solutions, investing in a conversion to a hydrogen economy" and more. It's not clear why the former madame speaker would complain.

It's also unclear why anybody looking to distance himself from Pelosi would plop down on a love seat with her to call for government action on climate change -- as Gingrich did in a 2008 television commercial. It was a season of bipartisan chumminess for Newt. "Kerry and Gingrich Hugging Trees -- and (Almost) Each Other," the Washington Post described a 2007 global warming event Gingrich headlined with Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass.

On foreign affairs, Gingrich's ideas are a little less conventional, but his apocalyptic saber rattling hardly instills confidence. "We need a calm, reasoned dialogue about the genuine possibility of a second Holocaust," he told an American Enterprise Institute audience in 2007.

In 2009, he proposed zapping a North Korean missile site with laser weapons. ("Beam me up, Mr. Speaker!" as former Rep. James Traficant, D-Ohio, used to say in the '90s.)

There's no denying that Newt is smart, but there's a zany, Cliff Clavin aspect to his intellect. At times, Gingrich, who's written more than 150 book reviews on Amazon.com, sounds like a guy who read way too much during a long prison stretch.

The former speaker's immense self-regard is evident in one of the exhibits to a 1997 House Ethics Committee report on him. In a handwritten 1992 note to himself, he wrote: "Gingrich -- primary mission, Advocate of civilization, definer of civilization, Teacher of the rules of civilization, arouser of those who fan civilization, ... leader (possibly) of the civilizing forces." Whew!

When he's not leading the assembled armies of civilization in a Thermopylae-style battle against "Obama's Secular Socialist Machine," Newt does a little consulting on the side.

In 2009, the ethanol lobby paid his firm \$312,000, and in 2006, the former speaker scored a \$300,000 fee from Freddie Mac, one of the government-sponsored enterprises that helped pump up the disastrous housing bubble.

They sought "my advice as an historian," Gingrich later explained. (Maybe they were impressed by all those Amazon reviews).

Newt may be a poor fit for the role of "anti-Romney," but you can say one thing for him: He knows how to play the Washington Game.