

The Washington Post

11/16/2011

Gingrich: The ultimate shape-shifting, get-rich artist

By [Jennifer Rubin](#)

"This is the bad Newt." That was the reaction of a contemporary of Newt Gingrich's in Congress, commenting on the former speaker of the House's insistence that mortgage giant Freddie Mac hired him only for ["strategic advice."](#)

Indeed, it is Gingrich's ability to convince himself of his own self-righteousness while behaving in disreputable ways that has always been his downfall. Asked earlier this year why he committed adultery in the midst of the Bill Clinton/Monica Lewinsky scandal, Gingrich [infamously replied](#), "There's no question at times of my life, partially driven by how passionately I felt about this country, that I worked far too hard and things happened in my life that were not appropriate." The noblest of excuses for the seediest conduct.

And likewise, Gingrich likely believes his "strategic" advice for more than a million dollars was something other than it was, the widespread game of engaging influential Democrats and Republicans to keep them from lobbying *against* Freddie Mac and fellow mortgage guarantor Fannie Mae.

In his response today to the Bloomberg story [documenting \\$1.6 million in fees he received](#), the Associated Press reports, Gingrich told reporters in Iowa that every American should be interested in expanding housing opportunities." This is madness in the post-2008 financial meltdown era, the sort of line that Freddie and Fannie gave to Congress and the public to justify massive lending to uncreditworthy borrowers. That Gingrich would say such a thing *now* only highlights his complete lack of self-awareness.

The AP explains that Gingrich, despite his self-image, was simply one of many in Freddie Mac's stable:

Gingrich's hiring was a small — but because of his name, important — piece of a much larger initiative by the company. Government-sponsored Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae have long been embraced by Democratic politicians in Washington as champions of affordable housing, but they have had few supporters on the political right.

Freddie Mac executive Hollis McLoughlin sought to remedy that by hiring a stable of conservative consultants, including Gingrich.

Before Gingrich was hired, Freddie Mac paid \$2 million to a Republican consulting firm in hopes of killing legislation that would have regulated and trimmed both companies. The legislation died without coming to a vote in the Senate. But the danger of regulation wasn't dead, so Freddie Mac hired more consultants, Gingrich among them.

My colleague [Charles Lane](#), in a dead-on post that documents how Gingrich's harsh rhetoric conflicts with his personal association with the lending giant, posits: "The dictionary doesn't include a printable adjective to describe the former House Speaker's hypocrisy. Maybe we need a new one. How does 'Gingrichian' sound?"

Whatever you call it, Gingrich, as we know, can shift his shape at the drop of a hat. Last week he was the maverick outsider who was going to reinvent Washington. Today he says, "It reminds people that I know a great deal about Washington." Yes, he knows the Congressional ethics laws from the position of a violator, the Washington influence-buying game from the position of an exorbitantly paid consultant, and the arguments for the individual mandate, cap-and-trade and ethanol subsidies from one who held such positions at various times.

There was a telling example in the last debate. In Congress Gingrich was a well-regarded internationalist who shot down conservatives attempt to zero out foreign aid. But the Rick Perry-Herman Cain know-nothing appeal to eliminate foreign aid was so tempting and so crowd-pleasing that Gingrich readily jumped on board. Whatever the times demand, you see.

Just as Gingrich can now convince himself he was more than an influence peddler, he can also portray himself as a principled conservative. Unfortunately for him, those who are principled conservatives are having none of that. [Gene Healy of the Cato Institute](#) writes that "most of Gingrich's policy ideas over the last decade have been tepidly conventional and consistent with the Big Government, Beltway Consensus." A few examples:

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.

Even more damning, and more revealing, is this nugget which so perfectly encapsulates the megalomania for which he was infamous: "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.' " Such a leading light, of course, couldn't be merely a grubby influence-broker!