

WEBCommentary Contributor

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Date: February 22, 2012

Newt, We Hardly Knew Ye (Part 2) **Will the *Real* Newt Gingrich Please Stand Up?**

Many know "for sure" that Republican presidential candidate Newton Leroy Gingrich is a "Reagan conservative", something he repeats often on the campaign trail. But is it so?

"It ain't what you know that gets you into trouble. It's what you know for sure that just ain't so." - [Mark Twain](#)

Many know "for sure" that Republican presidential candidate Newton Leroy Gingrich is a "Reagan conservative", [something he repeats often on the campaign trail](#). But is it so?'

Gingrich's claimed ties to President Reagan and conservatism are strongly refuted by Gingrich's [own history](#). As a freshman in Congress, [Gingrich](#) was no more important to passing President Reagan's agenda than any other new member – he had but one vote. Also belying Gingrich's claim is the fact he is not mentioned in President Reagan's autobiography. In fact, President Reagan only mentions Gingrich once in his diary, describing how he rejected the freshman's idea because it would cripple the military. That's it. One mention in 784 pages. A biographer of President Reagan who covered his administration as a journalist, [Lou Cannon](#), said, "I'm not sure Reagan even knew who Gingrich was." FactCheck^[1] did a text search of President Reagan's speeches, public statements, and other writings. They found a total of seven mentions of Gingrich by President Reagan, generally pro forma when the

president was in Georgia. That doesn't sound like an integral part of the Reagan administration to me.

I won't guess why Michael Reagan chose to endorse Gingrich. It's important to note that he didn't live with his father in the White House, nor does his bio show that he held any position in his father's administration. Therefore, I give much more weight to the comments of [Pat Buchanan](#), President Reagan's Communications Director and senior advisor. Buchanan recently said that in the Reagan White House, Gingrich was viewed as somewhat of a political opportunist; not to be trusted. [George H.W. Bush](#), President Reagan's V.P., made similar observations about Gingrich. [Peggy Noonan](#), a former Reagan speech writer, spoke to the fears of many when she described Gingrich as, "...a human hand grenade who walks around with his hand on the pin..." She also described him as, "ethically dubious," "egomaniacal," "harebrained and impulsive."

[Several notable figures](#) from the Reagan administration have endorsed presidential candidate Mitt Romney. [John Bolton](#), assistant attorney general under Reagan, endorsed Romney in spite of [Gingrich publicly asking](#) him to be the Secretary of State in a Gingrich administration. Former Reagan Chief Domestic Policy Advisor and current President of the *Family Research Council*, Gary Bauer, [endorsed](#) presidential candidate Rick Santorum. Former Ambassador [Rich Williams](#) says Gingrich exaggerates his "backbencher" role in the Reagan administration. He was joined by Former Ambassador Gerald Carmen, Secretary John Lehman, and Under Secretary Dov Zakheim in a conference call wherein they discussed Gingrich's "constant" criticisms of then President Reagan.

Perhaps this is why Gingrich felt the need to take the [1995 remarks of former First Lady Nancy Reagan](#) out of context to falsely bolster his Reagan credentials. In context, she didn't endorse Gingrich any more than any other member of the 104th Congress. That this event occurred [before](#) an [ethics investigation](#) ended after

Gingrich [admitted guilt](#), (thereby avoiding a public hearing), and paid \$300,000.00; later was found to have committed other [offenses](#) but not punished; and before Gingrich left another seriously ill wife, leaves one to wonder if Mrs. Reagan would have self-deleted Gingrich's name if asked to read the same remarks in 1999 instead of 1995.

You see, [Gingrich's first wife](#), Jackie, who had worked to put Gingrich through college, including graduate school, and who was [instrumental](#) in his first election win, was dealing with uterine cancer and facing another surgery when he left her after 18 years to marry his mistress, Marianne. Gingrich actually *admits* to [arguing](#) with Jackie, (reportedly about the terms of their divorce), while she recovered from surgery. His second wife, Marianne, who stood by Gingrich through his ethics troubles and lean financial years, had recently been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis when he left her after 18 years to marry another mistress, Calista. One has to wonder if it's the 18 years or the life-threatening illness that causes him to bolt. (*Saturday Night Live* opted for the latter, [starting at 2:52 here](#).) Gingrich ridiculously [claimed](#) his adultery was "...partially driven by how passionately [he] felt about this country..." So much for his reputation for [taking responsibility](#), yet another thing that just isn't so.

A former friend and Gingrich campaign treasurer, L.H. Carter, quotes [Gingrich as saying](#) at the time of his divorce from Jackie, "You know and I know that she's not young enough or pretty enough to be the wife of a president." Carter also [mentions](#) a local church collecting funds and food for Gingrich's wife and daughters as a result of Gingrich's failure to provide support after abandoning them. Yet Gingrich [hypocritically](#) claims to be a champion of family values, "[historic American values](#)," and "cultural ethics."

It is truly a sad commentary on our society that Gingrich's treatment of his wives and children is ignored by many voters to whom, apparently, family values - and even [character](#) - do not matter. [Jennifer Rubin](#) may have summed him up best

when she wrote, "With Gingrich you never have the peace of mind that you've gotten to the bottom of his well of sleaze."

Gingrich's hypocrisy is not limited to family values as he also now claims the Goldwater mantle, despite his support of [Rockefeller](#) in that race. Ever perverse, Gingrich has labeled Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney a "[Rockefeller Republican](#)." Pot, meet kettle. Of course, living up to Pat Buchanan's description of him, now that it's politically expedient [Gingrich claims](#) to have supported Goldwater. But then again, he claims a lot of things that simply aren't true or are distorted, at best.

Gingrich is widely credited with engineering the Republican takeover of the House for the first time in 40 years. But is it so? Should we also give current speaker, John Boehner, credit for "engineering" the takeover of the House in 2010, giving Republicans [the largest legislative majority since 1928](#)? Republicans picked up 60 house seats in 2010 and Gingrich "engineered" 54 house pick-ups in 1994. In both elections, there can be little doubt that voters were influenced much more by the bad behavior of the other party than any one member of Congress. In fact, according to another presidential candidate who was there in 1994, Rick Santorum, Gingrich was not part of the [fight against democratic corruption](#) that helped sway voters. Gingrich's many years of "engineering" primarily consisted of self-promotion through [verbal-bomb-throwing and confrontation](#). Sound familiar?

The Contract with America, dubbed the "[Contract with Clinton](#)" by Dan Quayle, was deemed a failure by the CATO Institute. In 1995 [George Will](#) wrote about a Brookings Institute examination of the Contract, "...Without enactment of the contract, they say, America will enter the next century with a federal government spending several trillion dollars annually. And if 'every jot and tittle' of the contract is approved, America will still enter the next century with several trillion dollars of federal government" spending. Will goes on to quote the authors, "Viewed historically, the contract represents the final

consolidation of the bedrock domestic policies and programs of the New Deal, the Great Society, the post-Second World War defense establishment."

Many believe the Contract was nothing more than a publicity stunt, particularly for Gingrich. A quick review of its [terms](#) may cause many with even a scant knowledge of history to agree. Gingrich originally insisted the terms be weakened, and refused to include some issues important to many conservatives, including social issues. Then, after it was ratified by Republicans and accepted by the American people, behind-the-scenes Gingrich undermined most of the Contract's promises. He [manipulated legislation](#) to ensure that term limits and a balanced budget amendment would never become law. He also watered down the *Property Rights Protection Act* and did other things to ensure there would be no meaningful reform of environmental laws during [his tenure](#). Furthermore, Gingrich didn't cut spending; it actually [increased](#) each year Gingrich led the House of Representatives. By 1997, the spending caps called for in the Contract had been abandoned. The 1997 budget deal also increased government, adding new entitlements including S-CHIP, then the greatest expansion of taxpayer-financed health insurance since medicaid was implemented in the 1960's.

Under Gingrich's leadership earmarks also ballooned from \$7.8 billion in 1994, (his first year as speaker, primarily from legislation approved prior to his leadership), to a high of \$14.5 billion in 1997. This almost doubling of earmarks actually was "engineered" by Gingrich to help re-elect Republicans using taxpayer dollars, according to his [Proposed Principles for Analyzing Each Appropriations Bill](#) memo. The fact of the matter is, where the Contract was kept, or successful, "[was very often in spite of Gingrich](#)," not because of his leadership.

[Citizens Against Government Waste](#) wrote "...earmarks exploded under Republicans, beginning in 1995..." and credits Gingrich with being "...one of the driving factors for the dramatic increase..." They also wrote that Gingrich's strategy

of using pork to ensure re-election "...led to the incarceration of several members of Congress and numerous lobbyists and Bush administration officials who got caught up in Jack Abramoff's criminal activities related to what Abramoff called 'the earmark favor factory.' In 2006, it helped bring an end to the Republican majority in Congress." Of course, Gingrich was long gone from Congress by then – and from taking responsibility for what his strategy wrought.

Gingrich frequently claims to have balanced the budget for "four straight years." This, again, just isn't so. When income (tax revenue) and expenses (government spending) are the same, the budget is balanced. When income is greater than expenses, a surplus is left. Since Gingrich actually increased spending during his reign, balancing the budget or "creating" a surplus happened despite his leadership. [The surplus was actually created](#) by significant revenue increases, caused primarily by large gains in the stock market, the "dot com" bubble, and investors paying taxes on their gains. Furthermore, the "four straight years" of balanced budgets were [1998 – 2001](#). Gingrich left Congress in January 1999 after losing seats for two election cycles in a row and a [revolt of conservatives](#) who felt Gingrich had abandoned the principles that got them elected.

Long before Gingrich announced a presidential bid, one of those conservatives, Dr. Tom Coburn, wrote [Breach of Trust: How Washington Turns Outsiders Into Insiders](#). In Coburn's view, one of the greatest threats to our country is career politicians who worry more about the next election than the effect of legislation they pass – or don't pass. (Gingrich served 20 years before his ouster.) [Coburn](#) described Gingrich as "...like a whipped dog who still barked, yet cowered, in Clinton's presence." Referring to Gingrich's resignation, Coburn wrote, "...it was Gingrich who had drained the lifeblood from the Republican revolution." Perhaps even more damning, Coburn wrote, "Gingrich's vitriolic response to us... confirmed to us that he was willing to trade our principles for a short term political advantage over the Democrats." At a 2010 town

hall meeting, Coburn said of Gingrich, "He's the last person I'd vote for for president of the United States."

Gingrich also likes to credit himself with [welfare reform](#), the bill written and ushered through committee and Congress by [Rick Santorum](#) and E. Clay Shaw. Rather than being central to its passage, Gingrich's "...[bloviating about orphanages and child janitors](#)..." actually made it more difficult to get the bill through. Gingrich has a long history of stepping all over the party's message, both in and out of Congress. This is just one example.

Of course, Gingrich does deserve some credit for the legislation he helped create and allowed to be brought to a vote while he was the speaker. He has also earned some of the credit for the Republican Revolution that helped sweep so many Republicans into Congress in 1994. However, he doesn't deserve nearly as much credit as he gives to himself. But while crediting his successes, we must also consider how much he undermined conservatives, while publicly claiming to lead them. We must also consider that Gingrich's main objective was then, and always will be, *self*-promotion.

Stay tuned for the next installment again proving that so much of what is "known" about Gingrich (and particularly what he says about himself) – just isn't so.

Lin Franklin

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