

Does GOP Really Want Newt?

By COKIE ROBERTS
And STEVEN V. ROBERTS
Universal Uclick Syndicate

We've covered Newt Gingrich for 30 years, and there has always been two sides to the man. The Good Newt and the Bad Newt. Towering talent and awesome arrogance. Boundless energy and porous ethical boundaries. A firm belief in his own destiny, and a cynical conviction that distortion and deception are justified in the pursuit of that destiny.



Gingrich

Now Republicans in Florida and elsewhere have to decide: Is he worth the gamble? Does the good outweigh the bad? Can they afford the risk? Gingrich is a brilliant political strategist. He engineered the Republican

takeover of the House in 1994 after 40 years in the minority. Long before Twitter and Facebook, he understood how to use new technologies to bypass the mainstream media and speak directly to conservative cadres across the country.

He made cassette tapes containing the gospel according to Newt and urged young activists (like Rick Santorum) to play them in the car. He used satellite uplinks to address gatherings of the faithful in hotel ballrooms. He organized like-minded lawmakers to speak regularly on the House floor, and while the chamber might have been empty, the C-SPAN cameras were on — and watched by potential recruits in the hinterlands.

Above all, he understood the power of talk radio and its ability to reach the "dittoheads" (as Rush Limbaugh's followers dubbed themselves) who could provide the shock troops for his revolution.

It wasn't just how Gingrich communi-

cated that was so shrewd; it was the language he used. Then as now, he understood the resentment many Americans felt toward the "elites" — pundits, bankers, intellectuals, secularists — who looked down on their values and lifestyles. Like Ronald Reagan, he realized that the future of the Republican Party depended on members of the Elks Club, not the country club; on mall shoppers, not Wall Streeters; on churchgoers, not jet-setters.

Yet Gingrich has never been a rigid ideologue. On immigration, for example, he's far more reasonable than Mitt Romney, acknowledging that undocumented workers who have been here for a generation, building lives and families, will not — and should not — be deported. He worked with Bill Clinton on welfare reform and had such trouble with the hardliners in his own party that he contemptuously referred to them as the "perfectionist caucus."

But — and there's always a "but" with

Newt — his speakership was largely a disaster. He was a great guerrilla fighter, but he couldn't run the palace after he moved in. Santorum is correct when he says, "It was an idea a minute, no discipline, no ability to be able to pull things together."

Gingrich has always cut corners with money, and no matter what he says now, the record is clear: He was reprimanded by the House (the only speaker in history to suffer such a penalty) for using tax-exempt funds to advance his political aims. Romney is accurate when he says of Gingrich, "At the end of four years, he had to resign in disgrace."

Perhaps the most damaging charge against Gingrich is his cynicism. His second wife, Marianne, recalls him making a ringing speech about family values just days after saying he wanted to keep both his mistress and his marriage. Newt, she told *Esquire*, "believes that what he says in public and how he lives don't have to

be connected." That impulse to deviousness — and hypocrisy — taints his political life as well. He's running as a foe of the Washington establishment when he's spent the last generation as a card-carrying, full-blooded member of the very tribe he's trying to demonize. As former rival Tim Pawlenty puts it, "To suggest that he's the outsider simply defies the facts."

More seriously, this master of language knows exactly what he's doing when he derides Barack Obama as the "food stamp president" and accuses the president of following the ideas of street organizer Saul Alinsky.

Gingrich is not a racist, but he is clearly indulging in vile innuendo. His followers know that "food stamp president" is code for pandering to blacks, and "Alinsky" calls up fears of foreign (and vaguely Jewish) influences.

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Thought for Today "Bow down thine ear, and hear the words of the wise, and apply thine heart unto my knowledge." Proverbs 22:17

More Of The Same Bilge

Marietta Daily Journal

The State of the Union address, regardless of who is president, is usually an overly long and, frankly, not very interesting recitation of administrative accomplishments, shout-outs to worthy citizens for their lady's seats and an assurance that the economy is on the mend — but if Congress only does its job, it will be even greater.

President Barack Obama's address was largely devoid of substance. He laid down a largely about the fall of the Roman Empire.

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The president said there were no real penalties for financial firms that are repeat offenders of fraud: "So pass legislation that makes these penalties for fraud count." Annual, he left out any need to find those who are equally culpable for the same offenses.

Let's get it

simple rule: If you receive a fine, you should be required to pay it. So what if the fine is small? It's still a fine. Congress to weak.

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Americans

when you are saying

that's wrong for

Let The Good Times Roll

Columbus Ledger-Enquirer

Our recent editorial on the need for an independent ethics commission — i.e., one not appointed by and answerable to the Georgia Legislature — concluded that "if the General Assembly still wants a role in the ethics process, then enacting some limits on what they can take from lobbyists would be a good start."

As the late Gilda Radner's ditty "Saturday Night Live" character Emily Litella might say: Never mind.

Response to the idea of capping lobbyist "generosity" such as "educational" meals, trips and sporting events in exchange for political "access" seems to have fallen somewhere between negligible and laughable on the legislative response meter.

Citizen groups from across the political spectrum are calling on the honorables of the Georgia General Assembly to show some good faith with their constituents, especially at a time of steep budget cuts and sanctimonious political lip service about fiscal austerity. Every state that borders Georgia has at least a token ban or limit on lobbyist gifts. Georgia has none.

We're not talking a bread-and-water regimen here. Legislation proposed by Rep. Tommy Smith, R-Nicholls, would limit lobbyist and PAC spending on a lawmaker to \$100 and out-of-town travel at \$500 ... per event. Transportation costs would be, as they are now, unlimited.

There was not one single GOP co-sponsor. Not one. Democrats likewise scattered to the four

winds, as Rep. Mary Margaret Oliver, D-Decatur, was the lone member of her party's House caucus to support it.

Kay Godwin of Georgia Conservatives in Action spoke for a lot of Georgians, conservative and otherwise, when she said: "If this is what politics has come to in Georgia, then this is a sad day."

Maybe this is where true nonpartisanship begins — with an unlikely alliance of politically and ideologically disparate people, united in disgust at official contempt for the voting rabble.

Godwin's organization wants this legislation. So does the Georgia Alliance for Ethics Reform. So do Common Cause, Georgia Watch, the Georgia Tea Party Patriots, the state Christian Coalition and Georgia Right to Life.

You couldn't get those groups to agree on a lunch menu, but they agree on this: A state where special-interest greasing of politicians is a virtual blank check is an embarrassment and a disgrace.

We know Josh McKoon of Columbus and at least a few others on the Senate side have a sense of how tawdry the political status quo has become. It is possible enough others might be shamed into reform?

Well, let's start at the top: Listen to House Majority Leader Larry O'Neal, who said the lack of support "might mean there's some particular part of it or portion of it that is objectionable or impossible to accomplish."

Oh. Never mind.



Deja Vu! Obama's Vision Unchanged

By Dr. MARK W. HENDRICKSON
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I had the honor of attending the State of the Union address as the guest of Congressman Mike Kelly, R-Pa., last Tuesday. Here are my impressions in abbreviated form:

The address seemed more like a rewrite of previous speeches than an original work. Sure, there were new anecdotes and fresh twists on old policy proposals, but the essential narrative remains: My predecessor messed up; none of your problems are my fault; I can make life fairer if Congress will approve my plans to increase federal spending and take more money from Peter to help Paul.



Obama

Even President Obama's partisan allies seem to have wearied of the "same old, same old." I was struck by how often the Democratic applause seemed tepid and tentative. (It sounded louder on the TV replay — amazing how electronics can create an illusion.) Statements that would have elicited enthusiastic cheers three years ago were met with uneasy silence. Yes, Democrats stood and clapped when the president mentioned one of their pet causes, but their efforts seemed forced, neither heartfelt nor genuine.

The president started and finished by paying tribute to our military and stating the truism that Americans can accomplish great things when we are united. Bravo. But in between those patriotic book-ends was a dismal speech. Could the American people possibly be ignorant or gullible enough to accept all the fallacies and half-truths in this speech? Here is a sampling:

The president claimed that three million jobs have been created in the last 22 months. Perhaps. But how many jobs have ended during that same time period? Labor force participation is still trending down, and unemployment and underemployment remain so severe that 19 percent of Americans between the ages of 25 and 34 are living with their parents. These are not signs of a healthy job market.

President Obama promised no more bailouts, yet one of his pet causes is the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau that authorizes bailouts of "too big to fail" financial institutions. He promised no more handouts, yet in the same speech proposed handouts and subsidies to certain businesses, homeowners, etc.

He proposed increased government control over capital and banks. He wants to require banks to refinance mortgages on terms set by the government.

He also proposed a Financial Crimes Unit to combat fraud. (Are the FBI, the Federal Reserve, and some 116 federal agencies with oversight of finan-

cial institutions not enough?) If the president succeeds in establishing an anti-fraud squad, will it crack down on the entities that promise to fund retirement programs but instead borrow money to cover current disbursements?

That is what the Social Security System is doing because of President Obama's 2 percent cut in withholding from wages. Will Uncle Sam be exempt from oversight by the Financial Crimes Unit?

Even Obama's choice of words was telling. He spoke of his desire to "consolidate" the federal bureaucracy, not "shrink" it.

At one point, Obama remarked that Americans are "cynical" about Washington. His address helps explain why. His talk of unity was belied by his second-class treatment of Republicans during the address. The Democrats had printed copies of Obama's text — a simple courtesy denied to Republicans.

After raising the American flag and extolling the great accomplishments of our military forces, President Obama made it clear that the only federal spending he is serious about cutting is military spending. To add insult to injury, he will order the U.S. Navy to waste part of its (reduced) budget purchasing overpriced and less reliable green energy.

Imposing politically correct energy on our armed forces illustrates how obsessed this president is with centralizing economic planning. It reminds me of the Chevy Volt fiasco. First, Team Obama coerced GM into making a high-cost, uneconomical car that few people want; then it boosted the Volt's sales figures by directing federal departments to purchase Volts.

Now, after spending billions to artificially increase the supply of high-cost, uneconomical wind and solar energy, President Obama will use his authority as commander-in-chief to artificially increase demand for green energy. First, the president uses taxpayer money to subsidize an inferior, unwanted product, then he uses taxpayer money to buy it — a double whammy.

Appealing to our national pride, President Obama promised not to cede dominance in green energy production to China and Germany. Excuse me, but who wants to be Number One at losing money? Please, let the Germans and Chinese take over those money-losing boondoggles. With over \$15 trillion of national debt, we can't afford them.

President Obama's SOTU address demonstrated that he has no intention of altering his course. If you're satisfied with his policies over the last three years, maybe he's your man. If you think we need to try something different, he's probably not.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Dr. Hendrickson is an adjunct faculty member, economist, and fellow for economic and social policy with The Center for Vision & Values at Grove City College.