



The Legacy of Newt's "Revolution"

The French Revolution was a "revolution." So was the Russian Revolution. America's "revolutionary war" was really a war for independence, a war of secession, based on many of the same principles the Confederate States of America claimed in the Southern war for independence, known as the Civil War. And it is hardly surprising, since the "revolutionary" document known as the Declaration of Independence was written by Thomas Jefferson, a Virginian and a slave owner, that neither Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederate States of America, nor Thomas Jefferson considered themselves revolutionaries. They were fighting for rights they believed were theirs, first as Englishmen and then as citizens of the United States — rights that belonged to them as free men, both by law and by custom and tradition.



But what are we to make of the "Reagan Revolution"? Supposedly it changed the attitude of Americans about big, omnipotent government that would take care of us. Americans bought the conservative rhetoric and ignored the bigger government that the "Reagan Revolution" produced. Nearly half a century after the conservative movement launched the 1964 presidential campaign of Sen. Barry Goldwater, the gold standard for conservatism, the icon of the Republican Party remains Ronald "Saint Gipper the Great" Reagan, alleged to have been the most conservative president since Calvin Coolidge. So Reagan, with a Republican Senate for six of his eight years in the White House and a conservative coalition of Republicans and "boll weevil" Southern Democrats in the South, merely presided over a doubling of the federal budget and a tripling of the national debt. Imagine what Walter Mondale might have done if he had been elected.

Well, we just didn't have enough good, conservative Republicans in Congress, I guess. So along came Newt. Gingrich, that is. The Georgian backbencher who had voted to create the federal Department of Education in 1979, then ran with Reagan on a national Republican platform calling for its abolition a year later, had become House Minority Leader by the time of the midterm elections in 1994, just two years after Bill Clinton had won the White House and Democrats retained control of Congress. But Newt had a brainstorm, and wisely turned the 1994 congressional elections into a national referendum on the presidency of Clinton. With Bill's First Lady, Hillary, masterminding a draconian national healthcare plan that would have done credit to Joe Stalin, Republican House candidates, led by Newt, ran on the Contract with America, and the GOP swept the table, winning back the Senate and winning control of the House for the first time since the Republicans came in with "Ike" in 1952.

But when the dust had cleared and voters looked at the Republican contract, we discovered it was



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mostly procedural stuff and [nothing of real substance](#). It promised not term limits, but a vote on term limits. We still don't have term limits for Congress members, and many of those who ran on and were elected on that pledge managed to stay around for several more terms, even while chiding their opponents for refusing to take the term limits "pledge." We were promised not a balanced budget, but a vote on a constitutional amendment to require a balanced budget. (Congress was to say to the states and the people: "Stop us before we spend some more.") No departments of government were eliminated or even reduced in spending. The Departments of Education and Energy somehow survived and thrived, despite all the Republican promises to eliminate both agencies. The Republican Congress and the Democrat Bill Clinton did manage to balance the budget for a few years, but that was due in part to creative bookkeeping and to the dot.com bubble that kept the economy going and the stream of revenue flowing abundantly. When the bubble burst, the old deficits resurfaced, with America's resources depleted by the heavy borrowing and thinly disguised thefts from more trust funds than most of us knew we had.

Yet Republicans still talk about the "Gingrich Revolution." Republicans don't do "revolutions" very well. They no longer do banking very well or wage war competently either, and they don't balance budgets at all. "Newtsie's" little "revolution" was written in sand and washed out by the tide of red ink. Sand castles at the shoreline have longer life spans.

One of the promises of that so-called revolution was that the House would attach to each piece of legislation a citation showing where in the Constitution of the United States the authority lies for the spending or the regulation authorized by the bill. Gee, how did that work out?

Well, former Sen. Judd Gregg from New Hampshire was already in the Senate when Newt was making that promise for the House Republicans, so "Jolly" Judd can't be held responsible for legislation that exceeds all constitutional duties and mandates. Still, Gregg spent 10 years in the U.S. House of Representatives and 18 years in the U.S. Senate, with four years as Governor of New Hampshire sandwiched in between. And Gregg was and yet remains a savvy politician. He, too, ran with Reagan and the first President Bush on platforms that called for the abolition of the Departments of Energy and Education. Then during the first year of the presidency of the second President Bush, Gregg co-authored with Sen. Edward M. Kennedy the No Child Left Behind Act that throws more federal education dollars at the states in return for "accountability" measured in test scores. And Gregg managed to corral enough federal dollars for New Hampshire institutions of higher education to get a few buildings named after his "fiscally conservative" self at the University of New Hampshire and elsewhere.

Gregg, now a retired Senator, showed up at the University of New Hampshire School of Law a few days ago and gave an impressive presentation about our fiscal crisis. He had enough charts and graphs to make H. Ross Perot jealous. But when I asked him where in the Constitution he found the authority for a federal role in elementary and secondary education, I received from him a stare nearly as blank as Al Gore's was when I put the same question to him in the year 2000. And why not? Gregg played Gore in debate rehearsals for George W. Bush in 2000. At times it appears he is still playing Gore.

"Well, perhaps the chief justice can help me out," Gregg said, gesturing lamely in the direction of John Broderick, former chief justice of New Hampshire's Supreme Court and now the dean and president of its law school. Broderick said nothing, exercising his right to remain silent. (That's in Amendment Five, Judd.) So Gregg merely noted that the federal role had never been ruled unconstitutional and the federal government, after all, provides funding for the schools. Of course, the Congress should not be



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appropriating funds, contingent upon its regulations being followed, for institutions the federal government has no authority to regulate.

Clearly, Gregg as lawmaker had no desire to let the Constitution be his guide. If all questions of constitutionality were to be left to the courts, as the first as well as final arbiters, why would we even require legislators and Presidents to take oaths to uphold the Constitution? Gregg is another example of how evanescent the “Gingrich Revolution” was.

But Gregg isn’t backing Gingrich for President. He’s backing former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney, who is as clueless as the rest of them. The only real defender of the Constitution now running for President is Ron Paul, which is why most of the political and media establishment figures are running away from the Texas Congressman (or taking swipes at him with pitchforks). Nothing could be more threatening to their careers than an aroused electorate that takes the demands of the Constitution and the promise of limited government, states rights, and individual liberty seriously.



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