



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on July 14, 2010

## Newt Gingrich, Meet Jim Madison

Newton Leroy Gingrich, former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives and godfather of the Grand Old Party's 1994 "Contract with America" made it clear he wasn't kidding when he told the Associated Press this week that he is considering running for President in 2012.

"I've never been this serious," Gingrich told AP reporter Mike Glover in Des Moines, Iowa, where the former speaker took part in a fundraiser and workshop for local candidates. Does that mean Gingrich was joking on the numerous previous occasions when he said he was considering a possible run for the roses in the next quadrennial election? It's hard to tell with Newt. Because even when he says he's never been this serious he means he's not really serious yet.



"It's fair to say that by February (2011) the groundwork will have been laid to consider seriously whether to run or not," Gingrich said. So even though he has "never been this serious," he is still at least six-and-a-half months away from considering it "seriously." While he is not as serious about it now as he will be next February, he is still more serious than when he was when considering it in the past, though with less seriousness than he has in considering it now. And chances are he will be even more serious each time he addresses the subject over the next few months, but not as serious as he will be in February, when the groundwork has all been laid for his serious consideration. Thus doth the Spotted Newt (a remarkable amphibian) make the future clear-and serious.

Some of the movers and shakers in the Republican Party are clearly taking the possibility of a Gingrich candidacy quite seriously. Some even appear to be awaiting it eagerly. For our nation is in trouble — serious trouble — and some see Gingrich as a viable alternative to the status quo, that fancy Latin phrase for "the mess we is in." Grover Norquist, founder of Americans for Tax Reform, told Newsmax he would welcome a Gingrich candidacy.

"Newt Gingrich, like Ronald Reagan, has spent his whole life building the modern Republican Party," said Norquist, who apparently meant that as a compliment. "Newt Gingrich, like Obama, is a community organizer," said Norquist. "Newt, however, is on the side of individual liberty."

Except, of course, when liberty gets in the way of the omnipotent Security State, of which the PATRIOT Act is a regrettable example.

Well, there you have it. How could a candidate who resembles both Ronald Reagan and Barack Obama lose? Simple. He's not tall enough. At about six feet even, Gingrich falls an inch short of measuring up to the incumbent. What difference does that make? A lot. In most presidential elections, the taller candidate wins. By that measure, the best Gingrich could do would be to make the election close.



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Americans, as satirist Mark Russell observed years ago, believe in "peace through height." But Republicans may be hard pressed to find a candidate taller than Obama. They may have to find a retired NBA star who is conservative enough to embrace the Republican platform. He need not believe in it, as recent history has shown, but he must be willing to embrace it until Election Day.

But at least Gingrich is old enough, though just barely, to be a Republican candidate for President. Sure, the Constitution says the President need only be 35 years of age. But the Republican Party, being loaded with strict destructionists, appears to have come up with an age requirement of its own. Republicans like to nominate candidates who personify the growing power of the senior citizens lobby. The elephant has gotten grayer in recent elections. George Herbert Walker Bush was a stripling when he entered the White House at a youthful 64 in 1989. Son Georgie was but a callow youth when he took up residence there 12 years later at a mere 54. The Bushes were aberrations. Ever since Ronald Reagan stepped into the Oval Office just two weeks ahead of his 70th birthday, the age of the typical Republican nominee for President has been determined by carbon dating.

Bob Dole was 73 when he became the party's standard-bearer in 1996. John McCain was 72 when he took the mantle in 2008.

So don't expect Sarah Palin to be the nominee anytime soon. Even discounting the height factor (Palin is believed to be about 5'5"), she is far too young (and probably too thin) to lead a party of septuagenarian elephants. Palin may have a shot at the nomination in 2036, when she will be a fine old mama grizzly of 72.

Now Gingrich will turn 69 on June 17, 2012, which means that if elected President that year, he will enter the White House 69 years and seven months of age — six months younger than Reagan was on assuming office, but close enough for government work. And he'll be old enough to make age an excuse for forgetting his campaign promises and making the same promises all over again when he runs for reelection. As John McCain said, the nice thing about Alzheimer's is that you can hide your own Easter eggs.

Some of the sentimentalists among us might wish to believe that wisdom comes with age, but don't count on it. The old-timers who tell us they have forgotten more than we'll ever know have forgotten that that is precisely the problem. And the maturity of judgment that supposedly comes with age is not always obvious. As Britain's Harold Wilson said of Tony Benn, "He immatures with age."

But "Newtsie" (as "Uncle" Bob Dole used to call him) will make a fine candidate. He's smart. He's glib. He'll push the right buttons, say all the right things. He may even bring back an old Republican campaign promise that was finally discarded after two decades of being studiously ignored. He could promise to abolish the federal Department of Education, the department for which Republican administrations and Republicans in Congress have provided steady and generous budgetary increases, year after year. It is the department "Newtsie" voted to create in 1979, when he was a freshman representative from Georgia, despite the obvious fact that the Constitution he had sworn to uphold delegates no power over education to the federal government. But, of course, he was much younger then and perhaps had not begun to "consider seriously" the implications of his votes.

Within the cluttered confines of my humble abode lies a paperback copy of *The Federalist Papers*, with a blurb on the front cover that says, "... Newt Gingrich's ... required reading..." In No. 45, James Madison assured those fearful of an overly powerful consolidated government that the new Constitution was designed to prevent just that.



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"The powers delegated by the proposed Constitution to the federal government are few and defined. Those which are to remain in the State governments are numerous and indefinite." Gingrich likely lacks the gift for self-deprecating humor that served Ronald Reagan so well. So we may never hear him paraphrase Lloyd Bentsen 's famous remark to Dan Quayle in the 1988 vice presidential debate as he advances in age: "I knew Jim Madison. Jim Madison was a friend of mine."

But Gingrich should reread his own required reading and consider the words of Mr. Madison.

Consider seriously, that is.

*Photo: Newt Gingrich is the keynote speaker on the subject of the new federal health care law July 13, 2010, at a Georgia Chamber luncheon in Atlanta, Ga.: AP Images*



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