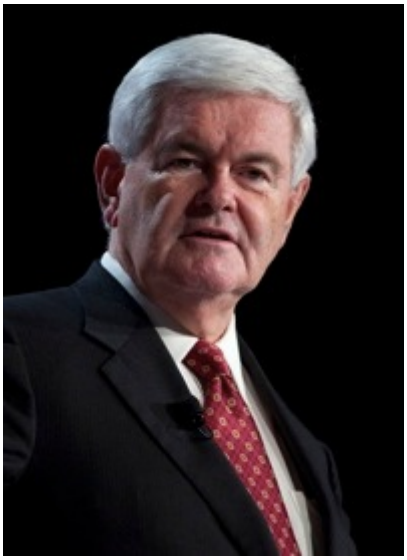
Written by **Thomas R. Eddlem** on November 1, 2011

Newt Gingrich: The "Anti-Romney" or the "Other Romney"?



But is Newt Gingrich the new "anti-Romney," or is he simply another Mitt Romney? Despite Gingrich's masterful performance of conservative rhetoric during presidential debates, Tea Party supporters may find Gingrich's record surprisingly liberal and comparable to Romney's record. Conservative opposition to Mitt Romney has focused upon two major issues, Romney's initiation of an individual health care mandate in Massachusetts which served as the model for Obamacare and Romney's support for the Wall Street bailouts under the Bush/Obama TARP program.

Gingrich's Support of the Individual Mandate and Federal Health Care

Newt Gingrich has campaigned on a pledge to repeal ObamaCare, but he also has a long history of supporting the same government healthcare mandates in RomneyCare and ObamaCare. In campaign videos, Gingrich insists that I am completely opposed to the ObamaCare mandate on individuals. I fought it for two and a half years at the Center for Health Transformation."

But in a May 15, 2011 interview on NBC's *Meet the Press* with host David Gregory, Gingrich admitted he has long sought an individual mandate by government:

> **Gregory:** Now, I know you've got big differences with what you call Obamacare. But back in 1993 on this program this is what you said about the individual mandate. Watch.
>
> **Video of Gingrich in 1993:** I am for people, individuals exactly like automobile insurance individuals having health insurance and being required to have health insurance. And I am prepared to vote for a voucher system which will give individuals, on a sliding scale, a government subsidy so we insure that everyone as individuals have health insurance.
>
> **Gregory:** What you advocate there is precisely what President Obama did with his healthcare legislation, is it not?
>
> **Gingrich:** Well, I agree that all of us have a responsibility to pay help pay for health care.... I've said consistently we ought to have some requirement that you either have health insurance or you post a bond.

In addition, Gingrich enthusiastically pushed for Bush administration's plan to create an unfunded Medicare prescription drug plan that has sent Medicare onto a bankruptcy trajectory. "If you are a fiscal conservative who cares about balancing the federal budget, there may be no more important vote in your career than one in support of this bill," Gingrich wrote in a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed back on November 20, 2003, "Let's face it, a Medicare drug benefit is inevitable."

The *Wall Street Journal* pointed out earlier this year that Gingrich's eagerness to embrace a new

welfare program in exchange for a sop from the left in the form of personal medical savings accounts may have made the prescription drug benefit's passage through the Republican Congress inevitable. "Mr. Gingrich stepped down after the GOP lost House seats in 1998, but he re-emerged in 2003 to campaign for George W. Bush's Medicare prescription drug benefit. His personal contribution was to promote the bill's modest market fillips as epic virtues that lesser minds couldn't grasp. Instead, the bill damaged the GOP's fiscal credibility, while Democrats have since rolled back medical savings accounts and private insurance options for seniors."

Gingrich's Support for Wall Street Bailouts, Mexican Bailout, and NAFTA

Newt Gingrich campaigned on behalf of the misnamed North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), saying on the House floor on September 22, 1993: "What we're being told is that free trade with Mexico would devastate the U.S. economy. With its low wages, Mexico would unleash a flood of cheap imports into our markets. There would be a mass exodus of U.S. factory jobs, as hordes of American companies fled across the border…. All this is scare talk."

Yet within a year, American banks were in over their heads in loans to the Mexican government and President Clinton decided to bail out the Mexican peso with U.S. taxpayer dollars using the federal government's Exchange Stabilization Fund. The argument against putting $20 billion on the line, Clinton argued, was that U.S. banks would be devastated by the Mexican government defaulting on loans.

All during the crisis, Gingrich kept silent, except for writing a protest letter that complained Clinton hadn't disclosed all the details of the bailout. The problem with Gingrich's silent acquiescence in favor of the Mexican bailout was two-fold: He favored bailing out a foreign currency, the peso, on behalf of Wall Street, and he did it through unconstitutional means. Conservative Mississippi Democrat Gene Taylor argued that Clinton had tapped a fund authorized by Congress to bail out the U.S. not the Mexican economy and had violated the U.S. Constitution. Rep. Taylor said in a speech on the House floor on February 10, 1995 that "if you take the time to read our nation's Constitution, it is very clear in article I, section 9 which says the Congress shall have the power to coin money. 'No money shall be spent from the Treasury without an appropriation by the Congress.' And yet what the President did was completely contrary to that…. The reason it was not brought before Congress is because both sides, the Democrats and the Republicans, knew that had it been brought before Congress, Congress would have voted it down, and that is the greatest outrage of all, that the will of the majority as expressed through their elected representatives was never heard."

Taylor stressed that Gingrich had conspired in secret to let Clinton do exactly this: "We know that Speaker Gingrich knew; we know that President of the Senate, Senator Dole, knew. We know that the President knew…. This deal was cut with the Speaker, with the President, with the President of the Senate, in secret, without the approval of Congress to bail out the peso, but most importantly, to bail out Wall Street, the same people who just 15 months ago said `We have to have NAFTA."

Gingrich's Support for Bank Bailouts: TARP

With Gingrich's historical support of Wall Street bailouts, it shouldn't be surprising that he also said he would have voted for the TARP bailout. Gingrich condemned TARP in strong words on Fox News September 28, 2008, calling it "an appallingly bad plan" that would be "an engine of corruption," but then told ABC's George Stephanopoulos the same day that "I suspect were I still in Congress in the end George is right and I probably would end up voting reluctantly yes because I think you are given no

choice."

Gingrich subsequently endorsed the concept of a Wall Street bailout in a *Human Events* column, while calling his plan a "work-out rather than a bailout." Gingrich's plan, he wrote October 1, 2008, would still involve government loans to insolvent Wall Street banks. "The taxpayers should be asked to extend these institutions a line of credit until they can get back on their feet, rather than blindly acquire these institutions' toxic paper. This is the essential difference between a workout and a bailout." But Gingrich's plan was a difference from TARP only in Madison Avenue marketing terms, not a difference in principle.

Prof. Cornpone: Energy and Ethanol Subsidies

Perhaps Gingrich's support for government bailouts of market forces shouldn't be such a surprise. Gingrich has long been an advocate of getting government involved in business, and has even drawn the ire of the *Wall Street Journal* for his steadfast advocacy of ethanol subsidies. The *Wall Street Journal* even dubbed Gingrich "Professor Cornpone" in a January 30, 2011 unsigned op-ed that noted Gingrich has been the champion of government ethanol subsidies for at least two decades. "In 1998, then Ways and Means Chairman Bill Archer tried to kill ethanol's subsidies for good, only to land in the wet cement that Speaker Gingrich had poured."

The cozy relationship Gingrich has with the ethanol industry led to his consulting business winning more than $300,000 in fees from the ethanol lobby after he left Congress. The *Wall Street Journal* noted April 27, 2011 that "Professor Gingrich says his ethanol support is grounded in his lifetime of studying history and intellectual problems, but what about that $312,500 from the ethanol lobby?… We've never suggested Mr. Gingrich has been bought off, though of course there wouldn't be an ethanol lobby to hire Mr. Gingrich if there weren't politicians like Mr. Gingrich willing to prop it up with taxpayer dollars, tariffs and mandates."

Even the neo-conservative *National Review* noted in an online blog post that "as much as Gingrich likes to criticize the Presidents agenda (often with good reason), he apparently shares the Presidents disdain for leaving energy choices to the market."

Gingrich's "Green Conservatism": Bigger Government

President Obama prates constantly to the American people about the need for more federal spending for "green jobs," and this is only slightly different from Newt Gingrich's approach, which he calls "green conservatism." On his campaign website, Gingrich says the federal government should "finance cleaner energy research and projects with new oil and gas royalties."

This is not a new position by Gingrich, and it was a key reason his campaign failed to take off with conservative Republican voters early in the primary season. In his 2007 book, *A Contract With the Earth*, Gingrich wrote that "our federal government should take the lead on this vital issue, an effort that may require strong incentives to encourage enterprise and drive the formation of private-public economic partnerships." Gingrich does not see a market solution to the energy crisis, but rather a federal government-led solution: "Future presidents will surely find a way to vet their bold proposals with an appropriate subset of environmental and economic gurus so our national leaders are better prepared to deliver workable and effective environmental policies."

Gingrich suggested in an April 23, 2007 column for *Human Events* a "green conservatism" that closely approaches the controversial cap-and-trade proposal on carbon emissions promoted by the Obama administration. "We should, for example, offer prizes for the development of high gas mileage cars and

other carbon-reduction challenges…. We should therefore create a program of carbon-reduction tax credits. One such tax credit idea is to incentivize the creation of new energy production technologies that reduce carbon loading."

Tax Collector of the Welfare State

In its "Professor Cornpone" op-ed, the *Wall Street Journal* suggested of Gingrich, "The Georgian has been campaigning in the tea party age as a fierce critic of spending and government, but his record on that score is, well, mixed."

Though Gingrich once derided Kansas Senator Bob Dole as the "tax collector of the welfare state," this was primarily the role Gingrich filled when he had a constitutional stranglehold on the nation's finances as House speaker from 1995-99. The Constitution provides that the federal government may not spend a dime unless the House of Representatives approves it in an appropriation bill. The "conservative" Gingrich failed to cut spending at all, but did manage to increase tax collection from the citizenry by more than 50 percent. Total federal spending during Gingrich's speakership increased from $1.227 trillion fiscal 1995 to $1.383 trillion in fiscal 1999, the last fiscal year of his speakership, a 12.7 percent increase (3.2 percent per year). The U.S. budget did move from a $226 billion deficit to an $86 billion surplus during that period. But it had nothing to do with spending cuts; the deficit was erased because of increased extraction of tax dollars from taxpayers. During Gingrich's tenure as speaker, federal tax receipts increased by more than 50 percent, from $1.001 trillion to $1.545 trillion.

Not surprisingly, Gingrich is campaigning on the same platform he employed as Speaker: no spending cuts, but higher tax revenues. "We can have higher revenues without having higher taxes," his campaign website boasts. Indeed, his campaign "solutions" website fails to itemize any specific spending cuts other than repealing ObamaCare and the boilerplate waste, fraud, and abuse that even liberal Democrats campaign against. Of the GOP presidential field, only Ron Paul has offered a proposal with specific and substantial spending cuts.

With current front-runner Herman Cain opening himself up to the charges of flip-flopping, it's possible Gingrich could replace Cain as the apparent anti-Romney and Tea Party favorite. But that depends upon the forgetfulness of GOP primary voters.

There's a precedent for voters forgetting Gingrich's record. Gingrich was apparently able to get many Christian Right "values voters" to forget his past, which included some very striking examples of lack of values. Gingrich once suggested that his adultery in his first two broken marriages was partly an outgrowth of his patriotism. Gingrich told Pat Robertson's CBN television network on March 8, 2011 that "theres 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. And what I can tell you is that when I did things that were wrong, I wasn't trapped in situation ethics, I was doing things that were wrong, and yet, I was doing them." Yet the thrice-married Gingrich a convert to Catholicism in 2009 received a standing ovation by Christian Right "values voters" at the October 22 Iowa Faith and Freedom Forum, the strongest applause of any candidate at the forum.

The question remains: Will Tea Party voters likewise forget Gingrich's record and adopt him as one of their own?

Photo of Newt Gingrich: AP Images

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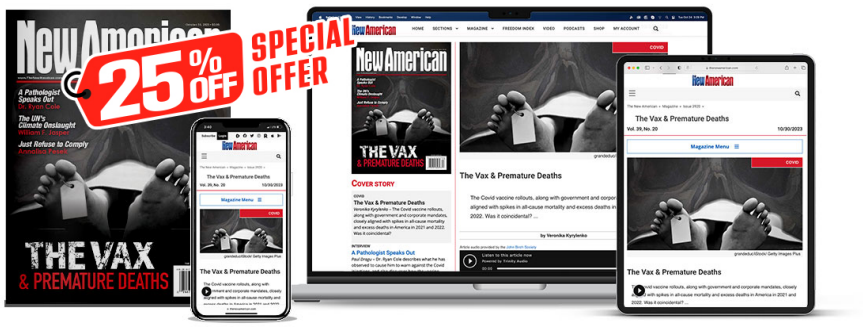

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