

David S. Broder

## 'Armeys' Axioms'

On those weeks when they are not abolishing government departments and programs, cutting taxes and balancing budgets, the supermen of the House Republican leadership publish books that they have written while flying between Washington and their home districts. This week's entry is "The Freedom Revolution" by Majority Leader Dick Armeys of Texas. It arrived on the shelves from Regnery Publishing without the publicity hype surrounding "To Renew America," the book Speaker Newt Gingrich of Georgia will publish next month. But if you want the philosophy that animates this new GOP House delivered in plain, unvarnished form, you can't do better than Armeys.

He is part of the Republican professoriate, a PhD in economics on the faculty of North Texas State University until he ran for the House 11 years ago. His rise to the top of the House Republicans has been even swifter than Gingrich's, and reflects the appreciation of GOP freshmen and sophomores for the blunt and outspoken way that Armeys says what they believe.

The positions he has taken fit together. He

supported—indeed co-authored—everything in the Contract With America, from term limits to tax cuts. Beyond that, he also would eliminate the graduated income tax in favor of a flat tax; end most government regulations; give vouchers to parents for the public or private schools of their choice; abolish the minimum wage; end workers' tax exemptions for employer-financed health care; convert Medicare to a voluntary insurance system; institute "tough love" welfare policies; and slap much stricter penalties on criminal acts.

Armeys does not blink at controversies that cause less committed conservatives to trim their sails. He defends free trade and, even more daringly, calls for expanded immigration, as long as it is legal. He butchers sacred cows. He invented the base-closing commission procedure that has deactivated dozens of military installations, and he is death on farm subsidies as well.

But somehow, these positions, though radical enough in themselves, are not as breathtaking as the underlying philosophy Armeys lays out in his book and boils down into "Armeys' Axioms." Many embody his profound

disrespect for the motives of today's liberals. "Social responsibility," he says, "is a euphemism for personal irresponsibility." It fits with another axiom that is Armeys' own favorite: "The market is rational and the government is dumb."

To me, these lines sound more clever than accurate. But over plates of Mexican food at a Capitol Hill restaurant the other night, Armeys assured me that he really believes this stuff. The last of those axioms, he wrote on the blackboard in his college classroom the first day of each year.

Armeys told me what is clearly a favorite story about the perversity of modern-day liberals. He had a faculty colleague, he said, who was so far gone that he refused to give to the United Way because "private charity reduced the need for government programs."

For Armeys, just the reverse is true: Reduce government programs and private charity will certainly increase, because, he said, in a nice mixing of historical phrases, "in the ordinary course of human events, we take care of each other with decency and respect. But as soon

as we ask what government should do about a problem, it releases us from our personal responsibility. It is the opiate of the masses."

I asked Armeys if he believed sufficiently in the morality of the marketplace to dissent from the many Republicans and conservatives who have been calling on the TV, movie and record industries to stop producing material celebrating violence and degrading women. He said that he personally didn't care for much of the popular fare on the market today and wondered why there couldn't be more "Lion Kings." But as a man of influence, he would not jawbone those executives.

Why? Because, he said, "If I run a movie company, my job is to sell movies." And then he leaned across the plate of fajitas and quoted an axiom he attributed to Andrew Carnegie but which actually was uttered by another 19th century tycoon, railroad magnate William H. Vanderbilt: "The public be damned! I work for my stockholders."

If that isn't a slogan for our time, then Dick Armeys and his disciples would not be writing the nation's laws. It's axiomatic.