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# Gingrich vs. Gephardt

Imagine for a moment that we had a parliamentary government, like Great Britain. As the head of the majority party in the House, Newt Gingrich would then be prime minister, and Dick Gephardt would be the leader of the opposition. What a clash of ideas, policies and programs that would produce in the 1996 campaign!

As their latest writings and speeches amply demonstrate, the Republican from Georgia who is speaker of the House and the Democrat from Missouri who is its minority leader not only march to different drummers but would take the country in opposite directions.

Instead of Gingrich vs. Gephardt, what we will likely get in 1996 is a much fuzzier choice. Should New Democrat Bill Clinton face off against Old Republican Bob Dole, the contest would be between two men more noted for their zigzags than for their adherence to any particular ideology.

That may be a comfortable circumstance for those who want to see America governed from the middle of the road. But it lacks the zest and the fireworks to be found in the House of Representatives, where most of Gingrich's Republicans and many of Gephardt's Democrats are ready to go toe to toe in a nakedly partisan battle to control the nation's future.

The two leaders agree on only one thing—that the social compact which has held this country together is collapsing. Gephardt, in a speech earlier this month on tax reform, invited listeners to go door to door in his suburban St. Louis district and listen "to the

hard-working middle-class families who are struggling just to make ends meet, and feel their anger and resentment."

Gingrich, in a speech at the National Press Club summarizing his new book, "To Renew America," put it even more starkly: "I would argue that the whole collapse of the family, the collapse of the inner city, the collapse of the school system, the emergence of the drug culture, the rise of violent crime . . . are a function of a crisis in our civilization."

Where they go from that common observation is totally different; their analyses and their prescriptions are flatly opposed. Gephardt blames the problem on a breach of faith by large institutions. Government has exposed workers to low-wage foreign competition by making free-trade deals like NAFTA without adequate safeguards. Even worse, business has funneled its profits to stockholders and executives, letting workers' wages erode.

He wants a tougher trade stance, a higher minimum wage and a tax system where the wealthiest families would pay a rate 3½ times higher than those earning below \$60,000.

For the long term, Gephardt favors expansion of federal education and job-training programs—the very ones that are being reduced in the downsizing of government, which is the goal of the Republican budget Gingrich is pushing through the House.

This is not just miserliness on Gingrich's part. As his book makes clear, he believes that the American crisis is one of values, not economics, and that restoring the "rules and principles" on which our civilization depends

requires that we turn from government programs to self-reliance and voluntary mutual help to meet the needs of the nation. Virtually every existing government bureaucracy is a threat to the nation, he says, not a source of salvation.

These philosophical differences bring them into opposition on every big issue. Gingrich wants some form of flat tax; Gephardt, a steeply progressive rate structure. It's the same way on a whole array of social issues—abortion, gun control, affirmative action and school vouchers. Indeed, there is hardly a public policy question from Medicare to clean water legislation, from tariffs to term limits, on which these two men see eye to eye.

Their differences reflect the fact that the House of Representatives is now the most polarized and partisan arena of the national government. The trend has been moving that way for some 20 years, but as long as accommodating House careerists like Tom Foley and Bob Michel—speaker and minority leader just a year ago—held sway, the battle lines were blurred.

You could not imagine Foley and Michel opposing each other for the presidency, but it takes no stretch of fancy to see Gingrich and Gephardt doing that one day. Gephardt has already run once for the nomination and doubtless will try again. Gingrich, already a larger national figure than almost anyone else in the GOP, has every reason to eye the White House as well.

Such a contest would certainly clarify the choices the voters face.