
The Right Stuff

Book
World
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TO RENEW AMERICA

By Newt Gingrich
HarperCollins. 260 pp. \$24

THE FREEDOM REVOLUTION The New Republican House Majority Leader Tells Why Big Government Failed, Why Freedom Works, And How We Will Rebuild America

By Dick Armey
Regnery. 318 pp. \$24.95

By Kevin Phillips

THREE REPUBLICANS in Congress, all former professors at various Sun Belt colleges and universities, are now running for president or thinking about it. More immediately, two of them—House Speaker Newt Gingrich of Georgia and House Majority Leader Dick Armey of Texas—have just published books to ponder America's future and promote their own.

By Gingrich's Dec. 15 presidential-race deadline, the political and literary verdict should be in on *To Renew America* and the prescriptions for national revival that he tells about studying since he was a teenager. Armey's own acknowledged White House hopes are at least four years out.

Gingrich cannot be thrilled at his chief lieutenant's finishing *The Freedom Revolution* in time to compete with *The Book of Newt* (or at least the one without sex scenes: Gingrich's novel, *1945*, was just released by a different publisher). Not that Armey's tome is particularly weighty. It's a familiar brand of conservative Texanomics—gub'ment bashin', tax-cuttin', market-worshippin' and budget-balancin'—with phraseology presumably pre-tested and perfected in Rush Rooms from Galveston to Grand Prairie. Gingrich's book and persona are much more interesting: the conservative as a space-age optimist.

To the public, of course, Gingrich is the superstar: the architect of 1994 GOP victory and the most powerful House speaker in memory, albeit also the first described by voters as too extreme. He is a former assistant professor of history at West Georgia College and, earlier still, a troubled adolescent who married his high-school math teacher—

in sum, an Interesting National Personality. HarperCollins was ready to pay \$4.5 million for this book until Gingrich realized that an author's advance of that magnitude would be

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one more personal ethics controversy on what was already a considerable list.

To Renew America has five parts: Visions and Strategies, The Six Challenges, The Contract With America, The Ongoing Revolution and the Speaker's concluding words on A

New Beginning: The America We Will Create. Co-writer Bill Tucker has obviously spent many hours laboring over the manuscript, but there are revealing Rorschach blots from Gingrich himself. The volume is
—Continued on page 14

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Book

ington Post

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TEXANOMICS-101 - ARIFAY AXIOM

$$\frac{\text{BIG GOVT}}{\text{BUDGET}} \times \frac{\text{K...}}{\text{TAXES}} = \frac{\text{MILITARY INCREASE}}{\text{FLAT TAX}} + (\text{CAP GAINS})^2$$

$$\text{POOR} = \frac{(\text{GOVT})}{2} - (\text{K...})^2 \quad \text{IRS} = \left(\frac{\text{...}}{\text{...}}\right)^2$$

$$\text{MARKET} \xrightarrow{\text{FS}} (\text{GOVT})^{\text{D...}} \quad \text{TECHNOKABELLE 202}$$

$$\frac{\text{NEW AGE 2005}}{2020} + \frac{\text{...}}{\text{...}} = \left(\frac{\text{...}}{\text{...}}\right)$$

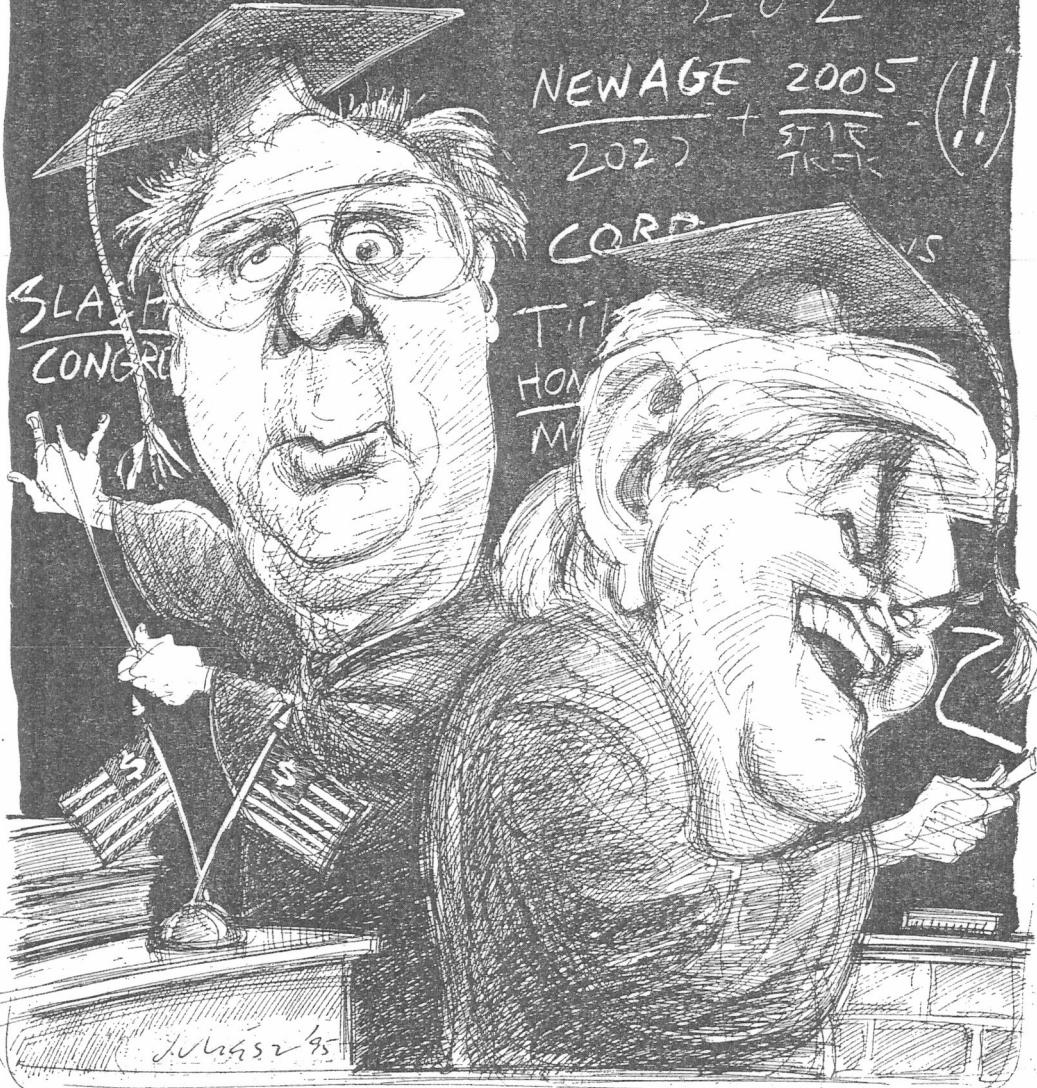


ILLUSTRATION BY VICTOR JUHASZ FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

readable, and it delivers a reasonably good synopsis of Gingrich's ideas, especially in the subsections that amplify ongoing issues from education to health care, space exploration, "corrections day," unfunded mandates and the failure of the entrenched Democratic leadership of the last Congress.

If there's a part of the new Republican agenda that a large majority of voters agrees with, it's in this area—reforming the House and reducing its staff, prohibiting Congress from imposing unfunded programs and mandates on the states, eliminating the occasional absurd federal regulation (to deal with which the speaker proposes periodic "Corrections Days" in Congress) and so on. Here Gingrich is entitled to sound his trumpet.

Renew, however, also spotlights some of the speaker's principal weaknesses. To start with, it is stuffed with Pollyannaish views of how technology will uplift politics, culture and public policy. By 2020, couples will be honeymooning in space. (Is this his next novel?) In 2005, meanwhile, "since most Americans now telecommute, rush hour [will be] dramatically smaller than it used to be," and telecommuting will also manage air pollution. Technology that adds one percent annually to economic growth will solve the deficit. As for health reform, "Surgeons may one day be able to operate by remote control. American doctors and hospitals will be called upon to operate on people in India . . . We may have a sales force travelling the planet selling American medicine." Alas, his gullibility in this genre is proven. On coming to Congress a decade and a half ago, he introduced legislation to set up statehood mechanisms for U.S. space colonies. None yet.

TECHNOBATTLE is also useful in sidestepping practicality. In a number of situations, Gingrich rolls out a list of ideas without explaining how they can be turned into legislation, enacted or implemented. Then he wraps things up with deceptive grandiosity, as in discussing immigration: "There is

no magic to solving the problem of illegal immigrants. It is not intellectually challenging. Throughout history, countries that have survived have learned to maintain their borders. There are plenty of practical examples of how to get the job done. If we work at it we can dry up 95 percent of illegal immigration within two or three years. Our challenge is getting to a clear decision, developing a workable plan, and implementing it relentlessly." Of course, nobody else in Washington thinks it's that simple. With good reason.

Not a few Capitol Hill insiders say that without Armev as chief operating officer, Newt himself

would be in orbit half the time, and the book's opening and closing chapters will not reassure hard-boiled operatives. "I have spent much of my life studying and working on the problems of how civilizations survive. It began when I was surprisingly young," Gingrich tells us by page 10. In 1953, as a 10-year-old, he appeared before the Harrisburg, Pa., City Council to propose a municipal zoo, got his name in the paper and "was hooked forever on public life." But he still expected to be a zoo director or dinosaur specialist until 1958 when—at age 14 now—he got interested in the processes of national decay and concluded that "this was the kind of challenge that could not be passed off to others. If it were truly a moral question of whether we as a people would survive, then I had an obligation to do my share of the job." Two years later, crossing the Atlantic by ship, he reviewed and reaffirmed his commitment to "spending my life on such a burdensome historical quest." Ahem.

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ideology on which Americans have been souring."

Gingrich has his strong points as a historian—his views on how the documents of the American Revolution indicate a strong public commitment to religion and the right to bear arms seem better grounded than liberal counterpoints. However, he didn't get tenure in his years at West Georgia College, and his book is sure to inspire a competition among snickering history professors to scalp the speaker in professional journals. *To Renew America* blithely ignores the partial parallels and warnings of recent declining powers like Britain, the Netherlands and Spain in favor of vague citations of Mayan, Aztec and Chinese trends from Arnold Toynbee's *A Study of History*, along with enthusiastic invocations of Isaac Azimov's three-part science-fiction series on the decline of the Galactic Empire. And when it came time for the future speaker to write his Ph.D. thesis at Tulane, he passed up trying for a four-bagger on the rise and fall of nations to hit a bunt on post-

World War II educational policy in central Africa.

Dick Armev, who used to teach at North Texas State, isn't likely to be much better received by his fellow economists. Chapters of *The Freedom Revolution* run to such tried and true titles as: "How Tyranny Perished," "The Big Government Coalition," "The Flat Tax, Freeing Health Care," "Freedom For the Poor" and "A Government Half the Size." His description of the flat tax, of which he is a prime advocate, is shallow enough to suggest that he understands that full detail will not reinforce his case. For example, he explains his decision to exclude interest, dividends or capital gains from the flat tax, which would mean that many rich people would pay a far lower percentage of their income than \$75,000 families, by saying that these have all already been taxed at the business level. The book concludes with Armev's Axioms, which include thoughts

like "The market is rational and the government is dumb" and "Social responsibility is a euphemism for personal irresponsibility."

THIS IS not a book for which trees should have had to die. Compared with Arney, Gingrich is Oscar Wilde. But it's interesting that neither man has anything much to say about popular opinion, even though both had chances to update as late as April, and therein lies the political rub. The ultimate weakness in the Gingrich and Arney tracts is that they propound a new Congressional ideology on which Americans have been souring since January with unusual rapidity.

Back in December, a national majority of 52 percent to 28 percent approved of the congressional Republican policies and proposals. By March, that approval rating had fallen to 43 percent to 39 percent, and by mid-June disapproval led by 45 percent to 41 percent—a stunning turnabout. The harsh new budget deficit reduction program proposed by Capitol Hill Republicans drew support from only 19 percent of U.S. voters in a late June Time/CNN poll (and, even more revealing, only 40 percent of Republican respondents supported it). Times-Mirror polling last spring found that a 53 percent to 32 percent majority of Americans regarded Gingrich as "too extreme," including 44 percent of Republicans. Meanwhile, almost half of Republican self-identifiers favor a new third party, hardly a vote of confidence in the Gingrich-Arney agenda.

GOP House members planning to take the two books to the beach for an inspirational summer read had better take along a third compilation: details on the opinion polls cited above. Professors Gingrich and Arney may be about to orchestrate another right-wing faculty club first: helping a surprising number of their legislative pupils to flunk out in next year's home state electoral exams. ■