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INSIDE THE REVOLUTION

HOLDING IT TOGETHER

In a Moment of Crisis, The Speaker Persuades

Another in series
of occasional articles

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Two hours after midnight on Aug. 4, the leaders of the House retreated to the third-floor Capitol suite of Majority Leader Dick Armey to celebrate what they viewed as the victorious conclusion of the longest night of their self-styled revolution. Speaker Newt Gingrich arrived tired and emotional, greeted by Armey and his whips, Tom DeLay and Denny Hastert, and several aides. It was time for the boys to relax: neckties undone, feet up, bottles of Sam Adams and Foster's Ale all around, the brew flowing as freely as Professor Gingrich's inevitable stream of historical allusions.

The House had just approved the most controversial spending measure of the year, an appropriations bill that would go further to cut social service programs and balance the budget than any other. Gingrich began the week conceding privately that the Labor-Health

and Human Services bill had no better than a 1 in 3 chance. Democrats called it mean-spirited because of its significant cuts in education, summer jobs and work force protection. But he was more troubled by a rift between moderate and conservative Republicans, primarily over abortion. Each faction had threatened to take the bill down if it did not get its way.

The leadership finally prevailed after Gingrich successfully lobbied recalcitrant moderates at a midnight meeting, while a flock of antiabortion conservatives prayed for guidance in a back room of the Capitol and then decided to vote with the speaker. Now, the battle over, Gingrich sipped ale and talked the night away, a nostalgic general. Obsessed recently with Arthur Wellesley, the Duke of Wellington, he likened the appropriations triumph to the way the British expeditionary force maneuvered against the French during the Peninsular War, a campaign in Portugal and Spain in the early 1800s that

See REVOLUTION, A8, Col. 1

REVOLUTION, From A1

eventually led to Wellington's ascendance and Napoleon's abdication.

Gingrich became misty-eyed several times, according to others in the room. He used the words "magical" and "mystical" and "romantic" to describe his feelings about the 232 House Republicans. He said they had come through the appropriations process together, despite their differences, because of a shared sense that they were "at a special place in history and could not fail." By four in the morning, he had moved on to football metaphors. What the Republicans had accomplished, Gingrich said, was like the old Green Bay Packers sweep during the days of Coach

Vince Lombardi: The opposition knows you are going to run at them, but they cannot stop you. Lombardi, Gingrich said, believed that the team that doesn't break in the fourth quarter wins.

But now they were more than a team, he declared.

They were "a family."

The Senate still must pass judgment on the appropriations bill and is likely to soften its impact. But the House GOP "family" has set the political direction in the wake of the 1994 Republican midterm election victory.

To many House Democrats, the Republicans seemed more like a bloodless monolithic force than a family, moving in obedient unison to Speaker Gingrich's dictates and Majority Leader Armey's relentless schedule. Veteran Democrat David Obey of Wisconsin complained that Gingrich and Armey had been "running the place like 'The Bridge on the River Kwai'" as they pushed their troops to roll back the Great Society by slashing government programs and adopting a corporate agenda curtailing federal regulations of the workplace and the environment.

But inside the revolution, the situation was more fluid, precarious and unpredictable than it often appeared. After being out of power for more than four decades, House Republicans were constantly facing situations that they had never before encountered. Gingrich, who had built his reputation as a hell-raiser for the minority, now had to call on heretofore unseen talents as a negotiator and gentle persuader to keep his family together.

During the early months of the session, he often boasted that he was so focused on the big picture that he rarely knew what was being debated on the floor. But in the final days of the appropriations fight, his presence loomed large as he brought various factions up to meet him in his second-floor quarters, moving from room to room like a doctor making rounds.

In one room would be members of the Lunch Bunch, moderates from the Northeast and Midwest uneasy with the party's fervor on abortion and regulatory issues. Their rivals were members of the Conservative Action Team composed largely of westerners and southerners. Pressing for the speaker's ear from a third direction were the New Federalists, eager-beaver freshmen budget-cutters plus Budget Committee Chairman John Kasich, who described the brash young outfit as "the tip of the revolutionary spear—the Red Guard." On the socially conserva-

tive side there were the House Pro-Life Caucus and the Family Caucus of Christians who prayed and voted together.

If more personal attention was needed during the endgame, Gingrich worked the House floor himself in a friendly bear paw-around-the-shoulder fashion that reminded some of his old nemesis, the late Democratic speaker Thomas O. "Tip" O'Neill Jr.

"In the end," said Gingrich's longtime House comrade, Robert S. Walker of Pennsylvania, "what direction Newt decides to take us is the direction we are most likely to go." To the surprise of some colleagues, who had viewed Gingrich as a staunch conservative during his days in the minority, his voice in internal disputes was more often than not one of moderation.

Commitment Letters

In early February, Gingrich visited the Appropriations Committee for a closed door meeting with his hand-picked committee chairman, Bob Livingston of Louisiana, and his 13 subcommittee chairmen, known as "the cardinals." Gingrich reminded them that they would be making deep cuts in programs they had funded for years. "You're going to be in the forefront of the revolution," he said. "You have the toughest jobs in the House. If you don't want to do it, tell me."

He instructed the cardinals to write him letters reaffirming their commitment. "It was Newt's way of letting them know they were in for a tough load," said Livingston, who sent his own letter signed, he joked later, "Love and kisses!"

To make their task even more difficult, Livingston and his cardinals were being asked to accommodate a sweeping legislative agenda. The leadership had decided that the money bills had to be used for that purpose because the normal flow of legislation was impossible. Too much time had been consumed on the "Contract With America." There were also political reasons. Stand-alone bills on such issues as abortion and environmental regulation would be easier for President Clinton to veto than appropriations measures needed to keep the government running.

Still, Chairman Livingston grew in-

creasingly agitated over the amount of legislative language added to his appropriations bills. An expressive man whose good humor is occasionally interrupted by volcanic explosions, Livingston reached his limit early one Friday morning when Ernest Istook, a conservative Republican from Oklahoma, presented the committee with a 13-page amendment whose intent was to "defund the left" by barring government money from going to public interest nonprofit institutions. When a Democrat demanded that the amendment be read in full, a process that consumed nearly an hour during an all-night committee session, Livingston stormed from his seat and placed a telephone call to Speaker Gingrich, who had been asleep in a hotel room in California.

"I just blew my top," Livingston recalled. "I said, 'Look, you guys are piling a lot of crap on my bill!'" Gingrich offered Livingston a sympathetic ear, but that was all. The leadership wanted the Istook provisions. The process would continue. Livingston calmed down and supported the amendment.

Reversing Roles

For much of the summer, Gingrich played the role of appropriations overseer, intervening only when a dispute arose that only he could resolve. At times he seemed torn between the ideals of the revolution, his own pet political interests and the practicality of moving legislation. Kasich and the New Federalists, led by freshman Sam Brownback of Kansas, challenged the leadership on several issues: funding for the Commerce Department and the National Endowment for the Arts, both of which they wanted abolished, and on a "lockbox" provision that would ensure that savings from appropriations cuts would only be used to reduce the deficit. Gingrich at times chastised Kasich for being overly aggressive, but he also helped negotiate deals placating the freshmen on their issues.

When the appropriations bill for housing, veterans and independent agencies began moving through the committee in July, the speaker emerged as more of a deal-maker. At stake was a bill that always requires legislative agility because of the disparate interests it funds, a task made even more sensitive because of the cuts needed to reach the balanced budget goals. Every dollar given to one agency meant one less for the others, and in this case many of the agencies represented traditional Republican

constituencies such as aerospace contractors and veterans. But there were risks to gutting programs in housing and the environment that were important to the smaller bloc of urban moderates needed to fill out any GOP majority.

In charge of this balancing act was cardinal Jerry Lewis, a silver-haired moderate from Southern California who had been ousted from a party leadership post by conservatives a few years ago. Lewis was one of the reasons Gingrich had demanded loyalty letters from the cardinals, but he quickly proved his willingness to adapt to the tough new order. His subcommittee planned to make such deep cuts that virtually all of the diverse interests, including veterans and NASA space center supporters, threatened to scuttle a bill central to the Republican pledge to shrink government.

Gingrich, who decorates his office with dinosaur bones and teeth, had a special interest in space and science programs and wanted to find more money for those programs without upsetting the other groups. First he used a bookkeeping maneuver to fatten the health care allotment for veterans. Assured that the veterans lobby would then not complain about more money going to space and science, Gingrich persuaded Lewis to restore funding for space centers in Virginia, Alabama and Maryland.

The speaker showed a moderate impulse in his final compromise. The Department of Housing and Urban Development had long been a target of many conservatives. Lewis, noting recent examples of HUD corruption and waste, unhesitatingly pushed his panel to cut its budget by one-quarter. But the party's moderates decided to take their stand.

Leading the way was Rick Lazio of

New York, who marched 25 of his Lunch Bunch allies into DeLay's whip office to protest cuts they described as punitive to society's most helpless. Before long, Lazio was invited to a meeting with Gingrich and Lewis, at which he appealed for more money to subsidize housing for the disabled, the elderly and people with AIDS. As Lewis argued against the move, he seemed to reverse roles with his old conservative adversary Gingrich. The last thing Republicans needed, the speaker said, was to be portrayed as turning their backs on "the poorest of the poor." With Gingrich's blessing, \$600 million

was restored before the bill reached the House floor.

Although Gingrich assumed that the housing compromise had resolved the problems in Lewis's bill, in fact one more battle loomed, an environmental fight that surprised the leadership and for a few days stood out as its most glaring defeat.

No one paid much attention when Sherwood Boehlert of New York announced that he planned to join Democrats in fighting provisions that would hobble the Environmental Protection Agency in enforcing air and water pollution regulations and protecting wetlands. Lewis presented such an optimistic forecast at a leadership meeting that DeLay and his whips saw no need to poll their members on the issue.

But a few days later, Lewis realized that he had vastly underestimated support for environmental regulations. Gingrich suggested that Boehlert and the anti-regulation westerners meet to work out their differences. Gingrich left the impression that he was too busy to work on the problem himself. With the speaker giving no strong signals, Livingston kept pushing for a vote, which ended up defeating the anti-regulatory provisions. Fifty-one Republicans defected on the floor that Friday, one of the largest groups opposing a leadership initiative all year.

Whether the outcome would have changed had Gingrich intervened is open to question. His inaction was uncharacteristic, but not without its own degree of calculation. Gingrich had ambivalent feelings about the EPA provisions. He was somewhat "greener" than his leadership allies, especially Arney and DeLay, and concerned that Republicans not be viewed as hostile to the environment. When Lewis asked for a second vote after a weekend of regrouping, Gingrich said privately that he preferred not to challenge the moderates after one of their few victories. But the speaker was out of town the following Monday and deferred to Arney and DeLay, who wanted a second chance on behalf of business interests and western Republicans. They got lucky the second time around. They won the revote without changing a single Republican—the difference

was absent Democrats.

Payback Time

Ever since the Republicans took control in January, the social conservatives of the party had been pushing for action on the seminal issue of their cause: abortion. The leadership kept putting them off, fearful that abortion would undo the tenuous majority the leadership had relied on to pass the "Contract With America" by upsetting moderates. Now, in early August, as the massive Labor-HHS bill started rolling through the House, the leadership felt obligated to finally give anti-abortion legislators their chance. "It was payback time," said Livingston.

The leadership's concern that abortion could tear apart the Republican Conference seemed confirmed as the social services vote neared. When Gingrich, Arney and DeLay met at 2 p.m. on Tuesday, Aug. 1, the day before the bill was to reach the floor, they saw trouble from both sides. Conservatives had prevailed in committee by adding three abortion-limiting measures to the bill. Moderates were now pushing to add two abortion rights provisions on the floor. One, by Jim Greenwood of Pennsylvania, would restore family planning funds, which had been eliminated in committee by those who said some of that money was used by groups such as Planned Parenthood to sponsor abortions. Another, by Jim Kolbe of Arizona, would provide federal Medicaid funding for abortions in cases of rape and incest in states that limited such funding to instances where the life of the woman was endangered.

Both sides had signaled the leadership that they would vote against the entire bill unless they were satisfied by the House rule dictating which amendments would be protected from parliamentary challenges. Without a rule specifically waiving them from challenges, all the abortion provisions could be stricken on the House floor because appropriations bills were not supposed to contain legislative language. A leader of the Pro-Life Caucus, Chris Smith of New Jersey, carried a letter signed by more than 60 colleagues committed to killing the rule if its wording went against them.

At 4 p.m., in Room H137 of the Capitol, Gingrich brought together 40 members from the two sides and said he would not be forced to choose "between different parts of the family." Either they worked out a compromise, he said, "or we're going to bring this up without a rule."

As Gingrich spoke, aides distributed

a list of unauthorized programs that would thus become vulnerable. It was apparent to antiabortion legislators that they had a lot to lose, and they were upset that Gingrich seemed to be placating the moderates.

"Newt, you're siding with the other side!" fumed Chris Smith.

Gingrich, unfazed, responded: "That's the deal."

Seeing that he could not resolve the dispute immediately, Gingrich recruited Kasich to mediate a smaller gathering. Four members from each group gathered in Arney's office, and after a few hours of bargaining, a deal was struck. The moderates would get to in-

troduce Greenwood's amendment to restore funds for the family planning programs, but they would give up on the Kolbe amendment on Medicaid payments. The Pro-Life Caucus would have protections for three antiabortion waivers. "To see Jim Greenwood and Chris Smith shake hands—this was a miracle almost comparable to Fatima," Kasich said.

On Wednesday, Aug. 2, the leadership's rule passed on the House floor, as did Greenwood's amendment, which won the support of 53 Republicans, including the appropriations subcommittee chairman overseeing the Labor-HHS bill, moderate John Edward Porter of Illinois. But the trouble was not over. DeLay's staff, after polling members all day, discovered the entire bill was endangered and called in a warning to Gingrich's chief of staff, Dan Meyer. "Clear Newt's schedule," DeLay said. "He's going to have to spend a lot of time on this."

At a leadership meeting at 8:15 the next morning, DeLay divided the dissatisfied into three groups: antiabortion lawmakers who hated the Greenwood provision, abortion rights supporters who disliked the bill's other antiabortion language, and pro-labor members from the Northeast upset with the bill's rollback of labor laws. The whip asked Gingrich to meet with each of the groups, which he did in succession that afternoon from 2 to 4.

While Gingrich addressed the specific concerns of each faction, his larger message stayed the same. As they prepared for summer recess, he said, Republicans had a choice: They could go home winners, part of what he considered the most successful seven months in congressional history, or they could read newspaper stories about the GOP revolution falling apart. The effectiveness of that plea was not immediately

apparent. At 8:30 that night, a whip count showed 40 undecided conservatives, waiting to see how the votes went on other amendments of concern to them. Among the moderates, 14 were still listed in the "leaning no" or "hard no" columns.

Answered Prayers

At 9 o'clock, 23 antiabortion members of the conservative Family Caucus gathered in a large circle in the Tip O'Neill room, where their Bible study class usually meets, to go over their concerns one last time. For the first 45 minutes, they talked about how important the abortion issue was in their campaigns and how they had vowed that they would not compromise once they reached Congress. Could they in good conscience support a measure that allowed for family planning funds that might be used for abortions?

"One of the things we have to be careful about," said Mark Souder of Indiana, "is that power doesn't tempt us to vote for things we don't believe in."

Donald Manzullo of Illinois recalled how Ben Franklin, on another hot summer night at the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, called for divine intervention during a deadlock.

"Why doesn't someone start with a prayer and I'll close," said Oklahoma's Tom Coburn.

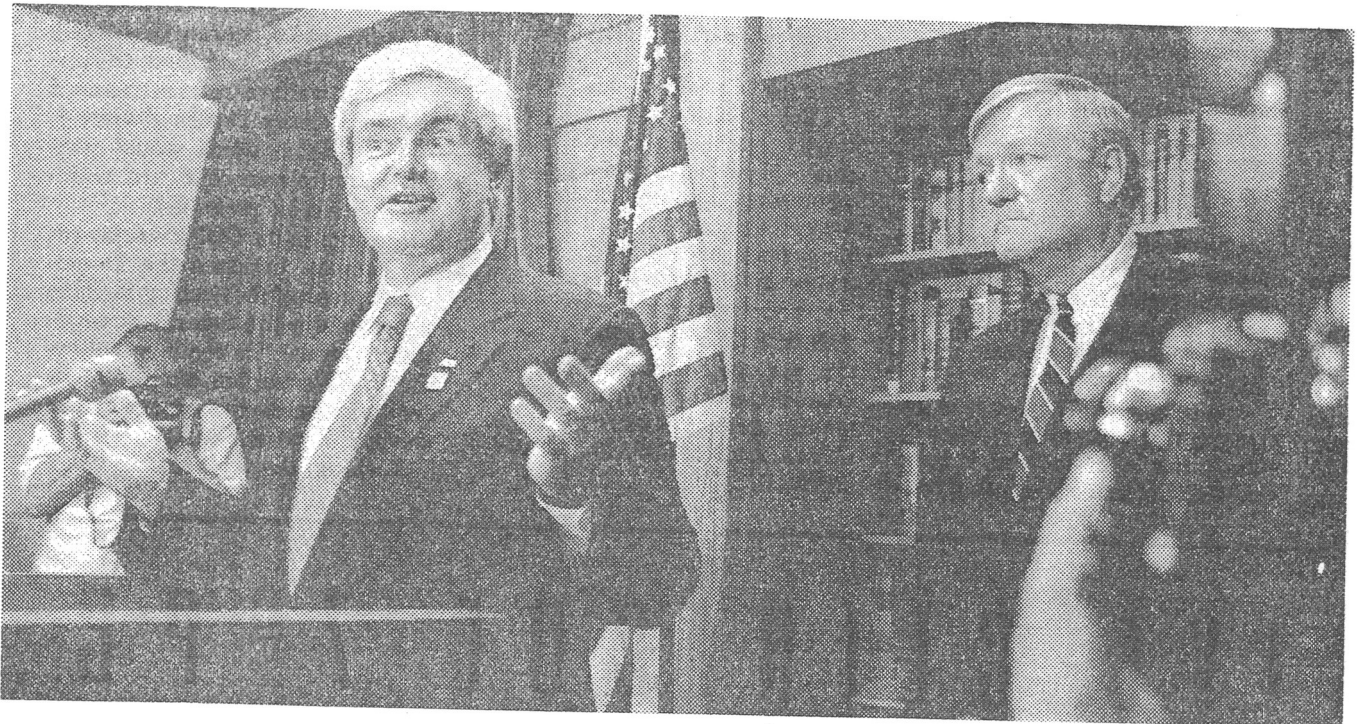
They took turns praying, leaning forward in their chairs with heads bowed and eyes closed, occasionally holding hands. Jay Dickey of Arkansas quoted a verse of scripture from memory. John Ensign of Nevada picked up a Bible and thumbed through it for another appropriate verse. They returned to the House floor at 11, reluctantly concluding that a limited victory would be better than none at all. They would all vote for the bill.

"Thank you, God!" Appropriations Chairman Livingston would say later, laughing.

At midnight, the leadership was still searching for the winning margin. Gingrich called a dozen moderates up to his office for a final appeal. His pitch again was for the good of the party, made in the presence of Republican National Committee Chairman Haley Barbour. Much of Gingrich's attention was focused on Marge Roukema of New Jersey, who entered the room as a "hard no" vote in the whip count. "Don't always expect us to bail you out after you've painted yourselves into an ideological corner," Roukema told the

speaker. But she came around, reluctantly, after Gingrich promised that in conference with the Senate he would reconsider a heating program for the poor that's popular in the Northeast.

The next day, after his all-night talkathon with Arney and the boys, Gingrich stood before the entire House Republican Conference, which he had convened in Room HC-5 for a celebratory lunch of pizza and soft drinks. He turned to Roukema, and reflected on how she had "looked out for the family." Tears welled in Gingrich's eyes. There was, Bob Livingston recalled later, "an eerie quiet" in the room as the speaker of the House fought to regain his composure.



BY RAY LUSTIG—THE WASHINGTON POST

SPEAKING TO DISSIDENTS

Shedding his image as a sharp-tongued hell-raiser, Speaker Newt Gingrich stepped in to negotiate and gently persuade moderate and conservative factional leaders to hold the Republican revolution together.

LEADERS OF THE PACKS

When the Labor-HHS appropriation bill reached the floor, GOP factions threatened to shred the Republican majority that had pushed the "Contract With America" through the House.



PRO-LIFE CAUCUS

Rep. Christopher H. Smith (N.J.) of Pro-Life Caucus accused the speaker of taking the other side.



CONSERVATIVE ACTION TEAM

Rep. Ernest J. Istook Jr. (Okla.) pushed a 13-page amendment in committee to "defund the left."



**THE NEW
FEDERALISTS**

*Freshman Rep. Sam
Brownback (Kan.)
challenged funding
for Commerce and
arts foundation.*



FAMILY CAUCUS

*Rep. Mark Edward
Souder (Ind.) urged
Family Caucus
members not to let
power tempt them.*



LUNCH BUNCH

*Rep. Sherwood L.
Boehlert (N.Y.)
jumped ship to join
Democrats backing
funds for the EPA.*