

Right in the Middle Of the Revolution

Activist Rises to Influence In Conservative Movement

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Senate Majority Leader Robert J. Dole (R-Kan.) was subdued when he met with Grover Norquist in his Senate office last April to sign a pledge not to raise taxes. "But then," Norquist later told a friend, "Lee didn't say much to Grant" when he surrendered at Appomattox.

Three pictures of Dole now hang on Norquist's wall in the offices of Americans for Tax Reform, trophies in the conversion of a politician once derided by fellow Republicans as the "tax collector for the welfare state."

As the dust settles on the conservative revolution that swept the nation's capital on Nov. 8, 1994, Grover G. Norquist, a 38-year-old bachelor who has devoted his adult life to the cause, is quietly emerging as a combination architect, gatekeeper, drill sergeant and mother hen of the right.

John Fund, a friend and editorial writer for the Wall Street Journal, describes Norquist as "the Grand Central Station" of conservatism. "All the trains run through his office," said Fund, referring to the Wednesday get-togethers near Dupont Circle when conservatives gather to share information and strategies.

Tax limitation groups from around the country meet via conference call each month, with celebrity visits from such figures as House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.), House Majority Leader Richard

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K. Arney (R-Tex.) and the major GOP presidential candidates.

Norquist founded Americans for Tax Reform in 1985, after holding jobs at the National Taxpayers' Union, College Republicans, Citizens for America and the Chamber of Commerce. His group, which has an annual budget of about \$500,000 raised from corporations and individuals, was originally founded at the suggestion of the Reagan administration to help build support for the 1986 tax reform bill.

Since then Norquist has used the organization to turn the "Taxpayer Protection Pledge" into a core commitment for much of the Republican Party. All the GOP presidential candidates have signed the commitment to "oppose any and all efforts to increase the marginal tax rates for individuals and/or businesses," although the version signed by Sen. Richard G. Lugar (Ind.) has been rejected because he reserved the right to raise taxes "under conditions of war or severe domestic crisis."

While the goal of Norquist and his Washington cadre of conservative optimists is nothing less than the destruction of Democratic liberalism, his most immediate and more important role is uniting the right: finding common ground among Christians, antiabortion activists, free marketers, gun owners, property rights advocates and libertarians.

Two years ago, Norquist orchestrated a 15-month drive to force—shame is not too strong a word—the U.S. Chamber of Commerce to repudiate its endorsement of employer health care mandates, a key provision of the Clinton health care plan.

Under Norquist's direction, GOP congressmen boycotted the Chamber's award ceremonies. National Empowerment Television broadcast two shows criticizing the Chamber, copies of which were shipped to state and local chambers. The Wall Street Journal editorialized, while the Small Business Survival Committee sent out a critique of Chamber policy to 800 talk radio shows. Under this assault, the Chamber gave in.

Since the election, Norquist has been a mainstay of the alliance supporting the House Republicans' "Contract With America" and the drive to cut federal spending and taxes.

"He's the brightest grass-roots activist on the whole tax front," Gin-

grich said. "He is just very, very smart, and he is very well connected around the country and he comes up with more interesting ideas than anyone I work with in terms of grassroots activism."

Norquist has dubbed the conservative alliance "the leave-us-alone coalition." This is his way of identifying common ground between, for example, social conservatives who favor requiring states to deny additional benefits to welfare mothers who have more babies and those who argue the federal government has no business in the regulation of morality.

Norquist's resolute commitment to building alliances on the right has led to some imaginative strategies. When business groups were fighting Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standards, Norquist turned to groups like Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum. Norquist persuaded them to join the fray because the mileage goals could be portrayed as threatening such mainstays of the family as the station wagon and the mini-van.

But Norquist's brand of conservatism seeks less to conserve than to achieve a radical restoration of the individualism and anti-statism of America in the early 19th century.

He draws an analogy between today's domestic battles and yesterday's Cold War.

"In an analogy with the Soviet Union, you are talking about the Reagan doctrine of going to the other team's territory and challenging them for it, fighting in Afghanistan, Nicaragua, Angola," Norquist said. In this case, conservatives are "going after Americorps, legal services and the National Endowment for the Arts, going after the weakest parts of the empire."

Tax and spending cuts are his main weapons. When he was a child growing up in Weston, Mass., his father would buy him ice cream cones at the Dairy Joy. But before Norquist got the ice cream, his father would take one lick and say, "That's the income tax," then another and say, "That's the sales tax." Now, he sees each tax and spending cut as a lick for conservatism.

"Republicans are talking about spending \$200 billion less in 2002 than Clinton is," he said. That would force many people off the federal payroll and into the private sector, he said.

For someone who thinks in such

relentlessly strategic and partisan terms as Norquist, the new House leadership is the ideal.

The problem with former Rep. Robert H. Michel (R-Ill.), Gingrich's predecessor as House GOP leader, was that "he didn't wake up every morning wanting to hurt the other team. . . . Newt's argument was that you go out and fight all the time, you wake up every morning and say, 'What can I do to move things forward?' I wanted to play with guys who work like that."

Norquist follows in a tradition established by such earlier icons of conservatism as Richard Viguerie, Howard Phillips, Paul Weyrich and Morton Blackwell. His own generation includes the Journal's Fund; Ralph Reed of the Christian Coalition; Paul Jacob of U.S. Term Limits; Jeffrey A. Eisenach of the Progress and Freedom Foundation; Leigh Ann Metzger, communications coordinator for Gingrich; John Podhoretz of the Standard; columnist and author Jim Pinkerton; and Jersey City Mayor Bret Schundler.

As conservatism has come of age, Norquist has come into his own. At Harvard in the mid-1970s, he worked on the student paper, the *Crimson*, and editor Nicholas Lemann remembers him as a shy, skinny guy with glasses, brave in his outspoken commitment to the right at an institution where liberals rule.

But when they met again at a 1992 reunion, Lemann, liberal author of "The Promised Land," was struck by the fact that Norquist had been transformed into a "burly, bearded kind of macho guy" who both enthralled and appalled dinner companions with stories of his adventures with anti-communist forces in Africa and his put-downs of political correctness.

In addition to the photographs of politicians signing the tax pledge, Norquist's office wall is covered with pictures of him cradling an automatic weapon in Angola with the South Africa-backed forces of Jonas Savimbi, and in the former communist countries of Eastern Europe. Still, his career has been spent primarily on the domestic front.

When he first arrived in Washington in 1978, he said the sight of executive branch buildings made him "physically ill. . . . They took people's money to build those things, people who were just getting by, [they] stole their money and built those things

out of marble. . . . Neo-American fascism, stuff that looks like Albert Speer designed it."

The ideological war against these institutions, he argues, must be fought on four separate battlefields: federal, state, personal and foreign. And it must be fought in all three dimensions of time: past, present and future.

At the personal level, for example, Norquist contends that the act of adopting a poor child has profound ideological consequence: It means an infant will be taken out of the clutches of government-financed foster care, which in his mind would have ensured a life of dependency and likely allegiance to the Democratic Party. Instead, the child will have a chance to enter the private sector, where he or she can learn the value of conservatism.

In the time dimension, there is the present struggle over the budget, regulatory reform and tax legislation. But of perhaps equal significance, in Norquist's view, are competing interpretations of the past: Were the Reagan years bust or boom? Were the 1960s liberating or debilitating?

At the moment, Norquist argues, the right has taken a commanding lead in the competition for a vision of

the future. To Norquist, it is a choice between the Gingrich notion of a decentralized Third Wave future with personal computers freeing a universal entrepreneurial spirit and the left's vision of a society somewhere between Sweden and East Germany.

Norquist—who in addition to running Americans for Tax Reform writes a column for the *American Spectator*, appears regularly with Weyrich on National Empowerment Television and has authored the forthcoming book "Rock The House"—sees a political landscape very different from that of his childhood and college years.

Back then, such leaders of the right as William Buckley declared their mission was to "stand athwart history and yell stop," and Whittaker Chambers, after moving from communism to conservatism, said, "I'm joining the losing team."

"How do you ever expect to gain allies [if what you say is] 'I'm standing in the train tracks and the train is going to run me over, but the right and virtuous thing for you to do is stand with me while we lose?'" Norquist asks.

"I think you run up 100 yards and blow [up] the train tracks and then see what the train thinks about that."



BY JOEL RICHARDSON—THE WASHINGTON POST

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