

November 22, 2011

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True, Chu's testimony is most problematic for him and the president. He insisted the Solyndra endeavor was fully scrutinized. He had no idea others were playing politics. [This exchange](#) neatly summed up Chu's cluelessness:

"I don't see any chain of emails looking out for the taxpayer money," Rep. Steve Scalise, R-La., said in a tense exchange with Chu. "I see a whole lot of emails in the administration that are concerned about the politics. That's what stinks the most about this."

Chu denied that he asked Solyndra to delay the layoff announcement, prompting committee Chairman Cliff Stearns, R-Fla., to ask if Chu plans to look into who sent the email.

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Chu said the Energy Department's general counsel "will look into who is doing these things."

Chu is a walking advertisement for the perils of giving government bureaucrats duties for which they are not remotely competent to perform. When he says he acted with the taxpayers' interests in mind, you get the idea that he might be serious. Apparently this crew thinks that the way to compete globally is to mimic failed command-and-control economies. ...

[Jennifer](#) also says the Occupy group is getting inconvenient for the Dems.

The Occupy movement has officially become a liability for the Democrats. The [New York Post](#) reported: "Thousands of anti-Wall Street protesters clashed with cops [Thursday] across lower Manhattan, starting with a march on the New York Stock Exchange [in the] morning and ending with a crossing of the Brooklyn Bridge that snarled traffic. Cops responded in force, at one point [in the] afternoon sweeping into Zuccotti Park and arresting anyone inside. In total, at least 275 people were busted by cops; five of whom were charged with assault."

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And [Jennifer](#) posts on the \$15 Trillion national debt.

[Rep. Paul Ryan \(R-Wis.\)](#) is out with a new video explaining the implications of the \$15 trillion debt we have now racked up:

Not surprisingly, the Republicans are having a field day with facts and figures to highlight their argument that President Obama has presided over a fiscal train wreck. Don Stewart, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell's communications director, sent out a handy guide to the debt history:

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One more from [Ms. Rubin](#) as she introduces the subject for the balance of Pickings today - Newt Gingrich. She says he has a lot to do to rehabilitate himself. *Newt Gingrich is experiencing his first real scrutiny of the 2012 presidential primary. [Jonathan Martin and John Harris](#) observe, "Even allies say there is simply no way Gingrich can defend all the controversies of his past — there are simply too many of them. His task is to transcend them by seeking to set his past against a context of personal growth."*

That would work better, or course, if in his years after his speakership he hadn't gorged at the trough of special-interest groups. That is why the Freddie Mac controversy is so difficult for him. As the Politico duo note: "Faced with more Freddie Mac questions on a campaign trip to Iowa Wednesday, Gingrich wouldn't say whether the report was accurate that he got paid at least \$1.6 million and, despite his previous claims, did not warn the organization about the looming housing bubble." If he doesn't have his story down yet on the first issue to confront him, it'll be tough sledding.

And we've only begun to see the extent of Gingrich's self-enrichment. ...

In regards to Newt Gingrich, [Toby Harnden](#) asks if Americans want another know-it-all president.

... The [New York Times](#) has reported that Obama balked when Tim Geithner, his Treasury Secretary, told him: "Your legacy is going to be preventing the second Great Depression." Far from being overawed by the momentousness of his task, the new president shot back: "That's not enough for me."

In his book [Confidence Men](#), Ron Suskind recounts that Mr Obama was frustrated by the mundanity of discussion about a trillion dollar economic stimulus. "There needs to be more inspiration here!" he said in one meeting. Later on, he raised the issue of smart grids. When he was told these were unfeasible as part of the stimulus, he responded: "We need more moon shot."

Having remarked loftily during the campaign that Reagan had been a transformative president in a way that Richard Nixon and Bill Clinton had not, Obama came into office making clear his desire to be a Reagan of the Left – as well as a reincarnation of Abraham Lincoln and Franklin Roosevelt with perhaps a dash of John F. Kennedy thrown in.

When he had hired his campaign political director Patrick Gaspard in 2007, he had [told him](#): "I think that I'm a better speechwriter than my speechwriters. I know more about policies on any particular issue than my policy directors. And I'll tell you right now that I'm gonna think I'm a better political director than my political director."

A similar self-regard was on display from Gingrich (who, like Obama in 2008, has no executive experience) last week when he was asked why his campaign had struggled to gain traction in its early days. “Because I am much like Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, I’m such an unconventional political figure that you really need to design a unique campaign that fits the way I operate and what I’m trying to do,” he replied. ...

Andrew Ferguson took one for the team. He read all of Newt Gingrich's books. He reports to us from the NY Times Magazine.

Let’s consult the literature — all 21 books by the self-proclaimed ideas man of politics. (Gingrich cites 23 books on his Web site. We are not counting the Contract With America or the coffee-table book “Ronald Reagan: Rendezvous With Destiny.”)

When his top campaign staff abandoned him not long ago, Newt Gingrich didn’t seem terribly surprised. “Philosophically, I am very different from normal politicians,” he said. “We have big ideas.”

The “we,” as Gingrich uses it here, is akin to the royal we — it’s what might be called the professorial we, employed when the intellectual and the ideas he generates merge to create an entity too large for a singular personal pronoun. “Over my years in public life,” he writes in his latest book about how to save America, “I have become known as an ‘ideas man.’ ” And we shouldn’t doubt it. As I write, a stack of books tilts Pisa-like on my desk, each volume written by Gingrich and various co-authors. I got out my tape measure the other day and discovered that the stack is precisely 15¼ inches high — a figure that does not include the various revised and expanded editions that I have had Whispernetted into my Kindle, along with the historical novels that Gingrich has published with a co-writer named William R. Forstchen: three fat books on the Civil War, three on World War II and a pair on the Revolutionary War. If I added these to my stack, it would be taller than the mayor of Munchkinland and much heavier.

The books taken together are evidence of mental exertions unimaginable in any other contemporary politician. Professorial affectations are not high on the list of tactics candidates like to use in this age of galloping populism. Within the politico-journalistic combine, Gingrich’s status as an intellectual is accepted as an article of faith — something that everybody just assumes to be true, like man-made climate change or Barack Obama’s stratospheric I.Q. Senator Tom Coburn, the Oklahoma Republican, says Gingrich is “undoubtedly the smartest man I’ve ever met.” Cokie Roberts calls him “a big thinker.” Without irony the Democratic consultant Paul Begala praises his “intellectual heft” and Howard Dean his “intellectual leadership.” Ted Nugent says Gingrich is probably the “smartest guy out there.” So that settles that.

Or does it? I built my stack of Gingrich books because I intended to read every one of them, in chronological order, and I did read them, though my chronological scheme broke down eventually. Aside from the sheer number of words, what is most impressive about the Gingrich corpus is its range of literary form, from confessional to guidebook.

Gingrich’s first book, “Window of Opportunity: A Blueprint for the Future,” came out in 1984 and contained the seeds of much of what was to follow. Beneath its cover image — a flag-draped eagle inexplicably threatening the space shuttle — the backbencher Gingrich was identified as

chairman of the Congressional Space Caucus, a position that inspired a series of “space cadet” jokes that took years to die. “Window of Opportunity” was co-written by Gingrich’s second wife, Marianne, and a science-fiction writer called David Drake. Anyone who takes seriously the books that politicians claim to write must sooner or later confront the delicate matter of co-authors and ghostwriters, especially when the books serve, as in Gingrich’s case, as intellectual bona fides.

I have no inside knowledge of Gingrich’s work habits as a writer, or co-writer. In 1994, I was asked to help write one of his books, but the offer never went far enough to allow for close observation. There’s no reason to be prissy or censorious on the subject of politicians and their ghostwriters. George Washington had ghostwriters (pretty good ones, too: Hamilton and Madison). Lincoln had his secretaries write some letters for him, including, some historians say, the most famous Lincoln letter of them all, to the bereaved Mrs. Bixby. And despite a long parade of co-authors — historians, novelists, policy experts, journalists, even family members — Gingrich’s books show a remarkable consistency from one to the next. His contribution to the books that bear his name must be substantial — certainly greater than that of Charles Barkley, who once admitted he hadn’t read his autobiography. (No one else did, either.) Gingrich’s books are Gingrich’s books.

The ghosts for that first book served him unevenly. They got him in metaphor trouble from the first sentence. “We stand at a crossroads between two diverse futures,” he wrote. This crossroads, it transpired, faced an open window. That would be the window of vulnerability, which is widening. Three paragraphs later, the crossroads, perhaps swiveling on a Lazy Susan, is suddenly facing another window, also open. The important point, Gingrich writes, is that this window of opportunity is about to slam shut. And if it does? “We stand on the brink of a world of violence almost beyond our imagination.”

Right Turn

Solyndra: The case against government meddling

by Jennifer Rubin

Energy Secretary Steven Chu’s testimony yesterday wasn’t just bad news for him and the Obama administration. It is also an inconvenient reminder for Republican voters that some of the Tea Party-friendly candidates have rotten records when it comes to crony capitalism.

True, Chu’s testimony is most problematic for him and the president. He insisted the Solyndra endeavor was fully scrutinized. He had *no* idea others were playing politics. [This exchange](#) neatly summed up Chu’s cluelessness:

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Chu is a walking advertisement for the perils of giving government bureaucrats duties for which they are not remotely competent to perform. When he says he acted with the taxpayers’ interests in mind, you get the idea that he might be serious. Apparently this crew thinks that the way to compete globally is to mimic failed command-and-control economies.

As [Kimberley Strassel](#) aptly put it:

Mr. Chu came to Congress to get grilled on the circumstances that led to \$535 million in taxpayer money getting thrown down (to use a high-concept business term) a rat hole. Republicans were particularly interested in plumbing whether undue political influence played a role in the later terms of this loan to Solyndra, whose investors include an Obama donor. But perhaps the greater merit of the testimony was to provide Americans the clearest view yet of the Obama philosophy of government in action. To watch Mr. Chu was to glimpse a day in the life of a political appointee destined for so much more than dusty energy policy. Boring! In Obamaland, department secretaries run the economy, baby! They swim in a pile of balance sheets — creating, funding and managing America’s future, one company at a time. As [Gordon Gekko] might say, Mr. Chu “makes the rules, pal!”

But Chu is also a reminder that a number of the Republican candidates aren’t much better. Newt Gingrich is a lifelong member of the energy subsidy society (that’s not a formal group). His writings and speeches are littered with all sorts of ideas for getting the government to back cool new ideas. I remember a few years back listening to Gingrich extol the virtues of energy-producing algae. Yeah, that’s the ticket. And let’s spend money on wind farms too. Gingrich, of course, posits himself as smarter than Chu, but is Gingrich-directed energy investment that much better than Chu-directed energy investment?

And likewise, Texas Gov. Rick Perry boasts that he personally signed off on tech fund grants. The Post’s Fact Checker, [Glenn Kessler](#), found:

The governor’s office administers the technology fund and approves each award, which appears to present a conflict of interest. The lieutenant governor and House speaker must also sign off, but not until the governor has green-lighted the companies.

The [Dallas Morning] News article notes that the 20-plus states with similar funds avoid using such a system in order to prevent corruption.

Perry told The News that it shouldn’t matter whether the award recipients supported his campaigns, as long as their projects were worthy of funding. It turns out that some of them were not.

The governor also denied knowing whether his donors had ties to the companies receiving money, even though applicants had to submit full financial disclosures with names of investors. Perry’s remarks suggest that the legislature’s reauthorization of these grant programs proves adequate oversight. But reauthorizing old programs and feeding them more money is not the same as auditing them.

The bottom line is that, in all these cases, pols contend they are better positioned to gamble money (not theirs, but the taxpayers) than is the private equity market. In all these cases, conflicts of interest are almost unavoidable.

Moreover, as Rep. Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) explained in his report on income inequality, these arrangements perpetuate a certain pernicious form of income inequality: the unfair preference for the politically connected. Solyndra is a good reminder for Democrats and Republicans alike that government shouldn't be in the business of picking winning and losing energy companies.

Right Turn

Democrats may be sorry they got into bed with OWS

by Jennifer Rubin

The Occupy movement has officially become a liability for the Democrats. The [New York Post](#) reported: "Thousands of anti-Wall Street protesters clashed with cops [Thursday] across lower Manhattan, starting with a march on the New York Stock Exchange [in the] morning and ending with a crossing of the Brooklyn Bridge that snarled traffic. Cops responded in force, at one point [in the] afternoon sweeping into Zuccotti Park and arresting anyone inside. In total, at least 275 people were busted by cops; five of whom were charged with assault."

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Meanwhile the Democrats' favorite polling outfit, [Public Policy Polling](#), reports:

The Occupy Wall Street movement is not wearing well with voters across the country. Only 33% now say that they are supportive of its goals, compared to 45% who say they oppose them. That represents an 11 point shift in the wrong direction for the movement's support compared to a month ago when 35% of voters said they supported it and 36% were opposed. Most notably independents have gone from supporting Occupy Wall Street's goals 39/34, to opposing them 34/42.

Voters don't care for the Tea Party either, with 42% saying they support its goals to 45% opposed. But asked whether they have a higher opinion of the Tea Party or Occupy Wall Street movement the Tea Party wins out 43-37, representing a flip from last month when Occupy Wall Street won out 40-37 on that question. Again the movement with independents is notable- from preferring Occupy Wall Street 43-34, to siding with the Tea Party 44-40.

What does this mean for the left? Well, there are plenty of liberal pundits who look foolish, after concocting a "movement" out of the filthy rabble. And there may be some really embarrassing ads featuring House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) and President Obama, among others, cooing over OWS, which eventually showed its true colors. By the way, does the president have *nothing* to say about the violence, destruction and fouling of American cities? Oh, he's in Asia, hiding from the supercommittee debate.

The lesson for pundits and polls should be that Americans at heart are not radicals. They may be disgusted with Washington pols and they may be perplexed by the unseriousness of the president in addressing our fiscal problems. But they aren't in favor of doing away with

corporations or wiping out students' loan obligations or, for that matter, ObamaCare. Trying to prove that fringe groups and mammoth pieces of statist legislation have currency with the American people is a losing gamble.

It may be satisfying for some on the right to pretend that support for Social Security is just AARP spin, or for some on the left to pretend that any attempt to reform entitlements will be rejected by the American people. On this I share Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels's optimism that the American people are looking for grown-up leaders not extreme ideologues — and certainly not a mob that's creating havoc in their cities.

Right Turn

[At \\$15 trillion in debt](#)

by Jennifer Rubin

[Rep. Paul Ryan \(R-Wis.\)](#) is out with a new video explaining the implications of the \$15 trillion debt we have now racked up:

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Likewise, Republican presidential contender Texas Gov. Rick Perry blasted away: "Today, the federal debt hit a depressing \$15 trillion. This astounding debt is a heavy pair of cement shoes for our children and America's economic future. Now more than ever, America needs leadership committed to overhauling Washington." He then touted his latest plan for "a Balanced Budget Amendment to the Constitution, a ban on earmarks, real spending and tax relief, and a part-time Congress to bring fiscal conservatism and responsibility back to our nation's capital."

Certainly, the milestone debt level is problematic for the president and red-state senators (who haven't been able to pass a budget in two years) up for reelection in 2012. However, the \$15 trillion mark also focuses attention on the supercommittee, which, from all appearances, seems far from a deal. The blame game, if the supercommittee fails, will then restart.

Republicans, wary of being on the losing end in that bit of political gamesmanship, are making the case that they have an offer on the table to which the Democrats have not responded. They point to the plan put forth last week by Sen. Pat Toomey (R-Pa.) that included tax reform estimated to generate \$300 billion in revenue.

A senior Republican Senate adviser told me yesterday, "We made them an offer nine days ago. The Dems haven't moved. Nothing serious on entitlement reform from them. And they want

hundreds of billions in stimulus spending and a trillion in tax hikes.” That doesn’t sound too promising. And while it is true that Toomey’s was the last offer on the table, supercommittee member Rep. Jeb Hensarling (R-Tex.) went out of his way to assure Democrats that he and his fellow Republicans were still ready to bargain.

The downside for Obama, of course, is that he’ll be facing a GOP opponent in 2012 who had no part in running up the debt. That candidate will have a comprehensive debt-reduction plan and plenty of criticism for the entire Beltway gang. Obama will try mightily to pass the buck, but the American people are likely to hold the president responsible for the state of the economy, including the mound of debt that casts a dark shadow over Americans’ future.

Right Turn

Gingrich: How can he rehabilitate himself?

by Jennifer Rubin

Newt Gingrich is experiencing his first real scrutiny of the 2012 presidential primary. [Jonathan Martin and John Harris](#) observe, “Even allies say there is simply no way Gingrich can defend all the controversies of his past — there are simply too many of them. His task is to transcend them by seeking to set his past against a context of personal growth.”

That would work better, of course, if in his years after his speakership he hadn’t gorged at the trough of special-interest groups. That is why the Freddie Mac controversy is so difficult for him. As the Politico duo note: “Faced with more Freddie Mac questions on a campaign trip to Iowa Wednesday, Gingrich wouldn’t say whether the report was accurate that he got paid at least \$1.6 million and, despite his previous claims, did not warn the organization about the looming housing bubble.” If he doesn’t have his story down yet on the first issue to confront him, it’ll be tough sledding.

And we’ve only begun to see the extent of Gingrich’s self-enrichment. The [New York Times reports](#) that during the 2009 health-care debate about “death panels,” Gingrich “praised Gundersen Lutheran Health System of LaCrosse, Wis., for its successful efforts to persuade most patients to have ‘advance directives,’ saying that if Medicare had followed Gundersen’s lead on end-of-life care and other practices, it would ‘save more than \$33 billion a year.’” It turns out that “Gundersen was one of the paying clients of Mr. Gingrich’s Center for Health Transformation, a health consulting firm whose other clients have included WellPoint, the American Hospital Association, and various other major health care concerns.” But that’s just the tip of the iceberg:

His campaign could not answer questions that have arisen — first in The Washington Examiner — about whether he represented the pharmaceutical trade group, Phrma, given that he had been a vocal advocate of President Bush’s 2003 prescription drug benefit for the elderly. Now often criticized by conservatives as a costly expansion of Medicare — and thus, potentially problematic for Mr. Gingrich — many Republicans supported the measure at the time as a way to increase prescription coverage by relying on the private market.

Phrma on Thursday released a statement confirming that it had hired Mr. Gingrich “on a positioning project,” though it did not provide exact dates or specifics.

It's a big problem for Gingrich if he was not only on the other side from hardcore conservatives, but in the pocket of Big Pharm during a battle that many conservatives consider a watershed moment in the federal government's creeping intervention in health care. In short, Gingrich will have a hard time playing down his role as a promoter of the very sort of crony capitalism that Tea Partyers abhor.

There is another problem with the personal growth angle: It involves a certain humility and admission of error. Gingrich hasn't done that except in the vaguest manner possible. As someone who fancies himself as an historic figure and deep thinker, he's not prone to enumerating his errors. How has he grown, and how do we know he has? And more to the point, is the Oval Office a self-actualization seminar or a place for a mature and entirely stable leader?

Moreover, there's no sign that he's "grown" beyond a rather unconservative view of government, one for example, that favors ethanol subsidies, the individual mandate and a list of statist policies. Rep. Ron Paul (R-Tex.) is actually far closer to the Tea Party ideal of minimal government than Gingrich, who has a thousand ideas about how government should improve our lives.

And if we're talking about "growing" away from the egomaniacal personality that vexed him as speaker, we've seen no evidence of that. He continues to cast himself as a transformational thinker, too brilliant to be constrained by mere moderators and demands for specific policies.

There are also some practical problems that he faces. He doesn't have much money or staffing. For the entire campaign Gingrich has raised less than \$3 million. His ability to get up ads and put boots on the ground in early states is quite limited. In Iowa, that's especially problematic because grass-roots organizers need to find and make sure the candidate's supporters turn out on caucus night.

Moreover, unlike Texas Gov. Rick Perry, who was largely unknown to many voters and the media, there is a wealth of information available on Gingrich. There are oodles of fellow influence peddlers, former colleagues, ex-wives and ex-staffers who have story after story to feed to the media, much of it unflattering. The mainstream and conservative media are wasting no time in beginning to excavate his record. That leaves Gingrich's rivals free to stay on message, attacking President Obama and presenting their own policy plans.

And then there is the widespread doubt that Gingrich could hold it together for an entire primary and general election and actually beat Obama. The search all along for anti-Romney voters has been to find an *electable*, conservative alternative to Romney. But who thinks the Obama campaign won't have a field day ripping Gingrich and his record to shreds?

Time will tell if Gingrich can keep himself in check. But as a supporter of another candidate put it, "It's a lot easier to be the professor at the back of the pack than leading the pack." He's going to have to do all those things that mere mortal candidates must do — answer questions rather than argue with the questioner, explain his policy proposals, convince voters he's not an anathema to independent voters and show a level of calm and magnanimity that we expect of presidential wanna-bes. Does Gingrich have it in him? We'll find out in the next month or so.

Telegraph, UK

Newt Gingrich and the second coming of Barack Obama

by Toby Harnden

Are Americans ready to subject themselves to another four years of a professor-in-chief? Could they endure an author in the Oval Office who pronounces himself more brilliant than any subordinate, is determined to be a transformational president and whose ego knows no apparent bounds?

These are questions that exercise David Axelrod and his comrades in President Barack Obama's [re-election headquarters](#) at One Prudential Plaza in Chicago. They should also concern Republicans as the name Newt Gingrich appears, miraculously, at the top of GOP primary polls with less than 50 days to go until the first 2012 votes are cast.

Certainly, Gingrich, who swept into power as Speaker of the House of Representatives in 1994 before flaming out four years later, is an old white guy and veteran politician whereas the Obama who won the White House in 2008 was, well, not.

But the similarities between the two men should not be dismissed.

As he embarks on an uphill struggle to win re-election in a year's time, anecdotes are now emerging about Obama's extraordinary self-confidence – some might call it hubris – during private discussion of the economic crisis he faced when he took office.

The [New York Times has reported](#) that Obama balked when Tim Geithner, his Treasury Secretary, told him: "Your legacy is going to be preventing the second Great Depression." Far from being overawed by the momentousness of his task, the new president shot back: "That's not enough for me."

In his book [Confidence Men](#), Ron Suskind recounts that Mr Obama was frustrated by the mundanity of discussion about a trillion dollar economic stimulus. "There needs to be more inspiration here!" he said in one meeting. Later on, he raised the issue of smart grids. When he was told these were unfeasible as part of the stimulus, he responded: "We need more moon shot."

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A similar self-regard was on display from Gingrich (who, like Obama in 2008, has no executive experience) last week when he was asked why his campaign had struggled to gain traction in its early days. "Because I am [much like Reagan and Margaret Thatcher](#), I'm such an

unconventional political figure that you really need to design a unique campaign that fits the way I operate and what I'm trying to do," he replied.

At a time when the American economy remains on life support, Gingrich's big idea is to spend billions creating a "brain science institute". As the Chicago Tribune's [Steve Chapman put it](#), Gingrich, a former history professor, is "deeply in love with the sound of his own voice" and "exhibits a stern, overbearing self-assurance".

Gingrich does not rely on a [teleprompter](#) but the parallels with Obama are otherwise unmistakable. Both men share the condescending tone that comes with a life spent believing they are the cleverest person in every room they occupy.

One of the most dismal slogans to be employed by the Obama administration this year has been "winning the future" – which just happens to be the title of Gingrich's 2005 book, one of 17 non-fiction tomes he has penned.

Despite his three marriages, the third to a [platinum blonde former congressional aide](#) 23 years his junior, his penchant for lavish spending [at Tiffany's](#), his at least [\\$1.6 million dollars of fees](#) for advising federal housing corporation Freddie Mac, Gingrich has been able to rise to the top of the Republican pile principally by critiquing the press in debates.

Flushed with his success, Gingrich is vowing to challenge to Obama to seven three-hour debates modelled on the [Lincoln-Douglas debates](#) of 1858 if he secures the Republican nomination.

Gingrich's rhetorical excesses have included a claim that Obama has been guilty of "[Kenyan, anti-colonial behaviour](#)". But fireworks would probably be in short supply if the two professors were to spend 21 hours trying to decide which of them was the most intelligent and historically significant figure.

The prospect of such a clash of egos could just be enough to send a majority of American voters, already heartily sick of politicians, over the edge.

NY Times - Magazine

What Does Newt Gingrich Know?

by Andrew Ferguson

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entity too large for a singular personal pronoun. “Over my years in public life,” he writes in his latest book about how to save America, “I have become known as an ‘ideas man.’ ” And we shouldn’t doubt it. As I write, a stack of books tilts Pisa-like on my desk, each volume written by Gingrich and various co-authors. I got out my tape measure the other day and discovered that the stack is precisely 15¼ inches high — a figure that does not include the various revised and expanded editions that I have had Whispernetted into my Kindle, along with the historical novels that Gingrich has published with a co-writer named William R. Forstchen: three fat books on the [Civil War](#), three on World War II and a pair on the Revolutionary War. If I added these to my stack, it would be taller than the mayor of Munchkinland and much heavier.

The books taken together are evidence of mental exertions unimaginable in any other contemporary politician. Professorial affectations are not high on the list of tactics candidates like to use in this age of galloping populism. Within the politico-journalistic combine, Gingrich’s status as an intellectual is accepted as an article of faith — something that everybody just assumes to be true, like man-made [climate change](#) or Barack Obama’s stratospheric I.Q. Senator Tom Coburn, the Oklahoma Republican, says Gingrich is “undoubtedly the smartest man I’ve ever met.” Cokie Roberts calls him “a big thinker.” Without irony the Democratic consultant Paul Begala praises his “intellectual heft” and Howard Dean his “intellectual leadership.” Ted Nugent says Gingrich is probably the “smartest guy out there.” So that settles that.

Or does it? I built my stack of Gingrich books because I intended to read every one of them, in chronological order, and I did read them, though my chronological scheme broke down eventually. Aside from the sheer number of words, what is most impressive about the Gingrich corpus is its range of literary form, from confessional to guidebook.

Gingrich’s first book, “Window of Opportunity: A Blueprint for the Future,” came out in 1984 and contained the seeds of much of what was to follow. Beneath its cover image — a flag-draped eagle inexplicably threatening the [space shuttle](#) — the backbencher Gingrich was identified as chairman of the Congressional Space Caucus, a position that inspired a series of “space cadet” jokes that took years to die. “Window of Opportunity” was co-written by Gingrich’s second wife, Marianne, and a science-fiction writer called David Drake. Anyone who takes seriously the books that politicians claim to write must sooner or later confront the delicate matter of co-authors and ghostwriters, especially when the books serve, as in Gingrich’s case, as intellectual bona fides.

I have no inside knowledge of Gingrich’s work habits as a writer, or co-writer. In 1994, I was asked to help write one of his books, but the offer never went far enough to allow for close observation. There’s no reason to be prissy or censorious on the subject of politicians and their ghostwriters. George Washington had ghostwriters (pretty good ones, too: Hamilton and Madison). Lincoln had his secretaries write some letters for him, including, some historians say, the most famous Lincoln letter of them all, to the bereaved Mrs. Bixby. And despite a long parade of co-authors — historians, novelists, policy experts, journalists, even family members — Gingrich’s books show a remarkable consistency from one to the next. His contribution to the books that bear his name must be substantial — certainly greater than that of Charles Barkley, who once admitted he hadn’t read his autobiography. (No one else did, either.) Gingrich’s books are Gingrich’s books.

The ghosts for that first book served him unevenly. They got him in metaphor trouble from the first sentence. “We stand at a crossroads between two diverse futures,” he wrote. This

crossroads, it transpired, faced an open window. That would be the window of vulnerability, which is widening. Three paragraphs later, the crossroads, perhaps swiveling on a Lazy Susan, is suddenly facing another window, also open. The important point, Gingrich writes, is that this window of opportunity is about to slam shut. And if it does? “We stand on the brink of a world of violence almost beyond our imagination.”

Reading the Gingrich catalog, you get used to intimations — or are they threats? — of Armageddon. Windows are slamming shut, or are just about to, all over the place, all the time. “Time is running out,” he wrote toward the end of “Window of Opportunity,” 27 years ago. It’s no wonder that Washington thinks he’s so smart: Gingrich was panicky before panicky was cool. The political class runs on his kind of excitement, as one crisis of the century succeeds another, week by week. Politics on its own terms is so boring — decades of the same issues, the same interests, the same charges of heartlessness against Republicans and of profligacy against Democrats — that attention has to be stoked by artificial means.

Gingrich is better than anyone in the capital at arousing interest and maintaining the capacity to surprise. Open one of his books at random, and who knows what you’ll find? “Congressman Bob Walker of Pennsylvania has been exploring the possible benefits of weightlessness to people currently restricted to wheelchairs.” (He has?) He is mad for adjectives: stunning, grotesque, enormous. His verbs get goosed, too, adverbially: remarkably, dramatically. The intensifiers are part of what Gingrich in a later book called “my usual boyish exuberance.” In his books the exuberance works as a stay against the approaching cataclysm.

After escaping the crossroads through the window, the reader follows the first chapter of this first book as it rushes into a discussion of the sclerotic technology of the welfare state circa 1984, the lengthening American life span, the futurist Alvin Toffler, space tourism, newfangled telephones, organic farming, the exercise boom, the return of apprenticeships, the decentralization of higher education, the rise of Methodism in Britain and the Third Great Awakening in America, Disraeli’s kinky sexual arrangements before he cleaned up his act, the Berkeley Free Speech Movement, historical revisionism, Idi Amin, Jimmy Carter’s bungling of the Ayatollah, the future of Gabon and his, Gingrich’s, daughter’s year off in France.

When you come up for air, you notice you’re only on Page 39, with 233 pages still to come.

In “Window of Opportunity,” Gingrich introduced himself as a futurist, a role he has played off and on throughout his career. There are problems inherent in futurism, most of them involving the future, which the futurist is obliged to predict (it’s his job) and which seldom cooperates as he would hope. Gingrich has called some and missed some. In 1984, he saw more clearly than most that computers would touch every aspect of commercial and private life, but nobody any longer wants to build “a large array of mirrors [that] could affect the earth’s climate,” warming it up so farmers could extend the growing season.

Gingrich’s faith in technology, as his books express it, is total, undimmed by potential misfirings. His artless belief in gadgetry and the power of human ingenuity, his inexhaustible curiosity and magpie gathering of unexpected facts (did you know Ray Kroc gave his autobiography the unappetizing title “Grinding It Out”?), makes his first book the most winning of them all. Even the polemics against the bureaucrats and liberals and other opponents of progress are mild compared to what we’ve got used to in the intervening decades.

“It is not their fault,” he writes empathetically. “They are simply ignorant.”

Stupid, not evil: this is the kind of concession not often found in subsequent books. After “Window of Opportunity,” Gingrich lapsed into a prolonged silence, at least as a literary man. As a politician, of course, he was a dervish, and by the time his next book appeared, in 1995, he was universally honored as the architect of one of the century’s great political triumphs, the Republican takeover of the House of Representatives the year before. “To Renew America” was written in the headlong rush that followed Gingrich’s elevation to the speakership and international fame.

Once again America faced a crossroads, though the word itself wasn’t used. “There is virtually no middle ground,” Gingrich wrote. He later concluded: “To renew or to decay. At no time in the history of our great nation has the choice been clearer.” To avert disaster, Gingrich had no choice but to present many numbered lists. In addition to the Six Challenges Facing America — similar to the challenges we faced 11 years before — and the “five basic principles that I believe form the heart of our civilization,” there were the five forces moving us toward worldwide medicine, a seven-step program to reduce drug use, the nine steps we can take immediately to advance the three revolutions in health care and more. The futurism was still there, too: “Honeymoons in space will be the vogue by 2020.”

Meanwhile, his polemics had hardened. “For some psychological reason, liberals are antigun but not anti-violent criminal,” was a typically dubious example. As a former professor (an unpublished one, at West Georgia College), Gingrich wrote about university leftism with all the bitterness of an ex-academic: “Most successful [alumni] get an annual letter saying, in effect, ‘Please give us money so we can hire someone who despises your occupation and will teach your children to have contempt for you.’ What is amazing is the overwhelming meekness of the alumni in accepting this hijacking of their alma mater.”

This is sharp and funny and nearly true, but it’s not a formulation designed to coax the undecided into agreement. “To Renew America” marks the moment that persuasion faded as a primary purpose of political talk and preaching to the choir took over. Having won at last, and confident that the future was safely in his pocket, Gingrich by 1995 no longer saw a reason to persuade anyone and didn’t try. It’s the victor’s prerogative, but it doesn’t give you practice in constructing arguments. And it’s catching. Hence talk radio, and in a few years the blogs; hence Fox News and MSNBC.

Liberals may not have liked this new aggressive tone from conservatives, but they had it coming. At least since the Red Scare of the 1950s, mainstream institutions had viewed ideological conservatism with condescension or contempt, as either a joke or a personality disorder — a series of “irritable mental gestures which seek to resemble ideas,” in Lionel Trilling’s excellent summary. Gingrich’s rhetoric had the ferocity of a backlash. The liberal revulsion toward him obscured how unorthodox — occasionally, how liberal — his conservatism was. The books then and now are full of heresy. He showed a willingness to criticize other Republicans, even Reagan at the height of his popularity. He advocated a health tax on alcohol to discourage drinking — social engineering, it’s called — and imagined government-issued credit cards that would allow citizens to order goods and services directly from the feds. He thought the government should run nutritional programs at grocery stores and give away some foodstuffs free. He was pushing cuts in the defense budget in 1984 and a prototype of President Obama’s cash-for-clunkers program in 1995.

The ultimate problem with Gingrich's firehose approach to idea-generation wasn't the ideological cast of the ideas but their practicality. To pluck a couple of trivial examples from the scores of proposals he offers in "To Renew America": "We should work with every recovery program to develop low-cost detoxification programs." Terrific, but who's the "we," and what would the "work" entail, and how would the cost be lowered? Before you can ask the question, Gingrich has rushed ahead. Because "we need to know more about the environment," we should "develop a worldwide biological inventory." Excellent idea, for all I know, but administered how? Paid for by whom? Gingrich's vagueness was always a problem, but the books show something more: a near-total lack of interest in the political implementation of his grand ideas — a lack of interest, finally, in politics at its most mundane and consequential level.

Gingrich's inattention to detail is one reason his speakership was so chaotic, as readers of a certain age will recall, and the primary reason he was shunned by his own party after four years with the gavel. "Lessons Learned the Hard Way," released months before his defenestration, is a more conventional memoir than anything else Gingrich has written, and it was supposed to serve as a mea culpa for his mistakes as Speaker, as well as a bid to regain the loyalty of members who had grown tired of his boyish exuberance. It didn't work.

Admitting mistakes comes easily to no public man — as memoirs from figures like Bill Clinton and Donald Rumsfeld demonstrate — but in "Lessons Learned," Gingrich gave it the old West Georgia College try. This didn't work, either. There's lots of mea in "Lessons Learned," but the culpa is all on the other side.

Early in the book, he offers an account of the drafting of the Interstate Transportation Bill of 1997. Most readers, he admits, might think such a story uninteresting. "But in this case most readers would be wrong." In fact, in this case most readers would be right. The point of the story, though, is that Gingrich handled the transportation bill pretty damn well. Indeed, he handled nearly all his duties pretty well — except for when he worked too hard or cared too deeply or thought too much or trusted too many of the wrong people.

Democrats, for instance. One lesson Gingrich claimed to learn the hard way was, as a chapter title has it, "Don't Underestimate the Liberals." As speaker, Gingrich discovered that Republicans are too good for their own — um, good. "The difference between the well-thought-out, unending and no-holds-barred hostility of the left," he wrote, "and the acquiescent, friendship-seeking nature of many of my Republican colleagues never ceases to amaze me." Democrats flatter themselves with the mirror image of this fantasy, of course, pretending to be envious of the robotic efficiency of Republicans and the freedom of action allowed them by their utter lack of conscience or shame. Self-awareness is not listed in the catalog of traits required for faithful partisanship. About the true nature of their enemies, however, if about nothing else, professional Republicans and Democrats are both exactly right.

When Gingrich finished his tenure as the "political leader of a grass-roots movement seeking to do nothing less than reshape the federal government along with the political culture of the nation," he kicked back. Transformational leaders get tired, too. "I found myself at an important turning point in my life" he wrote in "Five Principles for a Successful Life." "I had to stop and ask myself: . . . How can I live up to my potential and be the best possible version of 'me'?"

After I closed the cover of "Lessons Learned," my version of me was deeply fatigued. I abandoned my chronological scheme and began reading through the remaining books without method. As it happens, this is how they seem to have been published, willy-nilly. Once

Gingrich's first post-speaker book appeared, in 2003, the others tumbled out like a litter of kittens. Including co-authored historical novels, Gingrich has published 17 books over the past eight years.

The mental energy and organizational skill required to produce all these collaborative efforts are astounding. They ask a lot of a reader too. I found it useful to divide this part of the corpus into Lesser Gingrich and Greater Gingrich. Lesser Gingrich includes the guidebook, called "Rediscovering God in America" (2006), the book of management advice called "The Art of Transformation" (2006) and the works of straightforward advocacy with a think-tank gloss: "Saving Lives and Saving Money" (2003), about [health care reform](#); "Drill Here, Drill Now, Pay Less" (2007), about energy policy; and "A Contract With the Earth" (2007), about conservation. More comprehensive books survey the political and cultural scene at three-year intervals — "Winning the Future" (2005), "Real Change" (2008) and "To Save America" (2010). They constitute the Greater Gingrich.

Despite these differences, every Gingrich bears the same trademarks and verbal tics and jabs its readers in the ribs with the same sense of urgency. And every Gingrich carries the same theme. "Today we have a horse-and-buggy style of public administration presiding over a nation entering the space-shuttle age," he wrote in "Window of Opportunity." "In an era of A.T.M.'s, iPods and eBay" he wrote more than 20 years later, "we have government from the era of quill pens, inkwells and paper ledgers."

As a result, he wrote in "To Save America," "we stand at a crossroads: either we will save our country or we will lose it." "America today," he announced in "Real Change," "is at an extraordinary crossroads." In a revised edition of "Winning the Future," he phrased our predicament like this: "America is the most energetic, resourceful and innovative nation in the history of mankind. But we are at a crossroads." Moreover, he said in "Saving Lives and Saving Money," "we find ourselves at a crossroads."

The choice between these two roads diverging in a yellow-bellied wood is always stark: a question of "whether the United States as we know it will cease to exist." If nothing else, the Lesser Gingrich shows the author's ingenuity in adapting his theme. "Drill Here, Drill Now, Pay Less," for instance, is aimed at the pure activist. It includes a chart to calculate how much the liberals are making you spend on gas, along with checklists, printed petitions, a membership card, a bumper sticker — everything but a decoder ring. In "The Art of Transformation," he manages to one-up the usual business-book jargon by compiling an impenetrable lexicon of his own. He shows us an OODA loop, for Observe, Orient, Decide, Act, and connects "Islands of Excellence With Invisible Bridges" while "mind mapping" for project planning.

"Moving to the sound of the guns," he writes, "requires that we are externally rather than internally oriented, so we can hear the guns; understand our antelope" — that's what he wrote — "so we know if the guns are worth hearing; think through our deep-mid-near goals so we know which guns to respond to." Senator Coburn needs to get out more.

One of Gingrich's recent books had the potential to be charming. "Rediscovering God in America" is a walking tour of buildings and monuments in Washington. The point is to demonstrate how previous generations of Americans unabashedly included religious symbols in civic life, in contrast to the picky legalisms and hair-trigger sensitivities of our own era. The book is a collaboration with Callista Gingrich, the wife ("whose support and love have made the adventure of our life together exciting, enjoyable and fulfilling," Gingrich writes in "To Serve

America”) who replaced the second wife, Marianne (“who made it all worthwhile” back in the day of “To Renew America”). Callista is unavoidable in all of Gingrich’s current endeavors. Having married a powerful man and suddenly blossomed in fields in which she earlier showed seemingly no interest or professional skill — writing books, taking photographs, making movies, overseeing her husband’s not-for-profit company — Callista has emerged as the Linda McCartney of the conservative movement.

Her images in the most recent edition of “Rediscovering God in America” are lovely. (Linda was a photographer too.) The entire sepia-toned production is so elegant, that Gingrich’s attacks on the “ruthlessly secular society” in thrall to “a media-academic-legal elite [who find] religious expression frightening and threatening” sound wildly out of place, like a gunshot at afternoon tea.

If Gingrich’s theme is timeless and the enemy unchanging, so is the solution, the same one from 1984. The coming rush of high technology will dismantle the welfare state and provide a replacement that is humane and efficient; it will free the poor from government dependency, take apart a failing educational establishment, relieve the drudgery of industrial labor and provide a steady supply of pleasant jobs, defrock out-of-touch elites in every corner of the ruthlessly secular society, clean up the environment and bequeath to us an America that is “safe, healthy, prosperous and free,” as he wrote in “Winning the Future” and, with slight variation, in most of his other books too. Technology remains the *deus ex machina* of Gingrich’s vision.

His attraction to it goes beyond the sci-fi enthusiast’s love of gadgetry. As our country’s problems fall before technology’s advance, the need for politics and its drudgery disappears: no fuss over compromise and horse-trading, no grubby catering to commercial interests. Politics is just one more feature of the old order that becomes obsolete. Yet a reader who scans the whole collection from its beginning in “Window of Opportunity” might pause: Wasn’t this supposed to have happened already? The explosion in digital technology that Gingrich foresaw in 1984 has come off, with a bang. And yet still the country hangs in the balance, its condition more dire than ever, its need for a transformational leader never more pressing.

Like most Utopians, Gingrich sees the world in binary terms. Only his alternative future can prevent the cataclysm that has been about to happen for so many years. Muddling through — which is the default option of our constitutional system and the one that most Americans, latently conservative as they are, seem to prefer — never surfaces in the swirling mists of his crystal ball. For all the reciprocated disdain he claims to feel for the establishment in Washington, where he has lived for more than 30 years, he is still its unwitting champion; for without the crises that Gingrich chronically imagines, the establishment would no longer be necessary.

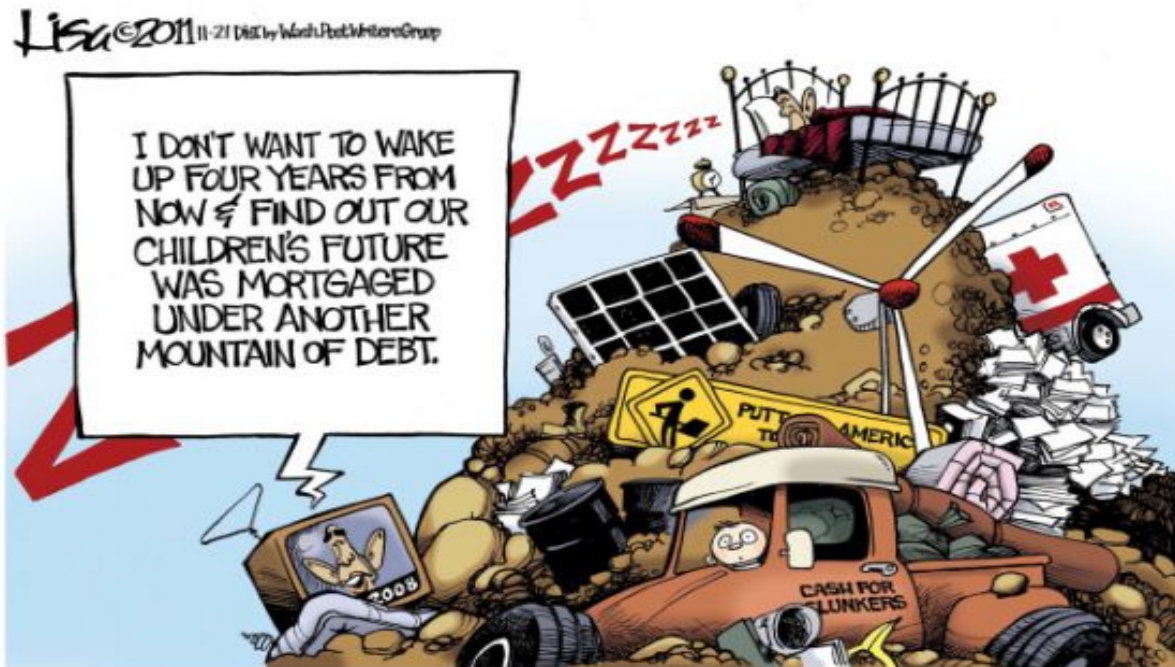
I see I have left little room for Gingrich’s novels. For a Civil War buff, the most interesting of these, and the only ones I read with any care, are the trilogy beginning with “Gettysburg,” continuing with “Grant Comes East” and concluding with “Never Call Retreat.” These are what the trade calls counterfactuals: the authors rewrite the pivotal events of history and then see how the alternative narrative might have played out.

A counterfactual account of history appeals especially to people who are disappointed in the real thing. Settled fact is unsatisfying; history as it occurs seems somehow a cheat. It is true that history hasn’t worked out the way Newt Gingrich envisioned it, and this lends poignancy to the moral of his Civil War trilogy. “This victory was a long way from inevitable,” Ulysses S. Grant

says in “Never Call Retreat,” “and every young American ought to learn just how important one man can be. How one man can shape history and, in that moment, save a nation.”

And then, just when my stack had dwindled to nothing and I felt the thrill of liberation, the mail arrived with my preordered copy of Gingrich’s latest book, “A Nation Like No Other.” I thumbed through it. “The election of 2008,” Gingrich writes, “will bring us to an historic crossroads.”

The choice is stark, apparently — as urgent as any in our history.







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I WASN'T ALWAYS A FRONT-RUNNER!

FANNIE / FREDDIE LOOT	
JOHNSON	100 MIL
RAINES	90 MIL
GORELICK	26 MIL
NEWT	1.8 MIL



STOP HURTING
OUR KIDS!



Melt