

# Gingrich at the Gate

By Bill Berkowitz | February 8, 2007

Although Newt Gingrich, the former Republican Speaker of the House of Representatives who was forced to relinquish his post over a series of ethical missteps, is still considering his options regarding a run for the 2008 presidency, there's little doubt that he wants to be president. Gingrich, who has never been camera shy and appears regularly on the Fox News Channel, does not hesitate to let audiences know where he stands on the critical issues of our time. (His upcoming schedule includes speaking engagements at the American College of Dermatology convention, the World Money Show in Orlando, Florida, an Ameritrade conference in Los Angeles, and the Texas Bankers Association.)

Late last year, at an annual dinner in New Hampshire held in memory of the late publisher of the conservative *Manchester Union Leader* and honoring individuals who stand up for free speech, Gingrich proposed that new strategies and tactics in the war on terror should be considered, including a reexamination of First Amendment rights. Gingrich said: "This is a serious, long-term war, and it will inevitably lead us to want to know what is said in every suspect place in the country, that will lead us to learn how to close down every website that is dangerous, and it will lead us to a very severe approach to people who advocate the killing of Americans and advocate the use of nuclear or biological weapons" (November 27, 2006).

In recent days, Gingrich has called on Congress to enact legislation to make English the official U.S. language; spelled out his ideas about transforming America's health-care system using information technology; and prepared a new "Contract With America for the 21st Century," which "proposes private savings accounts for Social Security, 'patriotic education' in public schools, and the appointment of judges who understand the 'centrality of God in American history,'" as the *Washington Post* recently reported.

To raise the money necessary to push his plans—and possibly his presidential ambitions—Gingrich recently formed a new "527" organization called American Solutions for Winning the Future. (Such 527 groups are often called "soft-money" PACs because they are not subject to the Federal Election Commission's PAC regulations.)

The former Speaker has also been poking around religious frames, dabbling in the Armageddon business. During a July 2006 fundraising trip to Washington State, Gingrich used the term "World War III" in describing the war on terror, the *Seattle Times* reported. He maintained that using the phrase might reenergize the GOP's base, suggesting

that public opinion could change "the minute you use the language" of World War III. The message, he said, was, "Okay, if we're in the third world war, which side do you think should win?"

In late January 2007, Gingrich was off on a similar track, warning that nuclear weapons constitute the threat of a second Holocaust. At the annual Herzliya Conference held by the Institute for Policy and Strategy, Gingrich, speaking via satellite from the United States, maintained that "Israel is facing the greatest danger for its survival since the 1967 victory ... If two or three cities are destroyed because of terrorism both the United States' and Israel's democracy will be eroded and both will become greater dictatorial societies ... Three nuclear weapons constitute a second Holocaust. Enemies are explicit in their desire to destroy us. We are sleepwalking through this as if diplomatic engagement will create a fiesta where we will all love one another" (January 24, 2007). Other conference speakers, including Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, former Israeli Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz, GOP presidential hopeful Republican Mitt Romney, and neoconservative stalwart Richard Perle, were also in agreement that the number one problem in the Middle East is Iran.

Since leaving Congress, Gingrich has enjoyed a host of posts at neoconservative and hardline think tanks, including the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) and the Hoover Institution. In November 2001 he was appointed to the Pentagon's Defense Policy Board (DPB), an advisory board for the Department of Defense, where he served with such top-shelf neoconservatives as Perle, James Woolsey, Ken Adelman, and Eliot Cohen.

Although occasionally critical of the way the Iraq War has been conducted, in late December, the *Sunday Times* (London) reported that Gingrich and fellow DPB members

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called “for a cross between the New Deal and the post-Second World War Marshall Plan that would ‘mop up every young Iraqi male who is unemployed.’” Gingrich said it would be “as big a strategic step toward victory as whether you have more troops or fewer troops” (*Sunday Times*, December 24, 2006).

On January 12, 2007, Gingrich penned with (fellow presidential hopeful) former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani an op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal* that supported the new neoconservative position on Iraq that “victory” there must be had: “The American mission in Iraq must succeed.” However, unlike the recent plans from Bush (and an even more militaristic proposal from AEI scholars) to “surge” troop levels, Gingrich and Giuliani focused on the need to rebuild Iraq’s civil infrastructure: “Our goal—promoting a stable, accountable democracy in the heart of the Middle East—cannot be achieved by purely military means.”

On the Election 2008 front, many GOPers are disappointed with the current crop of declared candidates for the presidential nomination. “They all suck,” Erick Erickson, CEO of the Republican blog RedState.com recently wrote. “From the lecherous adulterer [Rudy Giuliani] to the egomaniacal nut job [Sen. John McCain (R-AZ)] to the flip-flopping opportunist with the perfect hair [former Massachusetts Governor Romney] to the guy who hates brown people [Rep. Tom Tancredo (R-CO)] to the guy we’ve never heard of [Rep. Duncan Hunter (R-CA)] to the guy who has a better chance of getting hit by a meteor while being consumed by a blue whale being struck by lightning [Rep. Sam Brownback (R-KS)].”

Gingrich’s 527 group American Solutions for Winning the Future “received its first significant early contribution of \$1 million from” Las Vegas Sands Corp. Chairman Sheldon G. Adelson shortly after the November elections, according to Gingrich’s longtime friend and colleague Matt Towery. The *Washington Post* reported that, “Adelson was listed by *Forbes* magazine in 2006 as America’s third-richest man, with assets of more than \$20 billion. His long list of political donations, primarily to Republicans, includes \$100,000 to the Republican National Committee in 1997 and 1998,

when Gingrich was speaker” (*Washington Post*, January 23, 2007).

Back in the day, this huge contribution from a gambling honcho might have tickled the former Republican Party über-lobbyist Jack Abramoff. However, it is a donation that is not likely to sit well with the so-called traditional values crowd.

“The problem is the income comes from what we call a vice, and that is an issue,” the Rev. Louis P. Sheldon, chairman of the GOP’s Traditional Values Coalition, told the *Washington Post*.

Towery, a former national Republican legislator of the year and the author of *Powerchicks: How Women Will Dominate America*, views Gingrich “as a likely, viable candidate for president in 2008.” He was flabbergasted, however, that Gingrich would seek out funds from gambling interests, and is sternly advising him to give the money back immediately. “Newt’s ability to raise funds is legendary,” Towery pointed out in a January 25 column. “His concept of researching new ideas for America and sharing them with any and all takers—including presidential contenders—is laudable. But these strong points of Gingrich’s will be a secondary consideration by potential supporters of his potential candidacy if he continues to operate with a Vegas high-roller image,” Towery added (TownHall.com, January 25, 2007).

By accepting the gambling money, Gingrich’s 527 looks “like a front for gaming interests,” Towery said. “Or worse, a loud echo to the Abramoff scandal.”

Some on the right, like RedState’s Erick Erickson, also seem to have an innate discomfort with the idea of imagining Gingrich as president. While arguing that he would like to see Gingrich in the contest—so that he could move the debate further to the right—Erickson opined: “I don’t know that I’d trust him with that much power.”

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