

*President Clinton, Newt Gingrich,
and the 104th Congress*

ON PARTIES:

Essays Honoring Austin Ranney

Edited by

Nelson W. Polsby and
Raymond E. Wolfinger

with an introduction by

Douglas Rae

James P. Pfiffner
George Mason University

In January 1995 after the Republican sweep of the midterm elections Bill Clinton was in a world of hurting. The Republicans had just won a historic victory, giving them control of both houses of Congress for the first time in 40 years. Republicans gained 52 seats in the House and eight in the Senate in a clear electoral rejection of President Clinton and the Democrats. Not one Republican incumbent lost his or her seat. President Clinton's approval ratings had dropped to the low forties, and if he had been up for reelection in 1994, it is likely that he would have been defeated. Newt Gingrich, considered the architect of the House takeover, was seen as the agenda setter for the government, and he was orchestrating a 100-day drive to legislate the Contract with America. In April of 1995 President Clinton was reduced to asserting that the president was still "relevant" to the policy process.

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Fast forward one year to January 1996 and the positions are reversed. Newt Gingrich and the Republicans had been blamed by the public for unnecessarily shutting down the government twice in the previous three months. Gingrich had the highest negative poll ratings of any major national leader. Most of the Contract had not become law. Conservative House Republicans blamed Gingrich for their failure to win broader victories and talked openly of a revolt against the Speaker. President Clinton had rebounded in the polls, with some of the highest ratings of his presidency, and he was unopposed in the Democratic primary races. He would go on to a relatively easy victory in his campaign for reelection against Robert Dole.

This turnaround is one of the most striking reversals of fortunes in recent American political history, and its explanation is intertwined with the nature of the U.S. party system. This essay will take up the question of how President Clinton went from being an extremely vulnerable incumbent whom the Republicans were certain could easily be beaten in 1996 (most Democrats agreed) to an easy victory over Robert Dole by November 1996. The parallel story is how Newt Gingrich plunged from being the hero of the 1994 elections who had master-minded the Republican takeover of Congress to one of the most unpopular politicians in the national government.

In his classic analysis of responsible party government, Austin Ranney catalogues the defects of the U.S. political party system according to its critics and advocates of responsible party government.¹ U.S. parties do not often "stand" for anything and seldom offer voters clear programmatic choices at election time. Parties seem to pursue power as an end in itself rather than for the purpose of enacting systematic programs. Members of Congress see themselves as individual delegates responsible to their own constituencies rather than members of a party with collective responsibilities. Once in office they cannot command the votes of their members and thus cannot enact a coherent policy program.²

¹Austin Ranney, *The Doctrine of Responsible Party Government* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1962). See also Austin Ranney, *Curing the Mischief of Faction: Party Reform in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975).

²Ranney, *Responsible Party Government*, Ch. 2.

But in 1994 it seemed that the Republican party was offering the voters a clear choice in accord with some of the principles of responsible party government. In contrast to the complaint that U.S. political parties do not "stand" for anything, the Republicans had run on the Contract for America. In contrast to the complaint that U.S. parties put emphasis on individuals rather than collective responsibility in the party, the Republican leaders said explicitly that if they did not deliver on their promises that voters should vote against them in the next election. In contrast to the complaint that U.S. political parties only seek political power and are not committed to policy results, Republican candidates, especially the freshmen, often seemed to be more committed to policy outcomes than to winning reelection. Thus the Republican victory in 1994 seemed to be an exception to politics as usual.

In another perspective on American political parties, David W. Rohde has argued that the political circumstances of the 1994 elections and the 104th Congress created the conditions for "conditional party government." According to Rohde the necessary conditions include (1) a high degree of preference homogeneity within a party and (2) a high degree of preference difference between the parties. These conditions make party members willing to delegate a relatively high degree of power to their leaders because they are confident that leaders accurately reflect the will of the party.³ The elections of 1994 resulted in greater interparty polarization and interparty cohesion than any other postwar Congress. The changes enacted by the Republicans in the House (and to a lesser extent in the Senate) resulted in greater power being delegated to congressional leaders than since the early 1900s.⁴

While Rohde's theory of conditional party government helps explain the unusual degree of delegation of power Newt Gingrich enjoyed as Speaker of the House in the first session of the 104th Congress, Ranney's insights about the party system should lead us to expect that these condi-

³David W. Rohde, *Parties and Leaders in the Postreform House* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

⁴John H. Aldrich and David W. Rohde, "Theories of the Party in the Legislature and the Transition to Republican Rule in the House," paper presented at the 1995 annual meeting of the APSA; David W. Rohde, "Parties, Institutional Control, and Political Incentives: A Perspective on Governing in the Clinton Presidency," revision of a paper delivered at the colloquium on "The Clinton Years in Perspective," at the Université de Montréal, October 6-8, 1996.

tions would not endure too long and that the ambitious policy aspirations of the Republicans in 1994-95 would not be entirely achieved. Ranney's trenchant critique of the responsible party government model points out that the antimajoritarian institutions created by the U.S. Constitution make virtually impossible the type of majoritarian democracy implied by the responsible party government model and by extension, the policy aspirations of the Republicans in 1995.⁵

What makes the political reversal of fortunes between the Republican Congress and President Clinton in 1995 so interesting is that the Republicans, after their impressive victories, did not seem to realize the limits inherent in the separation of powers system. In pushing their priorities further than the system would allow, they hurt themselves and handed President Clinton an advantage he might otherwise not have had.

Before examining the reasons that the Republicans acted as they did, this essay will begin with a brief analysis of the electoral underpinnings of party polarization in Congress and its institutional effects. It will then take up the Republican congressional victory in the 1994 elections and the consolidation of power in the Speaker's office in the House. The budget showdowns and government shutdowns in the fall of 1995 that positioned President Clinton for his reelection in 1996 will then be analyzed. Finally, several explanations of the Republicans' actions will be presented.⁶

POLITICAL TRENDS AND PARTISAN POLARIZATION

The building blocks of the Republican majority in the House can be traced to the partisan reversal in the South over the past three decades. This transformation led to increasing ideological cohesiveness of both parties and polarization in Congress. National policies in the 1960s led to increasing participation by African Americans in the electoral process. The

⁵Ranney, *Responsible Party Government*, Ch. 10. According to Ranney, the factors that undermine majority rule in the U.S. include the separation of powers, presidential veto, staggered elections, Senate filibuster, federalism, and the Supreme Court.

⁶For a more thorough analysis of these developments see James P. Pfiffner, "President Clinton and the 104th Congress: Losing Battles but Winning the War," Working Paper of The Institute of Public Policy, George Mason University (October 1997).

Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the registration of many more black voters in the South began the slow change that led to a Republican majority in Congress. Increased black voting and the creation of majority/minority districts (in which a majority of the voters were African American) led to increased numbers of African-American representatives from the South. Since black members of Congress tended to reflect the liberal orientation of their constituents, they reinforced the liberal wing of the Democratic caucus, while the new Republican representatives from the South tended to be more conservative than their Democratic predecessors.⁷

As the party identification of southern whites changed, so did the number of House seats from the South held by Republicans. In the 102nd Congress the Democrats enjoyed a margin of 85 to 44 seats representing the South in the House; in the 104th Congress the margin had reversed to a 73 to 64 Republican advantage. In the Senate southern seats were dominated by the Democrats in the 102nd Congress by a margin of 17 to 9; by the 104th Congress the Democrats were at a 16 to 10 disadvantage. Partisan representation in the other three regions of the country stayed relatively stable over the same period.⁸ Thus the Republican capture of Congress in 1994, in addition to short-term factors such as Democratic vulnerability and

⁷For analyses of the changing electoral make-up of the South and the partisan implications, see: Earl Black and Mette Black, *The Vital South* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992); Bruce Oppenheimer, "The Importance of Elections in a Strong Congressional Party Era," in *Do Elections Matter?*, ed. Benjamin Ginsberg and Alan Stone (Armonk, N.Y.: M. W. Sharpe, 1996); Gary Jacobson, "The 1994 House Elections in Perspective," in *Midterm: The Elections of 1994 in Perspective*, ed. Philip A. Klinker (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1996); Gary C. Jacobson, "Reversal of Fortune: The Transformation of U.S. House Elections in the 1990s," paper delivered at the Midwest Political Science Meeting, Chicago, April 10-12, 1997; Paul Frymer, "The 1994 Electoral Aftershock: Dealignment or Realignment in the South," in *Midterm: The Elections of 1994 in Context*, ed. Philip Klinker (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1996); Lawrence C. Dodd and Bruce I. Oppenheimer, "Revolution in the House: Testing the Limits of Party Government," in *Congress Reconsidered*, ed. Lawrence C. Dodd and Bruce I. Oppenheimer (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1997), 29-60; and "Congress and the Emerging Order: Conditional Party Government or Constructive Partisanship?" 371-89.

⁸Dodd and Oppenheimer, "Congress and the Emerging Order," 366-97.

effective Republican strategies, was the result of longer-term trends in national and particular southern electoral politics.

These trends in electoral politics had an important impact on the internal dynamics of the House and Senate. As the two parties have become more ideologically homogeneous, they have become more cohesive, particularly House Republicans. Thus politics in Congress have become more polarized and partisan. There are fewer conservative Democrats (often called Boll Weevils) and fewer liberal Republicans (often called "Rockefeller Republicans"). One measure of partisan conflict in Congress is the "party vote" in which a majority of one party opposes a majority of the other party in a roll call vote. This measure of polarization has been increasing in recent years, especially in the House. From 1955 to 1965 the percentage of votes in the House that were party votes averaged 49 percent; from 1967 to 1982 the percentage was 36 percent. But after 1982 it began to climb, reaching 64 percent for the 103rd Congress.⁹ Party voting reached a record 73.2 percent in 1995.¹⁰ Party voting in the Senate roughly paralleled that of the House though at slightly lower levels, reaching a Senate record of 68.8 percent in 1995.

In the Senate the increased use of the filibuster and other dilatory tactics, such as "holds" on nominations, has developed into a "parliamentary arms race" in which each side is willing to use the extreme tactic because the other side has used it against them.¹¹ The recent polarization of Congress has also led to a decline of civility and comity that has led a

⁹See Barbara Sinclair, "Transformational Leader or Faithful Agent? Innovation and Continuity in House Majority Party Leadership: The 104th and 105th Congresses," paper presented at the 1997 annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, D.C., 5; and *CQ Weekly Reports*, (January 27, 1996), 199.

¹⁰It was the highest since *CQ* began keeping the data in 1954, *CQ Weekly Reports* (January 27, 1996), 199. According to John Owens' calculations party voting was the highest since 1905-06. See John Owens, "The Return of Party Government in the U.S. House of Representatives: Central Leadership—Committee relations in the 104th Congress," *British Journal of Political Science* 27 (1997): 265. Party unity scores, in which members of the two parties vote with their majorities on party line votes, also increased to unusually high levels.

¹¹Sarah A. Binder and Steven S. Smith, *Politics or Principle?* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1997), 10, 16.

number of thoughtful and moderate members to step down rather than to stay and fight increasingly partisan battles.¹²

Thus over the past several decades the once solid Democratic South has turned Republican, leading to the polarization of the political parties in Congress. This polarization has led to increased confrontation and the decline of comity in Congress. Although the partisan trends described above contributed to the Republican victory in the 1994 elections, the turnover of Congress to the Republicans was not foreordained by these trends. In order to understand the outcome of the 1994 elections it is necessary to review the political context of the 1994 campaigns for Congress.

The longer-term groundwork for the Republican victories in 1994 was laid by Newt Gingrich after his election to Congress in 1978. In 1983 he formed the Conservative Opportunity Society, a group of House Republicans who would fight the Democrats with harassing parliamentary tactics, such as long lists of floor amendments intended to force Democrats into making difficult votes.¹³ Also in 1983 Gingrich became the chair of GOPAC, a political action committee to raise money for Republican challengers to Democratic congressional seats. GOPAC systematically set out to develop a "farm team" of congressional candidates by aiding in fund raising, and by developing ideas, issues, debating points, and campaign literature for their campaigns. By the time of the 1994 Republican election victories the newly elected freshman class felt that Newt Gingrich had played a major role in their individual elections and in the creation of a Republican majority in the House. Their gratitude would be a factor in tight House votes during the 104th Congress.

The longer-term electoral trends and the building of Republican challengers over the previous decade provided the context for the immediate issues presented by President Clinton and the 103rd Congress.¹⁴ The

¹²See Eric Uslaner, *The Decline of Comity in Congress* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1993).

¹³See the summary by Barbara Sinclair in "Transformational Leader or Faithful Agent?"

¹⁴For an analysis of the Clinton administration's legislative record, see James P. Pfiffner, "President Clinton and the 103rd Congress: Winning Battles and Losing Wars," in *Rivals for Power: Presidential-Congressional Relations*, ed. James Thurber (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1996).

Clinton administration was vulnerable in 1994 because the 1992 elections had brought unified government; expectations of the electorate, encouraged by Clinton's ambitious policy agenda, were high. In his first year in office President Clinton won several significant legislative victories. But the major Clinton policy priority of the 103rd Congress, and the one that would make them most vulnerable to Republican attack, was the proposed overhaul of health care financing policy. The administration wanted to achieve universal health care insurance coverage without government financing (thus employer mandated insurance) or major tax increases.

The proposal was attacked by the Republicans as being too complex, too coercive, too costly, and too much big government. By blocking action on health care legislation in 1994 and opposing any alternative plan that might have been more acceptable, the Republicans were able to argue that the Clinton administration was in favor of big government and at the same time was not able to govern, since it could not even pass its most important legislative priority.¹⁵

The Republicans were able to turn the election into a referendum on the Clinton Administration and Democratic control of the government. Individual candidates ran as much against the Clinton administration as they did against their congressional opponents. Democratic candidates did not want the president to campaign for them in their districts, and Republicans ran ads that "morphed" photographs of their Democratic opponents into images of President Clinton. The Republican election themes were that President Clinton could not be trusted personally, the Democrats were not able to govern effectively, and that the government was a sinister force.

In addition to unified opposition to the Clinton administration, the Republicans sought to nationalize the 1994 elections through the Contract With America. The "Contract" was a collection of issues arranged into 10 points that had been carefully constructed under the inspiration and

direction of Newt Gingrich.¹⁶ The Contract issues included a balanced budget, welfare reform, term limits, defense increases, tort reform, crime, congressional reform, family legislation, tax cuts, and a number of other issues; though the specific form of each of the policy proposals would depend on the legislative process. Despite the Republicans' efforts to publicize the Contract, including an ad in *TV Guide*, most voters had not heard of the Contract.¹⁷ Nevertheless, it did have the effect of unifying the Republican candidates for Congress. They went back to their individual races and used the issues and rhetoric of the Contract to run against the Clinton administration and their Democratic opponents.

The efforts of the Republicans were successful; they won the 1994 elections in a landslide. In gaining 52 seats in the House and eight in the Senate, the Republicans took control of the Congress for the first time since 1952. Thirty-four Democrats lost their seats in the House, and no Republican incumbents lost. Perhaps more importantly, Republicans won 39 of 52 open House seats.

ORGANIZING THE 104TH CONGRESS: CONDITIONAL PARTY GOVERNMENT

Since Newt Gingrich was seen as the architect of the Republican takeover of Congress, his support was universal among House Republicans, and particularly strong among the 73 House freshmen who felt that they owed their seats to him. This strong support from the rank and file, combined with shrewd initial actions to consolidate his power in the House, gave Gingrich initial control of the agenda approaching that of a prime minister in a parliamentary system. The delegation of power to the leadership fulfilled the conditions of conditional party government, and the

¹⁵For analyses of the Clinton health care plan and the politics of Republican opposition, see: Jacob Hacker, *The Road to Nowhere* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997); Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein, eds., *Intensive Care: How Congress Shapes Health Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1995); Theda Skocpol, *Boomerang: Health Care Reform and the Turn Against Government* (New York: Norton, 1996); and Haynes Johnson and David Broder, *The System* (New York: Little Brown, 1996).

¹⁶John Bader, "The Contract with America: Origins and Assessments," in Dodd and Oppenheimer, *Congress Reconsidered*.

¹⁷A *New York Times*—CBS poll found that 71 percent of those polled had not heard of the Contract with America, see Gary Jacobson, "The 1994 House Elections in Perspective," in *Midterm: The Elections of 1994 in Perspective*, ed. Philip A. Klinker (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1996), 6.

discipline of the Republican ranks resembled what might be expected under responsible party government.¹⁸

After the elections Gingrich lost no time in asserting his control over the House, and a number of important changes were made in House rules and structure that facilitated leadership control over the legislative process. In enhancing the Speaker's power, Gingrich built upon Democratic practice over the previous two decades, but the Republicans' changes to the House rules created the most powerful Speakership since those of "Uncle" Joe Cannon and Thomas B. Reed at the turn of the century.

The main thrust of the changes was to enhance the power of the leadership at the expense of committees. Three committees were abolished outright (Post Office and Civil Service, District of Columbia, and Merchant Marine and Fisheries), and some committee jurisdictions were changed. Twenty-five subcommittees were abolished.¹⁹ Authority over committee assignments was changed from the committee on committees to the newly created Steering Committee that was dominated by Gingrich. In naming the chairs of committees Speaker Gingrich chose to ignore seniority in several cases. The terms of committee chairs were limited to three consecutive terms, while the speaker's would be limited to eight years, thus putting chairs on a much shorter leash than when the tenure of chairs was assumed to be indefinite and the seniority system sacrosanct. In addition, committee staffs were cut by one third, from 1,854 to 1,233 positions; committee

¹⁸For astute analyses of the leadership of Newt Gingrich in the 104th Congress, see John E. Owens, "Taking Power? Institutional Change in the House and Senate," and Barbara Sinclair, "Leading the Revolution: Innovation and Continuity in Congressional Party Leadership," both in *The Republican Takeover of Congress*, ed. by Dean McSweeney and John E. Owens (Basingstoke and New York: Macmillan, 1998).

¹⁹On the institutional consequences of the Republican takeover of Congress, see John E. Owens, "The Institutional Consequences of Partisan Change in Congress," in *Developments in American Politics* 3, ed. Gillian Peele, Christopher J. Bailey, Bruce Cain, and B. Guy Peters (Basingstoke and New York: Macmillan, 1998), and "Party Government and the Converging of Committee-Floor Relations in the House of Representatives: Some Preliminary Findings," paper presented at the Southern Political Science Association meeting, Norfolk, Va. (November 5-8, 1997).

budgets were also cut from \$222.3 to \$156.3 millions.²⁰ Notably the leadership staff was not cut (and in fact was slightly increased), and personal staff was left untouched.

With full committee chairs now more effectively controlled by the leadership, subcommittees were put under tighter control of the full committee chairs. The Republicans decided to roll back some of the reforms of the 1970s that were referred to as the "subcommittee bill of rights." In the 104th Congress full committee chairs would now be able to designate subcommittee chairs and control majority party subcommittee staffing and budgets.

Gingrich skillfully used his new leadership powers to control the legislative work of the committees. When he was not confident that he could control their behavior, he bypassed them by forming special task forces that were able to bypass regular committees in the formulation of legislation. Between 20 and 30 of these temporary task forces were created by Gingrich, and in October 1995 he went so far as to say that "eventually, it would be better if committees could be replaced by task forces."²¹

That all of these mechanisms to enhance the Speaker's power and ability to control committees were deemed necessary, demonstrates just how powerful the fragmenting tendencies are in the House and how formidable are the forces against maintaining conditional party government, let alone responsible party government. Virtually all the Republicans, and especially the 73 freshmen, gave Newt Gingrich credit for masterminding the Republican takeover of the House; they were firmly committed to the Republican policy agenda and felt grateful to Gingrich personally. Nevertheless, all of these changes were seen as necessary to ensure control of the agenda by Gingrich and his leadership team.

The opening of the 104th Congress on January 4, 1995 was accompanied by all of the spectacle and media coverage that usually accompanies a presidential inauguration. The Republicans were claiming a mandate from the 1994 elections based on the policy proposals in the Contract. The

²⁰John E. Owens, "The Return of Party Government in the U.S. House of Representatives: Central Leadership—Committee Relations in the 104th Congress," *British Journal of Political Science* 27 (1997): 252.

²¹Quoted in Owens, "The Return of Party Government in the U.S. House," 261.

opening session lasted a record 14 and one half hours, finally adjourning at 2:25 a.m. on January 5. The enthusiasm of the House Republicans stemmed from the conviction that they were participating in an unprecedented historic event. No previous congressional class had campaigned on such an explicit policy platform, and they intended to deliver on their promises. Newt Gingrich emphasized the historical significance of the Republican agenda: "what we're doing is a cultural revolution with societal and political consequences that ultimately changes the government. That is a vastly bigger agenda than has been set by any modern political system in this country."²²

The ambition of their policy goals was matched by the ambition of the timetable set by the Contract. It promised that the House would bring to a vote each item in the Contract within the first 100 days of the new session. Despite the large agenda, the House Republicans were successful in bringing up each of the items for a vote and passing all of them, with the exception of the term limits proposal, which entailed a constitutional amendment, requiring a two thirds majority. Of the 21 legislative actions that embodied the 10 Contract policy initiatives, the House passed 20, an impressive legislative feat, particularly within such a limited time frame.²³

The Contract was used very skillfully to force through a lot of legislation in a short period of time. It was invoked by the leadership as a moral commitment to pressure House Republicans to move quickly, delegate power to their leaders, and vote for measures that in ordinary circumstances they might not have. The 100-days commitment added pressure to act without questioning. That the Republicans were so successful in pushing through the House so much significant legislation was due to the skillful leadership by Speaker Gingrich as well as the special circumstances that provided the opportunity for his leadership.

While the Contract sped through the House in historic fashion, the Senate was another story. Senators had not signed the Contract, and in traditional fashion, the Senate acted as the saucer that cooled the legislative

tea (in George Washington's metaphor). Of the 21 legislative items in the Contract, only 13 passed the Senate, and eight eventually became law.²⁴

THE BUDGET BATTLES OF 1995

The first several months of the 104th Congress were taken up with the push to pass the Contract items, an effort that had overwhelmed the House and pushed aside most other priorities. If the first 100 days of the session were devoted to the Contract, the second hundred days were to be devoted to bringing about the Republican "revolution" through the budgetary process. The first step was passing the budget resolution that would lay out the overall guidelines and priorities. It would set targets for expenditures (which were to be cut) and for revenues (taxes would also be cut) and for the projected deficits (which were to decline until the budget was balanced within seven years). Overlapping with the passing of the budget resolution would be the consideration of appropriations bills that would specify programs to be cut or eliminated. Finally, in the fall all of the unresolved issues would culminate in the reconciliation bills that embodied the Republican priorities and would lead to presidential vetoes and shutdowns of the government.

BUDGET RESOLUTION AND APPROPRIATIONS

The budget President Clinton sent to Congress on February 6 was pretty much a status quo document, with a modest reduction in projected deficits over five years, but also projecting \$200 billion deficits over the next five years.²⁵ Clinton felt that he got little credit for his 1993 budget reduction efforts and saw no need to take any political risks for moving the budget

²²Elizabeth Drew, *Showdown: The Struggle Between the Gingrich Congress and the Clinton White House* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 275.

²³Bader, "The Contract with America," in Dodd and Oppenheimer.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 363.

²⁵*CQ Weekly Report* (February 11, 1997), 403.

toward balance. The House and Senate resolutions each proposed the elimination of hundreds of programs and several cabinet departments.²⁶

After conference committee meetings to iron out the differences between the two versions of the budget resolution, it was finally passed by both houses on June 29 on near party line votes. The resolution called for budget savings of \$894 billion (over projected spending) over seven years and a tax cut of \$245 billion.²⁷ While the budget resolution set guidelines for the serious spending cuts that would be necessary to deliver on the promise to balance the budget within seven years, the specific programmatic decisions still had to be made in committees and reported to the floors of the two houses for votes. The Republican leadership in the House decided to make many of the most far-reaching decisions through the appropriations subcommittees rather than through the standing authorizing committees that would ordinarily consider significant changes to programs.

Tight leadership control of the appropriations committee was asserted before the beginning of the 104th Congress when Newt Gingrich announced that he was going to bypass the three senior Republican members of the committee and elevate Robert Livingston (R-Louisiana) to chair the committee. In February Gingrich met with Livingston and the appropriations subcommittee chairs. He impressed upon them the centrality of their role to the overall Republican agenda, telling them: "You're going to be in the forefront of the revolution. . . . You have the toughest jobs in the House. If you don't want to do it, tell me."²⁸ He also insisted that they each write him letters to affirm that they would follow through on their mission. Majority Leader Dick Arney instructed the authorizing committee chairs that they were to work with the appropriations subcommittees in making the

cuts. In addition, many of the substantive changes in programs sought by the Republicans would be made in the appropriations committee.²⁹

THE RECONCILIATION PROCESS AND GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWNS

As the appropriations subcommittees worked on the programs under their jurisdiction, authorizing committees had to make changes in the large entitlement programs whose funding did not go through the appropriations committees. The committees had to meet to decide how to make the cuts that had been ordered by the budget resolution. All of the appropriations bills as well as the entitlement cuts were supposed to be finished by September 22 so that they could all be combined into one large reconciliation bill.³⁰

The budget resolution had committed the Republicans to deep cuts in entitlement programs, and battles over the contours of the cuts were contentious among the Republicans as well as drawing the opposition of Democrats. The cuts necessary to achieve balance were particularly challenging since the Republicans had excluded a majority of federal spending for political reasons: Social Security (about 22 percent of outlays, defense—16 percent, and interest on the debt—16 percent).³¹ In order to comply with the budget resolution the Republicans intended to cut \$270 billion from Medicare, and \$183 billion from Medicaid as well as making deep cuts in other entitlement programs.³²

The Senate Budget Committee proposed abolishing 100 programs and eliminating the Department of Commerce. The House voted to abolish more than 280 programs and eliminate the Departments of Education and Energy as well as Commerce. Both budget committees called for severe cuts or elimination of Clinton's Goals 2000, national service program, the

²⁶See the account by Barbara Sinclair in *Unorthodox Lawmaking: New Legislative Processes in the U.S. Congress* (Washington: CQ Books, 1997), Ch. 11. See also the account in Aaron Wildavsky and Naomi Caiden, *The New Politics of the Budgetary Process*, 3d ed. (New York: Longman, 1997), 303-08; and Drew, *Showdown*, 208-09.

²⁷Sinclair, *Unorthodox Lawmaking*, 188-89.

²⁸Quoted by David Maraniss and Michael Weisskopf, "Tell Newt to Shut Up" (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 87.

²⁹See John H. Aldrich and David W. Rohde, "The Republican Revolution and the House Appropriations Committee," Working Paper 96-08, Institute for Public Policy and Social Research, Michigan State University, presented at the Southern Political Science Association Convention, Nov. 7-8, 1996, Atlanta, Georgia, 9-21.

³⁰Sinclair, *Unorthodox Lawmaking*, 190.

³¹*CQ Weekly Reports* (October 28, 1995), 3282.

³²Sinclair, *Unorthodox Lawmaking*, 189.

National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities, and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.³³ The reconciliation bill had to embody compromises between the two houses across many policy areas.

When the end of the fiscal year approached late in September the appropriations bills had not been completed, and as is usually done in such situations, a continuing resolution was passed in order to keep government programs funded. The CR kept the government open until November 13 while Congress deliberated about the fate and funding of the programs slated for cuts or elimination by the Republicans. During October the Republicans began to gather all of the spending cuts in appropriated programs and entitlements together in the reconciliation bill. By October 26, the compromises among the Republicans had been made, and there was tremendous pressure for them to vote for their party's budget balancing package, despite the reservations of many individual members.

Democrats, of course, were firmly opposed to the deep cuts in many programs that they had supported over the years. They argued that drastic program cutbacks had been put into the bill at the last minute without hearings and that they did not have adequate time to consider them or offer alternatives. But the House Republicans prevailed and on October 26 passed the largest reconciliation bill ever passed by 227-203.³⁴ According to Newt Gingrich the bill was "the most decisive vote on the direction of government since 1933."³⁵ The next day the Senate passed its reconciliation bill 52-47. The conference committee included 43 senators and 71 members of the House, and after weeks of negotiations covering hundreds of programs, each House had approved the final version by November 20.

The First Shutdown

But in the meantime much of the government had shut down because of a lack of appropriations. Only two appropriations bills had passed and been signed by the president by the end of the fiscal year, September 30. Of the 11 remaining bills, only three had been sent to the president. Others

were still not agreed to by the House and Senate.³⁶ When the continuing resolution that had been in effect from October 1 to November 13 ran out, Congress passed another continuing resolution to send to President Clinton. But the bill had a number of provisions that were unacceptable to the president. While the first continuing resolution allowed for agencies to spend funds at 90 percent of their fiscal 1995 levels, the new proposal called for spending at 60 percent of that level for programs that both houses had agreed to eliminate.³⁷ In addition, it deeply cut funding for many programs, and it committed the president to agree to a balanced budget by 2002. The resolution also prohibited the Treasury Department from using trust funds to pay interest on the national debt. The Republicans intended to put further pressure on the president through the CR by threatening a financial crisis; the legislative ceiling for the \$4.9 trillion national debt would be breached about November 15 when \$25 billion in interest was due unless Congress passed a law increasing the debt limit.³⁸

The strategy of the Republicans was to use the leverage of a possible government shutdown and default on the national debt to force the president to agree to their budget and policy priorities. The Constitution limits the power of Congress to make policy by providing the president with a veto that can only be overridden by two-thirds of each house. Since the Republicans did not have the votes for an override and did not want to compromise with the president, they had to find some other way to pressure the president if they were to prevail. They chose the statutory debt limit and the threat to shut down the government as their means to put pressure on the president. Their calculation was that the consequences of each of the two actions would be so serious that the president would agree to their demands. It was essentially a game of chicken in which they challenged Clinton to accede to their demands or allow unacceptable consequences to follow.

The stakes were high because the United States had never defaulted on its debts, and its failure to finance its debt (pay bondholders) could easily have led to a financial crisis that would undermine the confidence of the financial markets and drastically increase the cost of future borrowing to the U.S. Treasury. That the Republicans were willing to risk the financial

³³Drew, *Showdown*, 208-09.

³⁴Sinclair, *Unorthodox Lawmaking*, 199.

³⁵*CQ Weekly Reports* (October 28, 1995), 3282.

³⁶*CQ Weekly Report* (November 11, 1995), 3442.

³⁷*CQ Weekly Report* (November 11, 1995), 3442.

³⁸*CQ Weekly Report* (September 23, 1995), 2863.

stability of the country demonstrated their commitment to their own policy goals. The consequences of shutting down the government were not nearly as great. When appropriations had lapsed in the past (about eight times since 1980) parts of the government had been shut down, but for relatively brief periods of time. The consequences were the disruption of services, the inconvenience of citizens depending on government programs, and the administrative costs of administering a shutdown.

The political calculation of the Republicans was that if the government was shut down, that President Clinton would be blamed and that he would soon agree to their terms so as not to be blamed for resisting a balanced budget and shutting down the government. The Republican freshmen were particularly committed to having their way because they felt that they had been elected to carry out their agenda in cutting government programs and balancing the budget. In October Gingrich told a university audience that if the Democrats did not go along with Republican demands, "fine, they won't have any money to run the parts of the Government they like, and we'll see what happens."³⁹ He further elaborated his position, "I don't care what the price is. I don't care if we have no executive offices, no bonds for 60 days. . . . What we are saying to Clinton is: Do not assume that we will flinch, because we won't."⁴⁰

When the continuing resolution with its unacceptable provisions reached President Clinton on November 13, he vetoed it. The political calculation of the White House was that the president would emphasize the deep cuts that the Republicans intended to make in popular programs such as Medicare, education, and environmental protection as well as programs to help the poor, such as Medicaid, food stamps, and welfare. When the government shut down on November 14, about 800,000 government workers were ordered to stay home, with only those necessary for essential services or where funds for programs had been appropriated.

Gingrich saw the Medicare cuts as crucial to the Republican agenda, and it became a key battleground between the parties. First, it was a big pot of money, and thus significant cuts were necessary since Social Security, defense, and interest on the debt were off the table. Second, the Medicare

fund was projected to go into the red within a decade, and regardless of which party did it, changes had to be made soon. Third, the Republicans wanted to shift public policy away from direct government funding of services toward private insurance. But the Republicans became politically vulnerable when President Clinton capitalized on the popularity of Medicare and accused the Republicans of slashing it.⁴¹

The rhetoric on both sides was misleading from a financial perspective because the estimates of future spending were not that far apart. The Republicans wanted to reduce the rate of growth of Medicare spending, which would necessarily reduce benefits as costs went up and new people qualified for benefits. And the Clinton administration knew that Medicare spending increases had to be curbed if the system was not to go broke. The Republican plan called for cutting \$270 billion over seven years, which meant a reduction in the rate of spending from 9.9 percent to 7.2 percent, while Clinton had proposed in 1993 to limit the rate of increase to between six and seven percent.⁴² On the other hand, the two sides did have sharply differing visions of how the U.S. should approach large public policy programs that were reflected in the dispute over Medicare. The Republicans wanted to cut governmental spending and rely on the private sector and individual savings, while the Democrats wanted to preserve governmental funding of most social programs, even if costs had to be trimmed.

The Republicans' Medicare proposals passed the House as a separate bill on October 19, and the Senate decided to include the Medicare plan in the reconciliation bill. In the battle for public opinion President Clinton had the advantage of being able to juxtapose the Republicans' target for cutting Medicare by \$270 billion with their proposed tax cut of \$245 billion, arguing that they wanted to cut Medicare for the elderly in order to pay for a tax cut tilted toward the wealthy. Throughout the fall of 1995 President Clinton would not let voters forget that the Democrats wanted to protect

³⁹Jason DeParle, "Listen, Learn, Help, Lead," *New York Times Magazine* (January 28, 1996), 61.

⁴⁰*CQ Weekly Report* (September 23, 1995), 2865.

⁴¹Some public statements by the Republican leadership exacerbated their problems. For instance, on October 25, 1995, Newt Gingrich said that the Health Care Financing Agency, which administers the Medicare Program, should "wither on the vine." Robert Dole the same day said about his opposition to the creation of Medicare in the 1960s, "I was there fighting the fight, voting against Medicare . . . because we knew it wouldn't work." (For both quotes, see Drew, *Showdown*, 318.)

⁴²Drew, *Showdown*, 316.

Medicare, Medicaid, education, and the environment from the ravages of Republican cuts.

The reconciliation bill put into one piece of legislation all of the Republican priorities, including Medicare cuts, putting Medicaid into a block grant, turning welfare (AFDC) back to the states, cutting taxes by \$245 billion, and the specific programs cuts and eliminations that had been included in the appropriations bills. It cut the Earned Income Tax Credit for the working poor, as well as food stamps and other welfare programs. The final bill, which proposed to cut federal spending by \$894 billion over seven years, was finally approved in both Houses on November 17 and finalized on the 18th, and Gingrich proclaimed it "the largest domestic decision we've made since 1933. . . . This is a fundamental change in the direction of government."⁴³ When the reconciliation bill with the provisions that the president had been objecting to arrived at the White House, Clinton vetoed it on December 6. To make a symbolic statement he used the same pen to sign the veto message that President Johnson had used to sign Medicare legislation in 1965.

With much of the government shut down, pressure for both sides to negotiate began to mount, though public opinion polls indicated that the public blamed the Republicans more than the Democrats for the shutdown.⁴⁴ Finally on November 19 a deal was reached to reopen the government, and a continuing resolution was sent to the president for his signature. As the Republicans had insisted, the president agreed to a resolution that called for a balanced budget in seven years scored by CBO.⁴⁵ Each side would read

⁴³*Ibid.*, 328. On the reconciliation bill see Sinclair, *Unorthodox Lawmaking*, 181, and Drew, *Showdown*, 326.

⁴⁴Drew, *Showdown*, 334.

⁴⁵According to the agreement, "The President and the Congress shall enact legislation in the first session of the 104th Congress to achieve a balanced budget not later than fiscal year 2002 as estimated by the Congressional Budget Office. . . ." But as the White House insisted, programs important to the Democrats would be protected: "the President and the Congress agree that the balanced budget must protect future generations, ensure Medicare solvency, reform welfare and provide adequate funding for Medicaid, education, agriculture, national defense, veterans and the environment." *CQ Weekly Report* (November 25, 1995), 3598.

the resolution to support its own objectives. Gingrich called the agreement, "one of the great historic achievements in modern America."⁴⁶

So the longest government shutdown to that date ended on November 19 and the 800,000 government workers went back to work as the continuing resolution took effect; it would last until December 15. The significance of this was that President Clinton had finally agreed in outline to the major demands of the Republicans: a balanced budget in seven years scored by CBO. He was not, however, locked in to the Republican policy priorities in attempting to achieve that balance.

As negotiators for the White House and congressional leaders negotiated into December to arrive at a mutually acceptable formula for the budget, it became increasingly likely that a solution would not be found soon. The White House wanted another continuing resolution in case there was no agreement when the existing continuing resolution ran out on December 15. Robert Dole was inclined to agree to a continuing resolution, but Speaker Gingrich was under heavy pressure from Republicans in the House, especially the freshmen, not to agree to one. Dole's political instincts told him that Congress and the Republicans would again be blamed for the ensuing shutdown, but Gingrich told President Clinton in budget negotiations: "If I go back and try to get a long-term CR without a budget from you, the next time you'll be dealing with Speaker Arney."⁴⁷ The Republicans wanted to be sure that the administration would agree to a specific balanced budget containing their priorities. Representative Scott Klug (R-Wis.) said, "We felt that the only way to get the White House to be serious was by keeping the government closed."⁴⁸

The Second Shutdown

With no new continuing resolution, the existing one ran out on December 19, and the government again shut down. But since several appropriations bills had been passed, the shutdown this time affected only 280,000 workers rather than the 800,000 of the earlier shutdown. Over the

⁴⁶Drew, *Showdown*, 340.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 352.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 354-55.

holidays the press ran articles on the effects of the shutdown on government services and programs. Pressure continued to mount for some resolution.

On January 2 Senate Majority Leader Dole declared that "Enough is enough," and convinced the Senate to pass a continuing resolution to allow the government to reopen. While Gingrich was still under pressure from his backbenchers, he felt that negative publicity from the shutdown was hurting the Republicans and that it was time to pass a continuing resolution. On January 3 and 4 Gingrich spent 22 hours in meetings with Republican House members to hear their feelings on opening the government.

After hearing the dissatisfaction of the conservatives but realizing that some of the moderates were worried about the public reaction to the shutdown in an election year, he decided that it was time to end the shutdown.⁴⁹ He told the House Republicans, "You don't like the job I'm doing as Speaker, run against me."⁵⁰ On January 6, Congress passed a continuing resolution to open the government until January 26 and end the 21-day shutdown. On the same day Clinton delivered a proposal to balance the budget in seven years, but the Clinton proposals differed from the Republicans' and included much lower cuts in Medicare, Medicaid, and welfare. The government was open, but the issues dividing the two sides did not disappear.

A series of continuing resolutions kept the government open for the first three months of 1996 as the two sides continued to negotiate contentious issues. On April 25 an omnibus appropriation bill was passed to cover all the appropriations that had not yet been passed to keep the government open until the end of the fiscal year.

Thus at the end of 1995 Newt Gingrich and the Republicans had shifted the debate in Washington from whether to balance the budget to an agreement with President Clinton to balance the budget within seven years using CBO's numbers. Even though most of the Contract With America had not become law, the Republican Congress had made a large difference in public policy. Many domestic programs were cut, and the framework for considering public policy had clearly shifted to the right. But the Republicans were unwilling to declare victory. Through two government shut-

downs they insisted on winning all of their policy priorities, even (or especially) minor symbolic ones such as shutting down the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities. Their intransigence during the fall of 1995 led to Clinton's resurrection in public opinion polls and his resuscitation as a strong contender for reelection.

WHY VICTORIOUS POLITICIANS ARE TEMPTED TO OVERREACH

President Clinton's relations with the 103rd and 104th Congresses present us with some striking ironies. In his first two years in office Clinton won many battles (laws passed and a presidential support score of 88.6 percent), but he lost the war—his health care proposals were defeated and the Republicans took over Congress in the 1994 elections.⁵¹ In dealing with the Republican 104th Congress, Clinton lost most of the legislative battles (his legislative support score was 36.2 percent), but won the larger war by winning the public relations contest with the Republicans and by being reelected in 1996. As Richard Fenno observed, the Republicans "did something few people thought could be done when they took over the Congress—they reelected President Bill Clinton to a second term.... The scope of that political transformation is mind-boggling and virtually impossible to pull off. But the Republicans had done it."⁵²

The big question is why things happened that way. It seems that the Republicans blew it late in the first session of the 104th Congress. In 1994 they had won a historic reversal of control of Congress, taking over for the first time in 40 years. They had come into office with an unprecedented and coherent agenda. They had pushed through the House an impressive amount of legislation and pushed much of it through the Senate. They had made significant cuts in a number of government programs. And perhaps most importantly, they had convinced Bill Clinton to agree to a balanced federal budget within seven years.

⁵¹For an elaboration of this argument see James P. Pfiffner, "President Clinton and the 103rd Congress: Winning Battles but Losing the War," in *Rivals for Power*, ed. James A. Thurber (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1996).

⁵²Richard Fenno, Jr., *Learning to Govern: An Institutional View of the 104th Congress* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1997).

⁴⁹David Maraniss and Michael Weisskopf, "As Time Ebbs, Futility of Talks Starts to Dawn," *Washington Post* (January 21, 1996), A16.

⁵⁰Drew, *Showdown*, 367.

They did not win all of their agenda to be sure. No departments were abolished, Medicare was not privatized, Medicaid and welfare were not turned back to the states (though welfare would be in 1996), and many of their other program cutbacks and eliminations were not achieved. Nevertheless, they might very well have seen the glass of political change as half full and declared victory in the fall of 1995. But when they realized that President Clinton would not agree to much of their ambitious agenda in the fall, they insisted on holding to their threats and refused to pass a continuing resolution that would allow the government to remain open. This allowed President Clinton to convince a majority of the public that the Republicans were being stubborn and thus responsible for the shutdown. Clinton was able to come out ahead by acting as the protector of popular government programs from "extremist" Republican plans for drastic cuts, and he was able to juxtapose their proposed cuts in Medicare funding of \$270 billion with their proposed \$245 billion tax cut to argue that Republicans were cutting Medicare to give tax breaks to the rich. Several explanations of the Republicans' behavior will be examined in an attempt to understand the political dynamics of 1995.

Rational Explanations

In trying to answer the question of why the Republicans would act in such a seemingly irrational manner (at least in retrospect), several avenues of explanation are possible. The Republicans' action could have been rational from several perspectives. One argument is that if you aim low, you will not accomplish as much as you might if your aim is higher than your reach. The Republicans might have realized that they would be unlikely to achieve all of their goals, but if this were the case, they did not recognize the point at which they had achieved much of what they wanted and that pressing further would hurt them.

A related rational explanation would be that the Republicans had a short time perspective because they had to demonstrate that they could govern as the majority party in Congress and that if they did not demonstrate this in two years, the voters would not return them to office. In addition, many of the freshmen believed in term limits and did not see themselves as professional politicians. Thus they wanted to win all that they could

quickly, because they would not be in office for the long haul. Their time horizon was short.⁵³

Another rational explanation for their behavior stems from the argument that strategic stalemate may sometimes be preferable to compromise. John Gilmour argues that at times politicians would prefer to have the issue to argue rather than to agree to a compromise and accept a partial solution.⁵⁴ This is based on the assumption that the lack of any progress and the persistence of the problem will convince the electorate to strengthen your party in the future, at which time a more complete policy victory can be achieved. This is the type of thinking that led some White House staffers to urge President Clinton in the summer of 1995 not to offer his own proposal to balance the budget, but rather continue to use the Republicans' proposed cuts to bash them and hope for future electoral advantage. The same sort of thinking led the Republicans in 1994 to work for the defeat of any health care reform rather than offering a plan of their own or compromising with the Democrats. They calculated that this would give them an electoral advantage in the 1994 elections. (They seem to have been right.) The problem with this approach in 1995 was that public opinion was not with the Republicans on the shutdown and many of the proposals for program cutbacks.

Hubris

It is also possible that the Republican actions did not result so much from rational calculation as from the nonrational tendency of victorious politicians to overreach. One could argue that President Clinton had overreached in 1993-94 when he pushed for a broad series of legislative programs and particularly when he proposed the sweeping health care reforms that ended up defeated. One might explain this by the Democrats

⁵³For an argument that presidents must move quickly after inauguration if they want to be successful with their policy agendas see James P. Pfiffner, *The Strategic Presidency: Hitting the Ground Running*, 2d ed. (Lawrence, Kans.: University Press of Kansas, 1996). For an analysis of how politicians must utilize policy windows of opportunity, see John Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies* (New York: Harper Collins, 1984).

⁵⁴John Gilmour, *Strategic Disagreement* (Pittsburgh, Penn.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995).

focusing on the return of unified government after 12 years and the capture of the presidency, but ignoring the 43 percent plurality and divisions within the Democratic party. From this perspective he overreached and lost in 1994. The Republicans' behavior may have been similar in 1995.

Why do victorious politicians often tend to overinterpret their victories? Perhaps it is because the odds against winning the presidency or control of Congress for the first time in 40 years are so great that the winners see it as a miracle and a sign that they are specially favored by the voters. If the victors come out on top despite the odds against them, perhaps they become emboldened to buck the odds again and bite off more than they can chew.

It is also possible that victorious politicians tend to interpret elections as prospective mandates from the voters rather than as retrospective judgments by the voters on their opponents.⁵⁵ The Republicans could easily have seen a mandate from the voters because most House Republican candidates had run on the Contract for America. In their eyes this constituted a specific promise that they needed to keep if they were to be reelected. The problem with this, of course, was that most of what the showdown was about in the fall of 1995 was not in the Contract but went far beyond it in cutting programs and changing policy priorities.

Another problem with reading mandates into elections is that voters are often rejecting the incumbents rather than granting a broad mandate to the winners. Politicians should be sensitive to this since so much campaign strategy and media expenditures go into negative ads that portray the opposition as evil rather than touting the proposed programs of challengers. Both the 1992 and 1994 elections were waged in part on negative advertising and thus the winners should have been wary of reading too much of a mandate into either.⁵⁶ Both the 1992 and 1994 elections were also about "change," but it is relatively easy for a broad range of voters to agree that there is a problem (such as the health care system), without any consensus on what should be done to deal with the problem (which is why health care reform foundered in 1994).

It is also possible that voters listen to campaign appeals that promise all sorts of good things if certain policy changes are made, e.g., universal health care coverage. But after the election and concrete policies are proposed to deal with the problem, the costs of the changes become more apparent. Voters may then become disillusioned and turn away from their initial enthusiasm in rejecting the changes that are necessary to achieve the results they had initially favored. In 1994 voters may have favored balancing the budget but may not have agreed with the specific policy proposals that the Republicans favored in order to achieve balance.⁵⁷

Lack of Governing Experience

Richard Fennio proposes another explanation for the overreaching of the Republicans in 1995 and their failure to realize when to stop and accept half a loaf. He argues that the root cause of the Republicans' actions was their lack of experience in governing. He points out that none of the Republicans in the House had ever served with a Republican majority and only seven of the 73 freshman had any governing experience.⁵⁸ Republican congressional veterans had spent their careers in the minority, and many had become convinced by Newt Gingrich that the best way to win majority status was a confrontational approach that included attacking the House as an institution. The tactics of the "bomb throwers" in the House were not easily transferable to building governing coalitions. Republicans in the Senate did not have the same problems, since they had been in the majority from 1981 to 1987.

The lack of governing experience was aggravated by the overbearing behavior of the Democrats over part of the 40 years they were in control. There was a tendency to deny the Republicans staffing and other resources proportional to their numbers and to use parliamentary tactics to keep the minority from achieving many of their goals, such as forcing votes on amendments they offered. As the disruptive tactics of the Gingrich-led

⁵⁵Morris P. Fiorina, *Retrospective Voting in American National Elections* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981).

⁵⁶Robert A. Dahl, "The Myth of Presidential Mandate," *Political Science Quarterly* 105 (Fall 1990): 355-66.

⁵⁷For an analysis of this dynamic, see: Anthony Downs, "Up and Down with Ecology—the issue-attention cycle," *The Public Interest* 28 (Summer 1972): 38-50.

⁵⁸Richard Fennio, Jr., *Learning to Govern: An Institutional View of the 104th Congress* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1997), 25.

Republicans increased in the late 1980s, Democratic use of special rules to thwart the Republicans intensified the negative cycle.

From Feno's perspective, the ability of the Republicans to push the Contract through the House was impressive, but short sighted. It was, "a short-run, narrowly focused, inward-looking legislative performance." In Feno's judgment the Republicans, "had not understood the difference between passing the Contract and governing the country, but what was worse, they had mistaken one for the other."⁵⁹ The Republicans might have realized that the Constitution established a system that is not easy to change in the short run. For institutional and political reasons the Senate might have been expected to slow the Contract and modify its contents. More fundamentally, the president has the authority to veto legislation, and short of the two-thirds majority in both houses to override, must be persuaded to sign a bill before it can become a law. Feno quotes one conservative senator as observing, "I'd feel a lot more confident about the outcome of the revolution if I were convinced all of these guys had taken high school civics."⁶⁰ In addition to misjudging President Clinton's willingness to stand firm against them through two government shutdowns, the Republicans failed to recognize the practical significance of the framers' antimajoritarian device, the president's veto power.

Newt Gingrich's Personality

Part of the problem of the Republican's miscalculations can be attributed to Newt Gingrich's personality. Just as Newt Gingrich must be given credit for leading the Republican minority in the House and orchestrating the victory of 1994, so must he be blamed for some of the negative incidents that undermined the ability of the Republicans, once in control of Congress, to accomplish all of their goals. David Maraniss and Michael Weisskopf argue that the problem stemmed from the inability of Gingrich to change his personal style once he became the Speaker of the House and leader of the majority party in Congress.⁶¹ In the minority,

⁵⁹Feno, *Learning to Govern*, 22.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 42.

⁶¹David Maraniss and Michael Weisskopf, *Tell Newt to Shut Up* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), Ch. 1.

Gingrich used disruptive tactics to harass and badger the majority Democrats. He used hyperbole and insult to attack the Democrats, and he made exaggerated claims about the historical significance of his quest.

When the Republicans captured control of Congress, two things changed: they were now in charge of attempting to govern, and Newt Gingrich became a celebrity. While in many ways Gingrich's attitude and personal style changed in accord with his new status, enough of his previous "bomb-throwing" behavior from his days in the minority remained to undercut some of the Republican progress. In seeing himself in a world-historic role, Gingrich was tempted to hubris, and too often he let himself become the issue.

Gingrich sometimes failed to see how he would be perceived by the public, as when he initially accepted a \$4.5 million dollar advance for a book he was writing. Part of the problem was his inability to suppress his voluble personality, as when he seemed to blame a murder in Chicago on the welfare state or a mother drowning her children as a failure of liberalism or advocating the return of orphanages as a solution to broken families. Part of the problem was his inability to soften his stance, as when he said that the agency that administers Medicare should "wither on the vine," or when he complained about being snubbed by the president during the return from Israel and said that the harshness of his stance on the CR was partly in reaction to that.⁶²

⁶²Gingrich complained in a November 15 news conference that he had felt snubbed by President Clinton when he and Robert Dole returned on Air Force One from Yitzhak Rabin's funeral. He and Dole had to leave the plane through the back door while Clinton deplaned from the front. He implied that this personal snub was part of the reason that the continuing resolution sent to Clinton was as harsh as it was. "This is petty. But you land at Andrews Air Force Base and you've been on the plane for twenty-five hours and nobody has talked to you and they ask you to get off the plane by the back ramp.... You just wonder: Where is their sense of manners? Where is their sense of courtesy?" (Maraniss and Weisskopf, *Tell Newt To Shut Up*, 152). "[P]art of why you ended up with us sending down a tougher interim spending bill..." was the way he was treated on Air Force One (Drew, *Showdown*, 331). Gingrich had a point that Clinton might have used time on the plane to talk about the budget, and the fact that they did not signified the administration's intention not to move toward the Republican position. While they should have been able to leave the plane from the front door,

It is easy to see how his legitimate claim to having led the Republicans out of the wilderness and his daily press conferences during the first several months of the 104th Congress could lead him to feel that he was the center of action. But his failure to rein himself in over the next year helped to undermine the Republican cause. He let himself, rather than the Republican agenda, become the focus of attention. Thus when his public approval ratings sank well below President Clinton's, he made a tempting target for Democrats attacking the Republican agenda. With one of the lowest approval ratings of any contemporary in American politics, Gingrich was often the target of Democratic attacks. During the campaigns of 1996 Clinton and Democratic House candidates ran against Gingrich as the symbol of all they objected to in the Republican agenda. Thus while Gingrich deserved much of the credit for bringing about the Republican "revolution," he must also shoulder some of the blame for their failure to achieve all that they had hoped.

Unstable Coalitions

The above analyses assume that "the Republicans" constituted one rational actor and that Gingrich was in control of their strategy. The reality, of course, is that the Republicans were, as all political parties are, a coalition of factions. A number of issues split the Republicans, such as abortion, race, gay rights, the role of the government, prayer in public schools, etc. But the main fissure seemed to fall between southern conservative Republicans who felt strongly about social issues and were concerned with traditional social values on the one hand, and Republicans who were moderate on social issues, but economic conservatives.⁶³ The more extreme members of the Republican coalition wanted to undercut the capacity of the federal government by cuts in taxes, delegating major

the public complaining made Gingrich look like he was whining and that he was making important policy decisions out of personal pique.

⁶³See the analysis by Dodd and Openheimer, "Congress and the Emerging Order," *Congress Reconsidered*, 403. See also William F. Connelly, Jr., and John J. Pitney, "The House GOP's Civil War: A Political Science Perspective," *PS: Political Science and Politics* (December 1997): 699.

programs to the states through block grants, and privatizing Medicare.⁶⁴ This fissure could be seen in the inordinate amount of time (from the fiscal conservatives' perspective) that was spent on trying to abolish the NEA and NEH during the budget fights. These arts and humanities programs involved relatively small amounts of money, yet were important targets of the social conservatives of the Republican party.⁶⁵

The Republican coalition was kept together during the first several months of the 104th Congress through the skillful leadership of Newt Gingrich and the realization that, with their slim majority, they had to stick together in order to accomplish much of their agenda. But in the fall of 1995, as President Clinton attacked the Republicans for shutting down the government and slashing popular programs, cracks in the coalition began to emerge between the most committed social conservatives (including most freshmen) and more moderate conservatives who felt uneasy about some of the more drastic program cuts and felt that their own reelection chances might be hurt by continuing to insist on total victory rather than compromising with President Clinton and the Democrats.

As leader of the "revolution," Gingrich was acutely sensitive to these potential fissures in the ranks of the Republicans. And as Speaker of the House he had come to realize that Clinton's political will and constitutional position was going to keep the Republicans from achieving all of their goals and that they would have to make some compromises. The crunch came at the end of the first government shutdown, when Clinton wanted a continuing resolution to keep the government open as budget negotiations continued. The Republicans were frustrated that Clinton would not agree to a specific plan to balance the budget or concede to their priorities. On December 15 the CR ran out. Majority Leader Dole and the Senate leadership favored a short-term continuing resolution, realizing that the Republicans would be blamed for shutting down the government again.

⁶⁴See the analysis by Paul Pierson, "The Deficit and the Politics of Domestic Reform," in *New Democrats and Anti-Federalists: The Politics of Social Policy Making in the 1990s*, ed. Margaret Weir (Washington, D.C.: Brookings and the Russell Sage Foundation, 1998).

⁶⁵See Norman J. Ornstein and Amy L. Schenkenberg, "The 1995 Congress: The First Hundred Days and Beyond," *Political Science Quarterly* 110, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 183-206.

Gingrich realized that they were probably right and broached the subject at a meeting with House Republicans. The answer of the House rank and file, especially the freshmen, was unequivocal: no CR. They felt that they had to keep pressure on the president by keeping the government shut down and that Clinton would finally accede to their demands.⁶⁶ Again on December 16 Gingrich brought up the issue of a CR with the Speaker's Advisory Group and was unanimously rebuffed. In Majority Whip Tom Delay's words, "We made history today," by refusing to compromise with the White House.⁶⁷

Finally, in January, when Republican moderates were losing their patience with the tactics of the freshmen and threatening to break from the coalition over the shutdown issue, Gingrich was forced to impose his solution on the House and demand a continuing resolution. As he lectured the Republican caucus, he made the issue a vote of confidence in his leadership. "I realize that many of you believe you have a better approach, and that if you were Speaker, you'd do it differently," but if "You don't like the job I'm doing as Speaker, run against me."⁶⁸

As Gingrich led the Republicans to demand that President Clinton give in to all of their policy priorities, not merely a balanced budget, he also came to appreciate that the American political system divides power and that the House Republican priorities would not be implemented without Senate and presidential participation. A necessary aspect of political leadership is realizing the limits of power and when it must be shared with other powerful forces in a polity. The 1994 electoral victories and success with pushing the Contract through the House had raised the expectations of the Republicans about what they could achieve. Gingrich, in taking the responsibility for his role in governing the nation, recognized that the aspirations of the House freshmen would have to be limited by the different priorities of the Senate and the opposition of the president. But the radical freshmen class that he had created and their unrealistic expectations, which he had helped to foster, would not allow him to make the necessary

⁶⁶See the analysis in Maraniss and Weisskopf, *Tell Newt to Shut Up*, 164-68.

⁶⁷Maraniss and Weisskopf, *Tell Newt to Shut Up*, 169.

⁶⁸Jason DeParle, "Listen, Learn, Help, Lead," *New York Times Magazine* (January 28, 1996), 36; Drew, *Showdown*, 367.

compromises when it became apparent (to Gingrich) that they had gone as far as they were able.

Thus the overreaching of the House Republicans in 1995 can be blamed in part on Gingrich because of his primary role in creating the freshmen class and raising their expectations about what could be accomplished. But it must also be admitted that he recognized earlier than they the institutional power of the Senate and the presidency. His backbenchers, however, would not allow him to make the necessary compromises until much damage to their cause had been done.

CONCLUSION

Some of the factors that Ranney cites that make responsible party government impossible in the U.S.—the supermajority demands of the president's veto power and the threat of filibuster in the Senate—came to limit the Republicans' aspirations in 1995. The intraparty cohesion necessary for conditional party government broke down as some Republicans came to see the shutdown as self defeating. The explanation of why these realities did not become apparent to the Republicans in the fall of 1995 can be attributed to several factors. From the rational to the irrational, from individual to institutional.

Each of the factors outlined above explain part of the Republicans' behavior, and of course, not all Republicans had the same motivations. In 1994 the Republicans, led by Newt Gingrich, had created an unusual set of circumstances, and it was not irrational for them to aim higher than they were likely to achieve in the wake of their historic electoral victory. But in pursuing their policy goals they let hubris veil the political and institutional realities of the situation. In rejecting the first two years of the Clinton administration, the voters in 1994 had not given the Republicans carte blanche to enact their policy preferences. And when the Republicans pushed policy change well beyond a balanced budget and the Contract, the voters reacted against their seemingly extreme proposals and political intransigence.

The Republicans, with their lack of governing experience, also forgot the antimajoritarian nature of the U.S. Constitution. The House majority expected the momentum of the election and the 100-days victories to carry their program through the Senate and to convince the president not to exercise his veto power. In addition to the deeper institutional conditions

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President Clinton, Newt Gingrich, and the 104th Congress

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that allowed the Republicans to win so heavily in 1994 and which limited the extent of their victories in 1995, the talents and limits of Newt Gingrich played an important role. It was his brilliance that allowed the Republicans to win control of the Congress, and it was his inability to rein in the freshmen in the fall that gave Clinton his opening to exploit the Republicans' vulnerability.

In the final analysis it was the inability of the Republicans to recognize the political and institutional limits to their electoral victories that led them to turn their impressive policy accomplishments into the resurrection of Bill Clinton as a viable and successful candidate for reelection.

Over a 50-year period, Austin Ranney has made many notable contributions to political science, especially to the study of political parties. This book, written by a dozen of Ranney's colleagues and students, adopts Ranney's agenda and examines contemporary political parties from a variety of perspectives. In particular, it highlights the recent movement toward subjecting parties to legal regulation and control. Other topics include party ideology, nomination process, and the perennial issue of party decline.

Contributors are: Lawrence Baum, Robert A. Dahl, Leon D. Epstein, Marjorie Randon Hershey, Robert Jackman, Malcolm Jewell, William Keech, Anthony King, Burdett Loomis, William Mayer, Jack W. Pelason, James Pfiffner, Nelson W. Polsby, Douglas Rae, Austin Ranney, and Raymond E. Wolfinger.

Austin Ranney, professor emeritus of political science at Berkeley, was educated at Northwestern, Oregon, and Yale, and holds honorary degrees from Northwestern, SUNY-Cortland, and Yale. He has taught at Yale, Illinois, Wisconsin, Georgetown, and UC California, Berkeley. His work has focused on political parties, nominating processes, and elections, especially referendums. He has served as managing editor of the *American Political Science Review* and president of the American Political Science Association, and he was a member of the Democratic party's first two commissions on reforming its presidential nominating rules. From 1975 to 1985, he was a research scholar at the American Enterprise Institute. Ranney is married and has four sons and two granddaughters.