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Voter Betrayal!

by Tom Gow

[T]he two parties should be almost identical, so that the American people can “throw the rascals out” at any election without leading to any profound or extensive shifts in policy.

— [Establishment Insider]
Carroll Quigley
Tragedy and Hope (1966)

Periodically, voters become angry over too much government coming from Washington. Many then support congressional candidates who promise they will work to bring Washington under control. If voter discontent

is widespread and deep enough, a “revolution” of sorts occurs, and the party controlling Congress changes.

Such a “revolution” occurred in 1994 with the election of the 104th Congress. But Establishment Insiders were too clever for angry, uninformed voters, and they made sure that the “revolution” was in form only. In 2010, history threatens to repeat itself, so let’s see what we can learn from history.

A Lesson From History

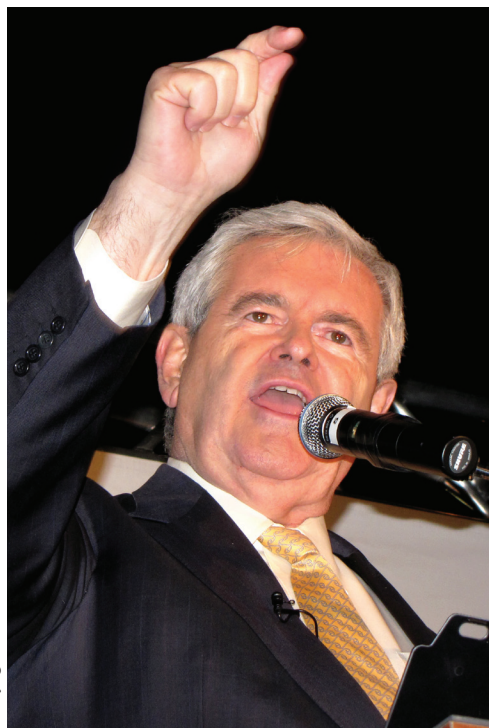
In 1994, a number of naive, but well intentioned Republican candidates

were elected to the House of Representatives. Unfortunately, these freshmen quickly discovered that keeping on course was not as easy as they had imagined.

In fact, before they even got to Washington most had allowed themselves to be tied by Establishment “conservative” and internationalist Newt Gingrich to a flawed and even dangerous “Contract with America.”

Moreover, when the new unschooled congressmen arrived in Washington, they found themselves outgunned by the more experienced staff of established veterans. Long hours and





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Revolution at polls only: In 1994, Republicans took control in Congress with a mandate to trim government. But Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich deflected the revolution by promoting a misleading “Contract With America.”

impossible schedules made it difficult to keep on top of critical pieces of legislation. Deals were hatched of which they were unaware, and often they were stampeded into voting on legislation allegedly containing merely “minor” changes, only to discover too late that substantial objectionable features had been added.

We can imagine what even the best-intentioned representatives must have faced as they set out to battle entrenched interests, bureaucracy, pressure from party leaders, and the agenda of the new world order. Several freshmen privately echoed a common theme: “You just can’t fully appreciate the pressure.” Unfortunately, experience shows that most eventually bend to this pressure and wake up one day to find themselves a part of the problem they went to Washington to correct.

What’s Missing

The reason voters are consistently disappointed when they send a “good” representative to Washington to clean house is that they have naive expectations. They just don’t appreciate the pressures their representative will encounter in Washington, and so they don’t realize that a successful representative must have the support — the counterbalancing pressure — of an *informed* electorate back home.

The best guide for sincere freshmen and for voters back home is the Constitution. In fact, the best legislative agenda is a general one — simply conform government to the Constitution.

All congressmen take an oath to uphold the Constitution. Unfortunately, even conservative-sounding congressmen rarely come equipped with a good understanding of the document or of fundamental principles, and too often their oath means little in practice.

So one serious pitfall facing well intentioned rookie congressmen is their lack of understanding of the Constitution. But there is another related pitfall — the seductive trap of compromise, heavily promoted by the leadership of both major parties. Before real change will occur in Washington, more voters and congressmen must understand why it is wrong and deadly to compromise on principle.

No Compromise on Principle!

Politics is often described as the art of compromise. If that is so, there is a big gap between “politician” and “statesman.” Certainly everyone must compromise on many things in order to work as a team and live harmoniously with others. But what may be a virtue in one arena quickly becomes a vice when vital principles are involved.

Too many congressmen buy in to the dangerous fallacy that a “good”

congressman is supposed to go back to Washington and work to achieve the best deal possible for his constituents or for the nation. But there can be no compromise between supporting and opposing unconstitutional acts. Any such compromise is, in fact, a repudiation of the concept of a Constitution.

Nevertheless, conservative congressmen often insist: “If we hadn’t voted for this flawed bill, which included *some cuts* in unconstitutional spending, the liberals would have succeeded in passing a version with even *more* unconstitutional spending.”

And so they protest when their votes are rated poorly on report cards using the Constitution as a strict standard: “Why penalize me for working to get the greatest cuts possible given the political situation?” they will object.

The votes for spending on foreign aid — spending that is clearly unconstitutional — illustrate their argument. Occasionally, one party will manage to get a foreign aid measure before Congress that includes substantial cuts over previous unconstitutional spending. Representatives who wish to appear fiscally responsible will often support such measures, even though the federal government has no authority to spend *any* money on foreign aid. They argue that if their halfway measure fails the liberals will insist on *more* spending for foreign aid.

Our answer is that a congressman’s overriding responsibility is to adhere to his oath to uphold the Constitution, not to cut the best deal possible. Even a reduced foreign aid bill is indefensible.

Both the congressman and his constituents need to understand that political pragmatism, while promising small, short-term gains, can’t solve the entrenched problem of exploding unconstitutional spending that is

sinking our nation. In fact, rampant political pragmatism makes a real solution impossible. (Pragmatism is objectively not pragmatic.)

Moreover, the pragmatic approach is just plain wrong. Each congressman takes an oath to support and defend the Constitution from all enemies foreign and domestic. He does not take an oath to negotiate the least violence to the Constitution. What his oath demands, and what the American people so sorely need, is for their congressman to set the example of standing on principle — even if he is the only one.

It makes no difference to the true statesman if voting on principle places him on the losing side of an issue. He doesn't vote for a little poison as a means to prevent liberals from administering a bigger dose. The true statesman stands up and says, "Any poison is wrong, and I am not going to be a party to it." But if a congressman thinks the solution has to be forged within the scope of party politics, he is limited merely to negotiating over *the amount* of poison to be administered to our Republic.

In contrast, the statesman who stands on principle provides an essential rallying point for conforming government to the Constitution. It then becomes the job of responsible citizens to give the principled representative support, pressure other incumbents to do likewise, and work to send reinforcements. A representative's principled stand will encourage the American people to carry out these responsibilities and embolden other representatives and candidates to follow his example.

Political pragmatists will often insist that standing on principle is politically impractical. But the year-to-year political climate has nothing to do with the rightness or wrongness of a position. And what appears politically "impossible" this year can become politically *popular* next year. Put differently, what is politically

impossible with an *uninformed* electorate may be politically possible with an *informed, moral* electorate.

The American people and their elected representatives simply need to eschew moral relativism and have confidence that doing the "right" thing will ultimately be blessed. Fortunately, informed voters will support a congressman who tenaciously defends the Constitution.

The Example of Larry McDonald

The political career of Lawrence Patton McDonald, M.D. (first elected as a Democrat in Georgia's 7th district in 1974) demonstrates that a constitutionally voting congressman *can* be highly influential — *in spite of* his party leadership. Several conservative indices rated McDonald's voting record at 100 percent, because he consistently voted against unconstitutional spending and for lower taxes.

But was he influential? At the conclusion of McDonald's freshman year, Senator Barry Goldwater (R-AZ) observed that Larry McDonald had perhaps "contributed more to the Congress than ... any other freshman who has ever come here."

A July 1983 *Conservative Digest* subscriber poll reflected legions of similar testimonies. To the question, "Which of these 12 conservative leaders most represent your personal philosophy?" 21.6 percent chose Larry McDonald (the top scorer) as opposed to 1.0 percent for Newt Gingrich (who came in last). To the question, "Who would you like to see as the future leader of American conservatives?" Larry tied with Jesse Helms for 2nd place (Phil Crane came in first), with Newt Gingrich again trailing in last place.

A principled stand in today's climate may not win the favor of *uninformed, misled* voters. But Congressman McDonald certainly demonstrated that, with organized

support, standing on principle was not the kiss of death, even in the face of strong Establishment opposition and opposition from the leadership of *both* major political parties.

The 1978 edition of *The Almanac of American Politics* claimed that McDonald "is likely to be just as controversial in 1978 as he has been in the past," and that "his seat must be considered in perpetual jeopardy." But that year McDonald was re-elected with 67 percent of the vote. Nevertheless, the 1980 edition [of the Almanac] opined that McDonald's seat that year was "almost certain to attract tough competition," and "it seems likely that some day he will succumb." Yet he was re-elected with 68 percent of the vote, and in 1982 garnered 61 percent, securing his *fifth* term.

Following the 1982 election, the liberal Atlanta newspaper serving McDonald's district admitted that Larry was unbeatable and openly



Maverick constitutionalist: Democrat Larry McDonald, M.D., repeatedly demonstrated that a congressman could buck his party and the local media, vote the Constitution, and still get re-elected — if voters were first informed.



worried that he had his eye on a Senate seat. (Note: Larry McDonald's career in Congress was cut short in 1983 when a Soviet missile brought down the commercial airliner, KAL flight 7, on which he was a passenger.)

What about a phase-out period?

In every Congress, most of the significant measures that come to a floor vote have good and bad elements. In decades past, when the Republicans (with the better fiscal image) would gain control in Congress, major spending bills would occasionally offer significant cuts in bad programs, while other unconstitutional spending programs in the same bills were barely touched or even increased. Should a congressman be pleased with this progress and give it his stamp of approval? In the examples discussed, our answer is no.

However, when the time comes that a majority of congressmen are truly determined to eliminate unconstitutional spending, the question will arise as to how fast unconstitutional programs have to be cut in order to merit the support of a committed constitutionalist. Don't justice and reality demand a phase-out period?

Unfortunately, we are not in that situation yet, and the question asked today is generally used to justify unsupportable political compromise and posturing. But looking ahead, we acknowledge that restoring constitutional government won't be easy even when the political will exists to do it.

Even the best Congress could not responsibly dismantle the entire welfare state in a day. Liberals have hooked large numbers of our people and a large share of our economy on the drug of government management and subsidy. Going cold turkey with

every one of these programs could create major disruptions and a new brand of injustice by defaulting on solemn commitments.

A case can certainly be made for a phase-out period for *some* unconstitutional programs. But the distinguishing factor must be that the goal is constitutional government — a complete removal of the unconstitutional program from the federal budget — rather than merely a reduction in its scope or (even worse) a reduction in the rate of increase in order to achieve a balanced budget.

We look forward to the day when the national debate focuses on how best to get the federal government out of these programs. Our view is that some assets and responsibilities should probably be transferred to the states, other programs should be privatized, and still others allowed to die a natural death (run their term and not be renewed).

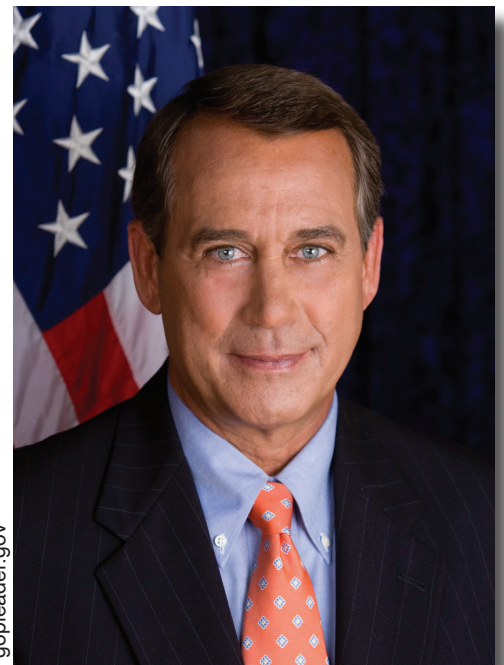
But there is certainly no need for a lengthy phase-out period for a number of programs, such as foreign aid. In most cases, the people foreign aid is ostensibly designed to help are actually injured by our financial aid to their ruling elites. For many counterproductive programs, implementing cuts slowly would prolong the agony, create further injustice, and delay the visible benefits needed to reinforce support for the cuts.

And let's not forget that delays invite a successful counterattack from the supporters of big government. When the political will to make change exists, it is dangerous to draw out the process unnecessarily. Moreover, any Congress that defers all of the difficult cost cutting to a future Congress is not acting responsibly — there is no guarantee that the next Congress will have any greater will. That will, of

course, must ultimately come from an informed electorate.

Confusing Choices

There are all kinds of hypothetical situations that one could dream up. However, we should remember that the proponents of unconstitutional spending are not anxious to provide clear choices and that many politicians welcome confusion so that they cannot be pinned down. In such cases, the proper course is to vote no and hold out for better legislation. In the vast majority of situations, an understanding of the Constitution and a commitment to principle are all that is needed to evaluate legislation. It worked for Larry McDonald!



A new betrayal in the works? House Republican Leader John Boehner claims he "was instrumental in crafting the [1994] 'Contract With America.'" In 2010, he wants Republicans to run on a new Boehner-designed platform.

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