

From:

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THE TRANSFORMATION OF AMERICAN POLITICS:

ACTIVIST GOVERNMENT AND THE RISE OF

CONSERVATISM (PRINCETON: PRINCETON

UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2007

Chapter Five

Seizing Power

CONSERVATIVES AND CONGRESS SINCE THE 1970S

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THE SCENE SEEMED AS IF someone writing a parody about the American Congress scripted it. In the summer of 2003, the House Ways and Means Committee was debating legislation dealing with pensions and retirement savings. The committee started by reading the language of the bill. Suddenly, committee chairman Bill Thomas (R-CA) introduced a ninety-page substitute measure that had only been released around midnight the previous evening. When New York Democrat Charles Rangel protested that the minority had not been given any opportunity to review the language of the substitute, Thomas ignored him. Condemning what they saw as another attempt by the GOP to use the power of the majority to force legislation down the throats of their opposition, Democrats stormed out of the committee room and into an adjacent library to map out a strategy. Before leaving, Democrats required a full reading of the bill to delay action. A furious Chairman Thomas instructed his staff and the U.S. Capitol Police to round up the Democrats so that the committee could complete its work; Rangel refused to return. Back in the committee room, Thomas dispensed with reading the bill, leading the lone-remaining Democrat, Pete Stark (CA), to protest in vitriolic rhetoric. When Republican Scott McInnis (R-CO) yelled at Stark to shut his mouth, the Californian responded by challenging McInnis to force him to be quiet. In the heat of the moment, Stark called his Republican counterpart a "fruitcake." After the story broke in the media, Republicans said that Democrats were blowing the incident out of proportion and exaggerating events for political effect. "Only one [police officer] walked in, and then walked out, on each of three occasions. For that, [Democrats] want to call us Nazis," complained a Republican aide (Cohen 2003).

While those Americans who noticed this incident were deeply troubled by these events, it was especially disappointing to older liberal Democrats who had struggled in the 1960s and 1970s to bring an end to the committee-era Congress. Although they intended to create an institution that was more progressive, their reforms backfired. The pension confronta-

tion was just one among many stories that revealed how legislators associated with the conservative movement thrived in a congressional process that liberals had helped to create. This chapter examines what went wrong.

During the 1970s, Congress underwent sweeping institutional reforms that closed down an era in legislative history when the chairmen of autonomous committees in the House and Senate dictated the pace of events while operating behind closed doors (for examples of the extensive political science literature on congressional reform in the 1970s, see Shepsle 1989; Polsby 2004; and Sinclair 1989). In addition to electoral changes that resulted in more homogeneous party caucuses, the 1970s congressional reforms had been driven by a liberal coalition of interest groups, legislators, and activists who believed that institutional reform was essential if they wanted to expand the American state into new policy domains and to defend recent gains from retrenchment (Zelizer 2004). While political scientists have focused on the transformation of the committee system, equally important were changes in the media coverage of Congress, campaign finance, and ethics rules. The congressional reforms, broadly defined, of the 1970s fostered decentralization and centralization simultaneously with the hope of creating an institution where strong parties thrived but where it was difficult for legislative leaders to gain the autonomy that committee chairs enjoyed in the previous era.

To the disappointment of liberals, the institutional reforms that were intended to protect the American state created opportunity structures for politicians with a very different policy agenda. During the 1980s, legislators associated with the conservative movement proved adept at working within the new institutional structures of national politics (for discussions of the conservative movement, see McGirr 2001; Perlstein 2001; Schoenwald 2001; Hodgson 1996; Dionne 1991; Nash 1976). Like southern Democrats in the earlier part of the twentieth century, conservative Republicans were highly cognizant that institutions mattered. Conservative Republicans devoted considerable effort to learning how to master the decentralizing processes created by the reforms when they were still a minority (in the 1970s and 1980s) and the centralizing processes when they were a majority (after 1994). Focusing on the House of Representatives, the history presented in this chapter also reveals how congressional conservatives experienced more limited success at curailing the American state. The tension between the political success of conservatives and their policy failures, namely the endurance of the state in an era when national politics moved to the right, has defined congressional history since the 1960s.

HOW CONGRESS WAS REFORMED IN THE 1970s

The American Congress was a very different place after the 1970s than it was between the 1920s and 1960s. As a result of a reform coalition, electoral transformations in the South and West, as well as changes in institutions external to Congress, the House and Senate moved out of the committee era and into the contemporary era. These institutional changes were extremely important because they changed the fundamental character of legislative politics.

The Committee Era, 1920s–1960s

During the committee era, the chairmen of standing committees held enormous power in both chambers and party caucuses were weak. Committee chairs were shielded from significant pressure because they were selected through seniority, which meant that legislators gained positions of power by remaining in office long enough to reach the highest point in the queue rather than by displaying loyalty to any set of policies or individuals (Hinckley 1971; Polsby, Gallaher, and Rundquist 1969, 787–807; Patterson 1967). Professional norms discouraged mavericks or freshmen from taking action, and there were rarely floor challenges to committee legislation (S. Smith 1989). Even in the Senate, where each individual had the right to filibuster, committee chairs were dominant (Sinclair 1989, 25–28; Matthews 1960). Most deliberations took place behind closed doors. The Board of Education was one of the most famous landmarks of the period, a daily meeting where Speaker Sam Rayburn (D-TX) met, drank, and deliberated with top members of his party to determine how Democrats should act on major issues. The committee system existed in a particular institutional environment, one where the composition of districts favored rural constituents, campaigns revolved around a secretive process that favored concentrated, large contributions, and the print media generally refrained from aggressive investigative reporting.

Politically, southern Democrats were very powerful in the committee era. Southerners enjoyed a large portion of the major chairmanships and relied on a voting alliance with Republicans when legislation that they opposed made it to the floor. Known as “the conservative coalition,” southern Democrats and Republicans presented a formidable challenge to liberal presidents and legislators between the 1940s and 1960s on such issues as civil rights legislation and the extension of federal protection for organized labor (Katznelson, Geiger, and Kryder 1993, 283–302; Plotke 1996, 226–61, 350–51; Key 1949, 314–82). Southern conservatives used the pillars of the committee process, such as the House Rules Committee

and the House on Un-American Activities Committee, as an institutional base from which to protect themselves from legislative proposals and policy innovations that they opposed (Schickler 2001, 163–74).

The Reform Coalition, 1958–1974

The committee-era Congress ended in the 1970s as a result of several factors. One was the influence of an interinstitutional reform coalition of legislators and interest groups that worked for decades to change the system. They began as a liberal coalition in the 1940s and 1950s, committed to extending New Deal liberalism in areas such as civil rights. Reformers included politicians such as Richard Bolling (Missouri), Hubert Humphrey and Donald Fraser (Minnesota), and Phil Burton (California) as well as organizations like the Americans for Democratic Action, the AFL-CIO, and the NAACP. They morphed into a “reform coalition” in the 1960s by absorbing organizations and individuals (such as Common Cause) who were devoted to broad institutional reform as an end in itself rather than primarily a means to a specific policy objective. The coalition dismantled the procedural foundations of the committee era by obtaining incremental reforms and by taking advantage of focusing events such as scandals and watershed elections.¹

The coalition believed that institutional reform was essential to expanding the American state. Following three long decades where southern Democrats had used the design of Congress to block important measures, post-war liberals were convinced that if they wanted to create programs that appealed to suburban voters, such as environmental regulations, and to defend hard-fought gains, including civil rights, they needed to transform congressional norms and processes. Much of the policy success of liberalism in the 1960s, according to reformers, had depended on the unusually large Democratic majorities that emerged after the 1964 elections, as well as congressional reforms passed in the early 1960s, such as the expansion of the House Rules Committee.

The coalition obtained many important reforms in the first half of the 1970s. The reforms purposely strengthened decentralization and centralization in both chambers with the intention of creating a system that fostered strong partisanship while forcing party leaders to be responsive to the membership. As a result of the reforms adopted between 1970 and 1978, party caucuses gained power over committees in the House and Senate. They did so as a result of formal mechanisms, such as the adoption of procedures granting caucuses the ability to easily vote on each chairman, the enhancement of party fund-raising mechanisms that allowed leaders to lean on their members, the centralized budget process that protected certain legislation from a filibuster, and more. New informal

norms were likewise important, such as the diminished deference exhibited toward committee chairs. At the same time, reformers strengthened the forces of decentralization—thereby curtailing the autonomy of party leaders and allowing individual legislators to influence debate—through a variety of changes. The reformers opened more congressional deliberations to the public and the media, created specialized caucuses, allowed television cameras to cover floor proceedings (although the Senate held off on this change until 1984), codified ethics rules that affected all legislators (including party leaders), strengthened regulations on campaign finance practices, and lowered the number of senators needed to end a filibuster. The Subcommittee Bill of Rights (1973) granted House subcommittee chairs the power to hire staff and ensured them the right to review legislation.

There was some early evidence that the reforms would fulfill the political objectives of liberals. Democrats who entered Congress in the 1970s used the process effectively. California Representative Henry Waxman, for instance, was one of the “Watergate Babies” elected in 1974. Waxman capitalized on the Subcommittee Bill of Rights to use his subcommittee chairmanship to push several important policies—often opposed by senior Democrats—such as national regulations to curb smoking, requirements that automobile manufacturers use tougher safety measures, and new environmental initiatives.

External Institutions and Electoral Change

There were likewise important changes in the institutions external to Congress that weakened the hold of committee chairmen while offering new opportunities for party leaders to enhance their influence, as well as for individual legislators who were outside the leadership. Foremost, the national news media was transformed with the success of adversarial journalism and advent of cable television technology. By the 1980s legislators faced a twenty-four-hour, adversarial media where it was difficult to control or respond to the flow of information. The media environment offered party leaders a way to promote their agenda, as well as a means for mavericks to attack those in power. The Supreme Court, moreover, issued its one man, one vote rulings in the early 1960s, which eroded the rural-based legislative districts upon which southern Democratic power had depended. Meanwhile, the proliferation and segmentation of professionally managed interest groups and trade associations made it more difficult for legislators to sustain coalitions. The presidency remained strong, despite the hope of reformers in the 1970s that they would tame the institution.

In addition to the reforms and institutional changes, electoral transformations greatly impacted Congress. The most important was the success

of the Republican Party in breaking the Democratic monopoly in the South. Dixiecrats lost their place in the Democratic Caucus. Republicans won conservative votes in the region. Migration into the South from northern states, facilitated by the advent of air conditioning and suburbanization, created a competitive partisan atmosphere in a region once dominated by Democrats (Polsby 2004). As Republicans gained a stronger foothold in the southern states, conservatives lost their centrality within the Democratic Party (Black and Black 2002). The result was that congressional Democrats moved further to the left. More dramatically though, the GOP moved sharply to the right as the party absorbed southern conservatives and abandoned northeastern liberals. The persistence of partisan gerrymandering resulted in a diminishing number of competitive seats. As primaries became the central contest for legislators in every region of the country, they played to the extreme elements of their constituency who tended to turn out to vote in the primaries. With moderates dwindling in both parties, the electoral incentives in the 1990s were for legislators to vote exclusively along party lines (Rohde 1991; Binder 1996, 36–39).

The Contemporary Congress

The contemporary Congress is quite different from the committee-era Congress. Since the 1960s, party caucuses have been the dominant force in the institution. Party leaders have a large number of institutional weapons at their disposal. This is true in the Senate, where the filibuster still offers individuals a tool to block legislative progress. Senate party leaders have used the post-1974 budget process to avoid filibusters and campaign funds to maintain party cohesion. Even the filibuster has turned into a tool of party warfare since the 1970s, as opposed to one primarily used by bipartisan factions or individual legislators. Scandal warfare has also become normalized in both chambers, as politicians have been willing to engage in the politics of personal destruction to achieve improved political standing (Ginsberg and Shefter 2002). Strong partisanship and scandal warfare—facilitated by the rules of the game and electoral incentives—have made it extremely difficult to devise durable compromises, as Nolan McCarty reveals in his chapter. Finally, both chambers are more open to public scrutiny as a result of sunshine reforms and the twenty-four-hour media environment.

While parties are strong in the contemporary Congress, party leaders continually encounter many threats and challenges. The legislative process crafted in the 1970s offered considerable political space for mavericks, specialized caucuses, the chamber minority, disaffected legislators, and others to challenge leaders through ethics rules, scandal warfare, and

the media. Congress is much more open to public scrutiny in the current era, and that meant that it was far more difficult for leaders to shield themselves and control political outcomes. All legislators, including party leaders, are forced to maneuver within an endless and instant news cycle that could be perilous to politicians caught in a frenzy.

THE CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENT

The new legislative process turned out to be central to the fortunes of the conservative movement. The conservative movement that emerged in the 1970s constituted several networks, individual leaders, and organizations that had formed in response to liberalism. Conservatives defined themselves in opposition to Great Society liberalism. The continued growth of the American state in the 1970s belied the notion that Richard Nixon's election as president in 1968 had marked the defeat of American liberalism. "Looking back on the budget, economic and social policies of the Republican years," lamented Nixon's conservative speechwriter Pat Buchanan in 1976, "it would not be unfair to conclude that the political verdict of 1968 had brought reaffirmation, rather than repudiation, of Great Society liberalism" (Hayward 2001, 286). In domestic policy, the federal government was expanding in size and substance. In foreign policy, conservatives felt that politicians were hamstrung by the legacy of Vietnam. Nixon's presidency had been especially disappointing to conservative activists. The onetime darling of anti-communist conservatives had campaigned in 1968 by promising to represent the concerns of the right, yet he ended up presiding over a massive expansion of the federal government before resigning from office in 1974. He also introduced the policy of détente, whereby the United States negotiated with the Soviet Union and China over arms limitations and trade. Making matters worse, the Watergate scandal threatened to destroy the party vehicle through which conservatives hoped to reclaim control of government. The "New Right," as they were often called, hoped to reverse these trends by tapping into the conservative traditions of America and giving them organizational muscle: "The conservatism was always there," wrote direct-mail guru Richard Viguerie. "It took the new right to give it leadership, organization, and direction" (Viguerie 1981, 6).

The Meanings of Modern Conservatism

Within the broad context of opposing the growth of domestic programs and attacks on post-Vietnam foreign policy, the conservative movement included several factions. Neoconservatives were former New Deal Demo

crats who had grown disaffected with the Democratic Party as its members turned leftward on foreign policy and social issues in the 1960s. The religious right, consisting of individuals who had become frustrated with the dominant social and cultural norms of the country, was rooted in the South and Southwest. Members who identified with the religious right were concerned with a series of Supreme Court decisions in the 1960s and 1970s that outlawed school prayer, limited the power of the government to regulate obscenity, allowed for the sale of sexual contraception and the medical practice of abortion, and protected the rights of criminals. Furthermore, the movement included business and financial leaders whose main policy concerns were deregulation and lowering federal taxes.

Although there were many areas of disagreement within the conservative movement, the various factions did share certain common beliefs: these included the need for a strong military stand against communism and other international threats, the centrality of tax reductions to overcome stagflation and revive the economy, and the belief that the 1960s was a decade when American society moved in the wrong direction. The conservative movement defined itself through a distinct set of organizations that represented these concerns before members of Congress. Terry Dolan headed the National Conservative Political Action Committee, which was devoted to promoting the New Right. Campaign specialist Richard Viguerie taught conservatives to use direct mail to solicit small contributions from a broad base of citizens. Paul Weyrich organized the Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress, which assisted allied legislators in their rise to power through fund raising, propaganda, and grassroots organizing. Conservatives relied on certain think tanks, both new and old, such as the American Enterprise Institute and the Cato Institute, to promote ideas that could be used against liberal programs. One of the most influential of these think tanks was the Heritage Foundation, formed in 1973 by Joseph Coors, Paul Weyrich, Richard Scaife, and Edward Noble. Heritage abandoned the restrained approach of the Brookings Institution by packaging and promoting ideas aggressively and with the intention of providing political advocacy information.

The conservative movement was thoroughly partisan since its inception. To a greater extent than most twentieth-century social movements, conservatism not only linked itself to a political party (Republicans) but also committed a large amount of resources to improving the party's electoral standing. Although the movement reached out to the remaining southern conservative Democrats, most of the individuals and organizations associated with the movement staked their fortunes on the GOP. As Hodgson (2004, 38) wrote, "the conservative movement came of age. In the 1970s it captured the Republican Party."

CONGRESSIONAL CONSERVATIVES AND THE POWER OF DECENTRALIZATION, 1978-1993

Because conservatives felt that they had been excluded from power for three decades, movement activists were keenly sensitive to the way in which institutions mattered. Although voters determined whether someone entered office, conservative Republicans believed that institutional politics held a key to success once a person was elected. The institutional reforms of liberals in the early 1970s, they were quick to see, offered opportunity structures for conducting attacks against the state, rather than just expanding it. Congress was a primary arena where conservatives felt as if they needed to thrive. The challenge was not simply to become a majority in both chambers, but to learn to use the institution more effectively even when they were a minority. There was a cohort of young Republicans who entered Congress between 1972 and 1982 who were closely linked to the conservative movement. Many were southern, southwestern, or western conservatives who came into Congress with a strong ideological mission, yet they were simultaneously committed to playing hardball politics so that they were not relegated to the margins. In the early years, they capitalized on the decentralizing reforms of the 1970s to cause enormous problems for Democrats. At first, the senior leaders of the party looked at them with suspicion and feared that their renegade attitude would subvert the effectiveness of the GOP at influencing legislation and isolate Republicans from the mainstream electorate.

The Young Turks, 1972-1982

The most prominent conservative Republicans came from the South and the West and were on a crusade to transform the GOP. They came from all walks of life. There were intellectuals in this group. One of them was Newt Gingrich, a brash and idealistic army brat who spent much of his youth traveling through the United States and Europe. Born in 1943 in Pennsylvania, his biological father was an alcoholic with a nasty temper who left the family when Newt was three years old. His mother remarried to Bob Gingrich, a tough disciplinarian. Gingrich earned his Ph.D. in history at Tulane University in 1971. He taught for several years at West Georgia College. It took Gingrich several attempts to win a seat in the House to represent the sixth congressional district of Georgia (which stretched from the Atlanta suburbs to rural west Georgia). After losing in 1974 and 1976, Gingrich won the seat when John Flynt, a southern conservative Democrat, vacated it in 1978. In his first two campaigns Gingrich had run as a southern moderate. In the last campaign, he ran a

a conservative. In contrast, Flynt had become alienated from the voters in his district as a result of suburbanization and redistricting (Fenno 2000). Gingrich was known for having a brilliant intellect. He could comprehend broad political trends in deep historical context. Critics, and allies, also knew that he suffered from a massive ego as well, as indicated in the tendency to overplay his hand. Furthermore, his emphasis on big ideas sometimes led him to overlook practical strategy. "If I have any criticisms of your style at all," Republican Dick Armev wrote Gingrich in October 1993, "it would be that you sometimes allow the forest to obscure the trees" (Garrett 2005, 281).

Other movement Republicans entered Congress through the traditional path of law. Trent Lott of Mississippi was born in 1941 and raised in Pascagoula, Mississippi. His father was a shipyard worker and a teacher. After graduating from the University of Mississippi law school, he practiced law at a private firm and worked for the notorious conservative southern Democrat, William Colmer (D-MS), Howard Smith's (D-VA) chief ally on the House Rules Committee. Symbolizing the regional shift that was taking place during this period, Lott replaced Colmer in 1972, who endorsed his protégé. As the youngest member of the House Judiciary Committee, Lott stood as one of Nixon's most ardent defenders during Watergate. Lott moved up the ranks of the party quickly, becoming whip in 1980. While he earned a public reputation for conservatism, he consistently showed his inclination to negotiate and make deals.

A few were journalists. John Vincent Weber (known as Vin Weber) grew up in Minnesota and studied political science at the state university. Weber spent a few years co-publishing his family's newspaper, the *Murray County Herald*, and managed the U.S. Senate campaign of Rudy Boschwitz in 1978. Constituents in the sixth district of Minnesota elected Weber to represent them in the House in 1980. He was skilled at using computers in fund raising and using television in politics.

Finally, there were many career politicians who, ironically, came to embody a movement that bashed politicians. The most famous example was Richard Cheney of Wyoming. Before entering Congress, Cheney had gained considerable experience in the executive branch, such as serving as chief of staff for President Gerald Ford in 1975 and 1976. Cheney had been greatly disappointed when Ford courted Republican moderates on issues such as détente, at the expense of pleasing the right-wing, who almost helped Ronald Reagan win the party nomination in 1976. When the representative of Wyoming, Democrat Teno Roncalio, retired in 1977 Cheney ran for the seat. Despite suffering a heart attack during the campaign, he won at thirty-seven years of age. Cheney avoided the spotlight, preferring to work behind the scenes. He was a conservative on both domestic and foreign policy.

Gingrich, Lott, Cheney, Weber, and other young Republicans kept close contact with conservative activists about the progress of "the coalition" in weakening Democratic power.² As a minority, they wanted to bring the Democrats to their knees and were determined to turn the GOP into a congressional majority. When Republicans took control of the Senate in 1980, their enthusiasm only grew in the anticipation of united government.

Not surprisingly, the young Republicans adopted similar legislative tactics as the Democratic Watergate Babies. Both cohorts had entered right as the committee-era Congress came to an end. Members of this legislative generation, both Republicans and Democrats, were comfortable with post-committee legislative politics because this was the process they experienced from the start. They were familiar with partisan decision making, using scandal warfare as a normal tactic of battle, maneuvering through the decentralized opportunity structures offered by subcommittees and specialized caucuses, and surviving in the news cycle of television. Regarding the importance of television, for instance, Gingrich explained that "television is the dominant medium of our society . . . the guys and gals in Congress who don't master it get killed" (Lamb 1998, 117).

Just like the Watergate Babies, young conservative Republicans made their voices heard immediately upon entering office. Elected in 1978, Daniel Lungren (R-CA), explained:

We didn't come here accepting that things take time and compromise. We wanted to challenge the institution and raise issues that ought to be raised . . . we have to be willing to shake up the system in the House in ways that may make us uncomfortable . . . because there is a natural tendency to want to be liked. No one, for example, wants to read in the newspapers that the Speaker called us ruthless, as he did, or wants to call for votes that inconvenience other Members. (Cohen 1984, 413-17)

In 1979 and 1980 the new House Republicans held more than forty meetings to discuss pending legislation. Gingrich organized an informal strategy group to coordinate legislative and political action (Cohen 1980) While reaching out to the Republican leadership, the younger Republicans were simultaneously critical of House Minority Leader Robert Michel, a plainspoken Illinois representative whose proclivity was to work with Democrats when possible. Michel disapproved of Gingrich's tactics Rejecting Michel's accommodationist approach, Gingrich explained in 1982 that "the best Republican strategy is to recognize that the Democrats run the House and will do all they can to butcher the budget. . . We should point out their obstruction from now until November and emphasize the opportunities of the Reagan budget. Bob Michel should

relax, concentrate on the impotence of Tip O'Neill and refuse to take up the burden of being Speaker himself" (Cohen 1982; see also Cohen 1981). Gingrich saw guerrilla warfare as a defensive tactic: "Liberal Democrats intend to act bipartisan before the news media while acting ruthlessly partisan in changing the rules of the House, stacking committees, apportioning staff and questioning the administration."³

Most young conservatives were devout followers of President Ronald Reagan, whose election in 1980 symbolized to them a watershed moment akin to the election of Franklin Roosevelt for liberals. They believed that Reagan could bring together the diverse coalition that constituted the conservative movement and articulate their ideas in a fashion that would attract broad-based support from the population. They perceived the historic tax cut that the Reagan administration moved through Congress in 1981 as a turning point in American politics. While the Republican Party had always tended to balance the demands of tax and deficit reductions, Gingrich's cohort was much more interested in tax cuts. A large number of the younger members, including Gingrich, had run on this issue in the 1978 congressional elections (Hayward 2001, 529–30). New York Representative, and former professional football player, Jack Kemp became an intellectual guru for the group by promoting a theory of economics whereby tax cuts for the wealthy would trickle down to help everyone and eliminate deficits by bringing money to the federal government through economic growth. Gingrich was even willing to freeze defense spending to save tax cuts (White and Wildavsky 1989, 359). He was not alone. In the 1980s Grover Norquist, president of a conservative advocacy group called Americans for Tax Reform, convinced more than 90 percent of House Republicans to sign a pledge stating that they would never vote to raise taxes under any circumstances (Gourevitch 2004).

Yet within a few years of Reagan's election, many movement conservatives were frustrated because so many of his policy promises seemed unfulfilled. For instance, the administration compromised by agreeing to sizable tax increases to reduce the federal deficit. The failure to restrain the federal tax system emerged as one of the central fault lines that divided these young conservatives from older members of the Republican Party. Responding to the 1983 tax increase, Gingrich (1983, 30–32) wrote: "From January to August of 1981, it [the nation] lived through a truly revolutionary period in the tradition of the early New Deal. We conservatives began to change the direction of federal spending, we changed the direction of national defense, we changed the pattern of regulatory bureaucracy, and we changed the pattern of taxation. But from that point to the present, we have essentially been muddling." Gingrich feared that the administration had been captured by moderates, who he defined as

"people who articulate conservative goals and beliefs but who try to govern inside Washington. They believe that, in the end, you have to compromise inside Washington and that you have to govern within the values of that city, which is by definition impossible."

The Conservative Opportunity Society, 1983–1989

Exercising control in the House, Gingrich and his colleagues concluded was essential if Republicans wanted to fulfill the Reagan revolution. After all, the House constituted a liberal bastion in a federal government now dominated by a Republican president and Senate. Like the persistence of a big federal government, the continued power of House Democrats—who used the centralizing procedures obtained in the 1970s to manhandle the GOP and isolate conservatives within their own ranks—greatly frustrated conservative Republicans. The young maverick Republican formed the Conservative Opportunity Society (in 1983) as a vehicle to promote their message and to design legislative strategy. They defined their term in opposition to the liberal welfare state, which they hoped that they could replace through their bold policies (Broder 1983).

COS was created following a weekend conference in Baltimore, chaired by Newt Gingrich and freshman Connie Mack (Florida), where Republicans spent most of their time trading war stories about how Democrats used the procedural power of the majority to stifle their participation (Cohen 1984). During the Baltimore meeting, they divided themselves up with different tasks. Gingrich would be in charge of formulating policy and tactics. Vin Weber was named the coordinator because he was well liked by his colleagues. Robert Walker, another member of the group who represented Pennsylvania, was made floor leader because of his knowledge about parliamentary tactics and reputation for being willing to be aggressive when needed. "Oh, yeah, they think I'm a pain," Walker said in one interview. "But see, you don't win a lot of friends in my job" (Rei 1984). Following the conference, COS started to meet every Wednesday morning in the office of Vin Weber. COS realized that the procedures and norms of the post-committee House offered numerous methods for challenging the majority. Cheney, who had clout with senior GOP members as a result of his work in the Ford administration, served as a liaison between COS and the leadership. "I was the grease between the grinding gears to some extent," he said (Remini 2006, 463).

Just as the Democratic Study Group had offered young liberals assistance in the 1960s, COS worked with Republicans elected in 1984 who were seeking a different kind of conservative politics. Gingrich and his allies, for instance, were quick to embrace Tom DeLay, who was elected in 1984 to represent the suburbs of Houston and symbolized the risin

power of affluent suburban conservative Republicans. This Texan was just the kind of legislator COS was looking for, one with a strong commitment to the ideological principles of modern conservatism and a brazen individual who was willing to use the toughest of tactics to combat Democrats and moderate Republicans. DeLay was born in Laredo, Texas, to a family that was in the oil business. He graduated from the University of Houston in 1970. While he was the owner of a pest control company, DeLay developed an intense dislike for federal agencies (particularly the Environmental Protection Agency). He served for six years in the state House of Texas before winning election to the U.S. House in 1984. A devout Baptist, DeLay's twenty-second district was a model of the new suburban South, filled with up-scale residential developments as well as churches and civic associations. While Anglo-Americans constituted the largest part of his solidly Republican district, there was a sizable percentage of Hispanics and Asians. If the 1960s counter-culture had redefined American culture, most of his constituents had missed the news.

COS conceived of numerous plans to achieve their objectives. Gingrich, for example, devised an elaborate media strategy for Republicans. He urged GOP legislators to coordinate their responses for national interviews on the evening news shows and on the Sunday morning talk shows in order to offer a consistent message. Gingrich implored Republicans to act as partisans in front of reporters by pinning blame on Democrats and claiming credit for themselves.⁴ Although Michel and other senior leaders initially dismissed Gingrich's media ideas, they gradually embraced them as their own after they began to realize that COS was succeeding at influencing the agenda and building a following. For example, the GOP leadership adopted a central tactic of Gingrich's group when they launched a well-coordinated national media campaign depicting Democrats as corrupt.⁵

COS used the post-committee legislative process effectively. "It is my tactic to confront them so hard they have to respond," Gingrich said (Rogers 1984). As a minority, for example, the Republicans understood that the televised Congress (the House authorized televised floor proceedings in 1978, and C-SPAN was founded in 1979) could be used as an effective weapon for individuals and the minority to challenge the party in power. Although C-SPAN was a small station compared to the networks, Gingrich concluded that the small viewership still ranged between a quarter of a million to half a million people each day. "My test was very simple," Gingrich explained, "How far would you go to speak to five thousand people. The average politician would go around the planet" (Clift and Brazaitis 1996, 228). In 1984 COS coordinated televised one-minute and special-order speeches on C-SPAN where they attacked Democrats for various policy issues. The practice became the center of controversy

in May 1984, when COS members criticized the foreign policy position of Democrats. After each speech, Republicans would ask Democrats to respond to the charges of their being weak on fighting communism. Viewers were unaware that the chamber was empty, so it appeared as if Democrats had nothing to say. David Obey (D-WI) compared this to the anti-communist scares of the 1950s: "He may look prettier than Joe McCarthy but 'it still looks like a duck to me.'" Speaker O'Neill was livid when COS attacked his close friend Eddie Boland (D-MA). "What really infuriated me about these guys," O'Neill later recalled, "is that they had no real interest in legislation. As far as they were concerned, the House was no more than a pulpit, a sound stage from which to reach the people at home. If the TV cameras were facing the city dump, that's where they'd be speaking" (O'Neill and Novak 1987, 353-54). To retaliate for the attacks, the Speaker ordered the cameraman to pan the chamber in order to show that it was empty (thereby violating the rules of the House). Although at first "CAMSCAM" seemed to reveal the tricks that COS employed, COS turned the incident against O'Neill by launching television ads that depicted the Speaker as a corrupt boss who violated and manipulated the rules. Jack Kemp wrote Republicans: "Since he has become Speaker in 1977, he has manipulated and maneuvered the system to insure his iron-fisted control." With CAMSCAM, Kemp argued: "O'Neill alone altered procedure and tried to use the televising of the House to embarrass the Republicans."⁷ All of the three major networks covered the events, so Gingrich's name gained national attention.

The incident established COS as a serious player in the Republican Party. Understanding the irony of how events unfolded, O'Neill said to Gingrich that "when I came out on the floor and attacked you, you were nothing but backbench-rabble rousers. I made you" (Farrell 2001, 636). In January 1984 the Conservative Opportunity Society drafted its own budget, which included curtailing the growth of Medicare and across-the-board freezes on domestic programs. Gingrich publicly criticized Reagan for "feeding the liberal welfare state instead of changing it" (Birnbau 1984). In the summer of 1984, the young Republicans shunted moderates such as Robert Dole (Kansas) and Howard Baker (Tennessee) and rewrote the Republican platform. Describing himself as a "visionary conservative," Gingrich wanted Reagan to launch a "dynamic, audacious first 100 days reminiscent of [Franklin] Roosevelt's first term" (Thomas 1984, 3-35). Some moderate Republicans were angry. Jim Leach of Iowa, head of the Republican Mainstream Committee, said of the revised platform: "I do not identify with the Republican platform and view it as an embarrassment. I will run on my record" (*U.S. News and World Report* 1984, 23). But these kinds of activities gave the impression that House Republicans were now the source of ideas in the GOP. Former Indiana represent

tive Dan Quayle, elected to the Senate in 1980, said of Gingrich and his allies: "They are conducting the intellectual work of the Republican Party" (Shribman and Rogers 1985).

In addition to televised proceedings, conservative Republicans also relied on the congressional ethics code that had been enacted in 1977 and 1978. The most infamous example involved the downfall of Speaker James Wright (D-TX). Wright had been elected as Speaker in 1987. Although he started his career as a centrist southern Democrat, Wright moved with the congressional base of the party to the left by the mid-1980s. By the time that Democrats elected him as Speaker, Wright understood that he had to push for the national agenda of the party or he would face retribution from the caucus. Therefore, Wright ruthlessly used the rules that the majority had gained in the 1970s. For instance, he worked closely with the House Rules Committee to make sure that party-based legislation received favorable treatment. As a result of the 1970s reforms, the Rules Committee had become an instrument of the caucus rather than an independent fiefdom, as it had been in the committee era (S. Smith 1998). Following the 1984 election, the Democratic majority voted to seat a Democratic legislator over a Republican, who had been certified by the Indiana state authorities to represent the eighth district, following a series of controversial and partisan recounts. Not only were young Republicans unhappy with the Democratic leadership but with senior Republicans as well for their apparent indifference (Evans and Novak 1985). Gingrich proposed civil disobedience. Richard Cheney complained "What choice does a self-respecting Republican have . . . except confrontation? If you play by the rules, the Democrats change the rules so they win" (Balz 1985). In 1987, moreover, the Speaker held open a vote on tax increase legislation beyond the allotted time just so that Democrats could find someone to switch his vote and thereby gain a victory. "Can we lock the damn door?" asked Trent Lott in protest. Republicans who had cheered when Wright initially declared that time had expired and the vote stood at 206–205 against the measure, started to boo and yell at him. "They had to cheat to win it," complained Minnesota Representative Bill Frenzel, who added that "it was a bad day for the speaker and for the country." The House approved the \$12.3 billion tax increase by a narrow one-vote margin (Birnbbaum and Langley 1987).

Gingrich perceived an opening to attack the Speaker through the ethics rules. Common Cause, an organization that had formed in 1970 to fight for government reform, accused Speaker Wright of ethics violations. Gingrich realized that Wright offered a perfect target: it seemed that he had really abused the laws, and he had so many enemies in both parties (many Democrats personally disliked Wright because of his gruff style). Gingrich called for a House Ethics Committee investigation with a professional

staff that was granted subpoena powers.⁸ Common Cause and Gingrich made several accusations. They charged the Speaker with having violated the rules regarding outside income by forcing trade associations to purchase copies of his book—a collection of floor speeches—when he made an appearance. William Carlos Moore, a friend of Wright from Texas whose business had received over \$600,000 in consulting fees from the Speaker's reelection committee, published the book. Another accusation involved the claim that Wright once intervened with the Egyptian president to help a business friend obtain oil rights in the country and that he had approached the head of a savings and loan in Texas for special assistance. When Gingrich called this situation a crisis for the House,⁹ Wright responded that he had "violated no rule and certainly violated no commonly accepted ethical standard" (Carlson 1988, 21). Importantly, most of the aforementioned activities would have been tolerated during the committee era (W. Schneider 1989). To spearhead his defense, the Speaker released a twenty-three-page pamphlet refuting each of the charges. He called this an inquiry being driven by partisanship and targeted the seventy-two Republicans mounting the attack, while ignoring the role of Common Cause (*Time* 1988, 31; Borger 1988, 20). Bill Alexander (D-AR), one of Wright's closest allies, took a different tack. He raised questions about Gingrich's ethics, claiming that he had engaged in inappropriate financial deals. Alexander also said that "Gingrich is clearly an extension of the Republican 'Southern Strategy' based on confrontational, demagogical politics that began with Richard Nixon and Harry Dent of South Carolina and is now being continued by Lee Atwater, Roger Ailes, and Ed Rollins. This strategy has established a political base for Republicans in the South."¹⁰ Gingrich himself did not care about public perception that he was mean: "If voters see a race as a nice-guy Republican against a nice-guy Democrat, we lose" (Dionne 1991, 296).

The House Ethics Committee began an investigation into Wright on June 1988. The Republicans pressured the Ethics Committee into conducting a thorough investigation. They also appeared regularly on the media to keep these charges at the forefront of attention. Republicans elected Gingrich as minority whip in 1989, and then the partisan war accelerated into high gear. Gingrich told PBS's *MacNeill/Lehrer New Hour*: "It is my honest belief as a citizen that you now have Tammany Hall on Capitol Hill . . . that it is a sick institution, and that it has no legitimate authority, has enormous power, and that it has no legitimate authority; it does not represent the constitutional government. It is, in fact, a subversion of the process of free elections" (*National Journal* 2001). In April 1989 the Ethics Committee released a full report stating that Wright had violated the ethics rules on multiple occasions.¹¹ Sensing that he would be removed, Wright decided to resign on 31 May 1989.

Before he stepped down, the Speaker warned his colleagues that they needed to stop the "mindless cannibalism" that was sweeping through the chamber as both parties eviscerated each other through scandal warfare.¹² As with CAMSCAM, the deposition of Wright revealed that COS was a force to be reckoned with. Not only had these mavericks gained a secure foothold in the GOP, but they had also toppled the most powerful legislator in the House.

A few years later, conservative Republicans would strike once again with their campaign to depict Democrats as a corrupt majority.¹³ In 1991 the GOP pressured Democrats to launch an investigation following a report from the General Accounting Office in 1991 that showed 269 sitting representatives had bounced checks at the House Bank without having been required to pay a penalty. The scandal was complicated, because the House Bank was not actually a bank. Rather, it was a depositing service offered to legislators that covered bad checks. Republicans kept the issue in the spotlight, however, despite attempts by Democrats to quiet them down. Once the investigation began, Republicans pushed for an even broader inquiry. Representative James Nussle (R-IA), part of the notorious "Gang of Seven" who favored confrontational styles, wore a bag over his head before the C-SPAN cameras to indicate disgust with his colleagues.

In the spring of 1992, the House Ethics Committee released the names of the worst offenders, which included 252 sitting lawmakers. The Justice Department hired a special counsel to investigate the worst cases. The revelations seemed to have an effect, earning the House some of the worst press that the institution had faced in years. During the 1992 elections, voters produced the largest House turnover in forty years with 110 new members. Of the 269 sitting members implicated in the scandal, 77 retired or were defeated. The scandal also caused a significant number of retirements and primary defeats. While many accused survived, there were enough losses to vindicate the Republican campaign.

The Frustration with President George H. W. Bush, 1990–1991

When it came to public policy, however, the young Republicans were not as successful. Indeed, one of the factors that motivated congressional conservatives to maintain such high levels of discipline and energy was that, despite their increased political success, they were unable to curb the growth of the American state. Their disappointment was evident with the presidency of George H. W. Bush, who signaled to conservatives that Republicans were regressing. During Bush's presidency, there was a series of historic expansions in the scope of government, including the Civil Rights Act of 1989 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. The defining moment for congressional conservatives occurred in 1990 when,

he faced with pressure from Republican and Democratic budget hawk Bush agreed to raise taxes in exchange for spending cuts. Upon hearing of the president's decision to renege on his famous promise in 1988 not to raise taxes, Gingrich lambasted it as "the fiscal equivalent of Yalta" (Critchlow 2004, 719).

Gingrich and his allies would not tolerate the tax hikes, as they had with Reagan, because they already did not trust Bush and believed he was an old-guard compromiser (Gould 2003, 448). Bush was so angry with Gingrich for defying him that he refused to shake his hand during a White House ceremony. Gingrich said that "there was a sense in the White House that the admiral of the fleet had made the decision and I was but a disloyal ship captain. . . . I think that is a total misunderstanding of politics. For me to have voted for that compromise would have destroyed my effectiveness" (Clift and Brazaitis 1996, 245). Many conservatives never forgave Bush for raising taxes. His opponent in the 1992 Republican primaries, Patrick Buchanan, said to fellow conservatives: "George Bush, if you'll pardon the expression . . . has come out of the closet as an Eastern Establishment liberal" (Hodgson 1996, 250).

Frustration with Bush further energized congressional Republicans to stifle President Clinton (although they were certainly prepared to attack regardless of the experience with Bush). During the 103rd Congress, despite Democrats controlling both chambers of Congress, Republicans maintained tremendous discipline and made it difficult for Democrats to pass major legislative accomplishments. Congressional Republicans were even able to block Clinton's health care reform proposal in 1993, turning what was meant to be a centerpiece of his presidency into an electoral liability that would cost Democrats control of Congress in 1994 (Jon 1999, 82–87). Congressional Republicans worked together in the months running up to the midterm elections of 1994, relying on congressional investigations in the House and the Senate filibuster to block Clinton's agenda. Clinton was able to pass an economic stimulus package in 1994 that included a tax increase and other deficit-reduction measures, but he did so without Republican support.

CONGRESSIONAL CONSERVATIVES AND THE POWER OF CENTRALIZATION, 1994–2004

The election of 1994 had been a watershed year in congressional history. Republicans took control of both chambers of Congress for the first time since 1954. Senate Republicans increased their number to 52 by gaining 8 seats; 2 Democrats then switched parties. House Republicans took over the chamber with 230 seats. Importantly, the biggest Republican gain

were in the South, Midwest, and West. Most politicians and pundits credited Minority Whip Newt Gingrich for having orchestrated a national campaign based on the conservative ideas (including a balanced budget, term limits for legislators, capital-gains tax cuts, a policy to prevent U.S. troops from being placed under the authority of the United Nations, and requirements promoting personal responsibility and self-sufficiency for citizens on welfare) that were outlined in the "Contract with America." This was a slick document, published in *TV Guide*, that Republicans promoted through a sophisticated public relations campaign. As a result of the election, the individuals who came from COS were now in control of Congress and of the party. The Republicans showed themselves to be children of the 1970s reforms and had little interest in turning back the clock to the committee era. Most of the reforms that they passed in 1995 cemented, and accelerated, the trends of the 1970s.

The Republican Reforms in 1995

After years of using the decentralizing aspects of the legislative process to their advantage, conservative Republicans switched course. Speaker Gingrich continued to strengthen parties through a variety of methods. He created task forces that reported directly to the Speaker to craft legislative proposals and committee agendas. Gingrich organized the Speaker's Advisory Group (SAG) to meet every week and design policy (Dodd and Oppenheimer 1997, 43; Wolfensberger 2000, 175–91). The Speaker and others in House leadership also stacked the key committees with individuals and chairmen who were loyal to the new Republican agenda, while imposing six-year term limits for committee chairs in the House and Senate. House Republicans created a twenty-six-person Steering Committee that obtained the responsibility of naming committee chairs. The Speaker chaired the committee and had more votes than the other members (S. Smith and Lawrence 1997, 174). Republicans did reverse some of the 1970s changes by eroding the balance between centralization and decentralization that reformers had hoped to achieve. For example, the Republican leadership under Gingrich weakened the Subcommittee Bill of Rights by granting committee chairs the power to name subcommittee chairs and to hire staff (Schickler 2001, 272). Republicans also limited the number of subcommittees that most committees could have to five. "In the Commerce Committee," lamented Henry Waxman, "the subcommittees are practically irrelevant" (S. Smith and Lawrence 1997, 179).

Yet Gingrich understood that the decentralizing tools of the 1970s reforms were still in place and that he needed to remain responsive to his membership. In this respect, the post-committee reforms worked by creat-

ing opportunities for strong party caucuses while leaving party leaders susceptible to attack. The forces of decentralization, though not as strong after 1994, were still very relevant. Gingrich depended on the seventy-three freshmen as a solid voting block, and he was always aware of the trouble they could cause him. This was a big challenge because the freshmen were a volatile bunch. While sharing the ideological outlook of the founders of COS, they were more extreme than their predecessors in their refusal to learn how to work in the political system or to build any kind of coalitions. Most of this class never intended to stay in politics. Only twenty-six of the freshmen had any previous legislative experience, and almost none of them envisioned themselves as career politicians. As a result, most were willing to put everything on the line.

The freshmen included South Carolina's Lindsey Graham, a single Baptist who was born in 1955 and raised in Pickens County by a family that owned a bar. He studied at the University of South Carolina following the early death of his parents, and he was the first person in his family to earn a college degree. Graham went on to earn a law degree at the University of South Carolina. He worked as an attorney for the Air Force. After practicing law in Seneca and serving in the Gulf War, he worked for two years in state government before being elected to the House in 1994. In his campaign, he ran against state senator Jim Bryan on a platform that emphasized increased military spending, term limits, and cultural conservatism. Another freshman was Mark Foley, who represented the sixteenth district of Florida that included beachfront resort communities, affluent suburban areas, and farmers. A Massachusetts native, Foley's family had moved to Florida when he was three. Unlike Graham, Foley did not do as well in school. He never completed his work at Palm Beach Community College and instead opened a restaurant. Before his election in 1994 Foley served in state politics for only four years. From the time he arrived to Washington, Foley became known for his independence and willingness to challenge any authority, including the Republican leadership. Then there was Mark Neumann, a self-made millionaire who had worked his way through undergraduate and graduate school at the University of Wisconsin by taking jobs in restaurants and coaching sports teams. Neumann had earned his millions through a real estate company; he financed much of his own campaigns. Despite his self-accumulated wealth Neumann did not embrace the life-style of a millionaire. This workaholic maintained a cluttered and messy office on Capitol Hill, and he rejected most of the perks that came with working in Washington. Neumann developed a passion—bordering on an obsession—with the size of federal deficits. He entered office with a determination to cut the cost of federal spending, even when that meant that he would have to do battle with Republican leaders (Browning 1995).

Freshmen such as Graham, Foley, and Neumann made their voices heard. When Robert Livingston (R-LA) tried to remove Neumann from the defense appropriations subcommittee for voting against a piece of legislation, the freshmen intimidated Gingrich into placing Neumann on the Budget Committee instead. During one of the budget battles between President Clinton and the Republican Congress in 1995, Neumann added an amendment to an appropriations bill that would have blocked the \$600,000 that was earmarked for the African Elephant Conservation Act and \$200,000 that was to go to a fund to help developing nations protect certain animals that were headed toward extinction. Gingrich was angry because he supported the appropriations, especially the first measure that would have sent money to the Atlanta Zoo. Gingrich also felt that Neumann was practicing a kind of budget-balancing extremism that had little effect on the overall budget but earned GOP scorn among constituents. In response to criticism that \$800,000 was a trivial amount of money, Neumann said: "Some people here in Washington would have us believe that \$800,000 is not worth worrying about. Let me respond. . . . I understand it takes \$1 per day to keep a starving child alive in some of these countries. That means we could use these same tax dollars to keep 2,100 starving children alive (for a year), rather than spend the money to preserve tigers, elephants and rhinos." Neumann moved forward with his amendment despite Gingrich's fervent opposition. Although the House rejected Neumann's measure, it was a bold sign of defiance. Neumann, was not the only young Republican willing to take on the leadership. At a retreat that followed the 1994 elections, some Republicans asked why the party shouldn't impose term limits on the Speaker as it had with committee chairs. The idea "caught on like wildfire," recalled Lindsey Graham, and the freshmen imposed an eight-year term limit. "Ain't nothing was off-limits, buddy. You could feed us, wash us, and comb us, but we'd still bite," Graham said (Baumann 2004).

Additionally, these conservative legislators used advocacy think tanks to gain ground in the battle over ideas (Ricci 1993; J. Smith 1991). Republicans likewise depended on the new campaign finance system to gain political advantage, capitalizing on their broader base of support to mobilize small contributions and political action committees. After years of exile, Republicans became prominent in the mainstream media. Besides gaining attention in the network news shows, they relied on talk radio shows, C-SPAN, Internet Web sites, and cable television.

The Travails of Conservatism, 1995–1999

In the coming years, Gingrich realized that lower-ranking Republicans could cause him enormous problems. As Speaker, Gingrich had to con-

front the tension between the strength of the conservative movement of which he was a part and the persistence, as well as entrenchment, of the American state. When Republicans squared off against President Clinton in 1995 over the federal budget for fiscal year 1996, attempting to obtain deep cuts in spending and complete Reagan's revolution, they found themselves in a bind. Republicans proposed over \$1 trillion in spending cuts over a seven-year period, as well as \$353 billion in tax cuts and increases in defense spending. They packaged most of their proposals within the budget process since the rules created in 1974 offered a means of avoiding the filibuster in the Senate (Sinclair 1997, 216). They also relied on a number of highly restrictive rules to limit debate. For instance, upon introducing the budget resolution in the House, Republican leaders required that any substitute show it would balance the budget in seven years. Until then, only narrow amendments had been barred from consideration when dealing with budget resolutions (Sinclair 1997, 185). Clinton responded by calling for \$1.1 trillion in spending cuts over ten years and a much smaller tax cut that would only benefit the middle class. "The White House," Gingrich told his colleagues early on in the battle, "has crossed the line. We want them to understand that if they want a long-term stand-off, we are prepared to stay the course for as long as it takes" (Thurber 1997, 337).

During the budget battles, Republicans learned that it was extremely difficult to dismantle the American state. President Clinton was able to link the proposed Republican Medicare cuts to their proposed tax cuts, presenting this budget as an attempt by the GOP to transfer money from the poor to the rich. Clinton also honed in on specific cuts in the budget that affected programs that had public support, such as food stamps, school lunches, and health care (Witcover 2003, 676). Gingrich, however, had little room to maneuver since the freshmen remained adamant regardless of the political costs. As Clinton's top adviser said, "the freshman had become Newt's Frankenstein monster—and my new best friend" (Stephanopoulos 1999, 406). When the intransigence of both sides caused a series of government shutdowns in December 1995 and January 1996, the media turned on the Republicans by presenting them as unwilling to compromise and as prepared to abandon popular government services ranging from the National Zoo, to federal monuments, to travel visas. Republicans had not perceived that most voters would blame the Congress for a government shutdown—particularly after they spent so much time wielding this as a threat in public—rather than Clinton. The tension between Republicans and the White House became so severe that at one point during a shutdown, as House GOP leaders complained to the president about an insulting picture the White House had provided to *Time*

magazine, Gingrich picked up the phone and cursed at Clinton, accusing him of being a "goddamn lying son of a bitch!" (Garrett 2005, 125).

In the end, Republicans agreed to a federal budget that did not significantly cut into the strength of the federal government. Kansas Senator Robert Dole was instrumental at reaching a compromise, in part because he was concerned about how the budget shutdown would affect his presidential campaign. Politically, Clinton emerged from the battles with renewed strength as congressional Republicans had lost some of the luster they gained following the 1994 elections. Gingrich personally suffered as the national media developed an unfavorable caricature of the Speaker as immature, mean-spirited, and out-of-control.

Nonetheless, congressional Republicans would score some important victories. In January 1996 Clinton sent a message to Congress with a plan to balance the budget by 2002, thereby adopting a central platform of the Republicans in the budget battles. Moreover, in 1996 Clinton agreed to sign legislation that ended the federal welfare program, Aid to Families with Dependent Children. Clinton also made the famous proclamation that the "era of big government is over," which seemed to confirm the ideological message of the conservative movement. In 1997 Clinton agreed to a budget that constrained discretionary spending below the predicted rate of inflation, opened the door for Medicare reform, and reduced income taxes. In exchange, Clinton ameliorated certain parts of the welfare reform and obtained a new health care program to cover low-income children. Republicans would also prevent programs from being updated to meet current conditions, an effective way to retrench programs without eliminating them (Hacker 2004). Despite the Republicans accomplishments in the second term, however, most parts of the American state remained intact throughout the 1990s, and spending did not decline in dramatic fashion.

Once again, the persistence of the American state inspired Republicans to remain aggressive in employing the tools of the majority to achieve their goals. Their political victories were not translating into the kind of policy victories that they desired, so many in the GOP did not feel as successful as they thought they should. The leadership continued to use House rules to curtail dissent within their caucus and to limit Democratic opposition. Republican investigations into the White House were a central tactic that they used to combat Clinton, culminating with the investigation of Clinton's affair with a White House intern named Monica Lewinsky. As the House of Representatives considered whether to impeach President Clinton in 1998, Majority Whip Tom DeLay prevented Democrats and moderate Republicans from offering a censure resolution that would likely have attracted the support of many legislators (Baker 2000, 217-37).

*Exercising Majoritarian Power in an Era
of United Government, 2000-2004*

Once the era of divided government ended with the election of President George W. Bush in 2000, House Republicans accelerated their efforts to use the centralizing aspects of the 1970s reforms. With Gingrich out of office (he was forced by Republicans to resign during the Clinton impeachment), Tom DeLay stepped into the power vacuum. As whip and then majority leader, DeLay used House rules without restraint. On Republican colleague called DeLay's office "a cross between the concierge at the Plaza and the mafia. They can get you anything you want, but will cost you" (*National Journal* 2003). The role of committees continued to decline, as was evident from the diminished number of committee meetings and hearings (*National Journal* 2001).¹⁴ Between 2000 and 2003, Republicans also blocked Democratic participation in committee deliberations, refused to give Democrats access to the language of legislative proposals until hours before a vote, and made it hard for them to gain attention in the media. Even the tragedy of 9/11 did not stop House Republicans from employing their procedural power. Initially, Speaker Hastert tried to work across partisan lines. According to one report, shortly after 9/11 Congress was working on legislation to stimulate economic recovery. Senator Tom Daschle's (D-SD) and Richard Gephardt (D-MO) staff convened with Hastert's staff in a conference room to work on an airline bailout package in the late hours of evening. After hearing about this, DeLay personally dashed into the conference room without announcement. In a fury, DeLay screamed at the Democratic staffer "Who elected you to Congress?" He ordered the Republican staffers to leave immediately. Thereafter, he dismantled the work completed in the discussions. The Republican leadership removed all of the Democratic provisions the following day before the House voted on the legislation (Crowley 2003).

But with a Republican in the White House and fewer GOP centrists to stop them, the skill of conservatives at institutional politics started to reap big dividends. In 2001 the Republican Congress passed a massive tax reduction, the largest in postwar history, which made deep inroads into the fiscal capacity of the state. In 2003, in the midst of a war against terrorism, Congress passed a smaller tax reduction that nonetheless broke the historic tradition in the U.S. of increasing federal tax contributions when American troops were fighting abroad. The \$350 billion tax cut of 2003 included lower rates for dividends and long-term capital gains, various benefits to individual taxpayers, and business tax benefits such as improved depreciation rates. The rules were important to a smooth passage. House Democrats, for example, were only granted one hour to d

bate their less costly and more progressive \$150 billion alternative; Democrats were not even allowed to vote on their plan. Republicans were so successful at stifling Democratic proposals through restrictive rules that the media reported as if Democrats had agreed to the Republican plan rather than being shut out of debate (Crowley 2003).

House Republican leaders employed many tactics throughout other battles in Bush's first term. Republicans only allowed 15 percent of the bills in 2004 to be open for amendment (Milligan 2004). In numerous committee meetings, Republicans prohibited Democratic amendments. During a vote on a prescription drug benefit in 2002, Democrats were not allowed to vote on their plan. Republicans also have delayed omnibus spending legislation until the very last minute so that Democrats had to scramble to influence legislation without having much time to devise strategy. Frequently, Republicans prevented Democrats from obtaining access to critical information. Democrats have been denied meeting space on some occasions or locked out of conference committees. The House Rules Committee barely gave notification about meetings on important rules decisions, while the markup of most legislation has been handled by party leaders, administration staff, and lobbyists without the consultation of members on the conference committees (Mann and Ornstein 2006, 172–73).

With control of the White House and Congress secured, congressional Republicans also strengthened the K Street Project. Begun in 1994, this was an effort by conservative legislators to master the campaign finance and lobbying systems that had emerged in the 1970s. Conservatives understood that to thrive they needed command over the relationship between private contributions, interest-group lobbying, and governance. Congressional Republicans felt that so many decades of Democratic rule had biased the entire Washington community against them. The connections between Congress and lobbyists had become all that much more important after the 1960s as the number of trade associations exploded in Washington and the costs of campaigns skyrocketed. Through the K Street Project, Republicans attempted to make certain that top interest groups hired Republicans who had worked in Congress or the White House, thereby ensuring GOP dominance over money in politics. After 2001 Senator Rick Santorum of Pennsylvania met every Tuesday on Capitol Hill with carefully selected lobbyists. They discussed new job openings and the best candidates for the positions.

The lobbyists in the K Street Project were usually devoted Republicans, who had been working with activists in the conservative movement for more than a decade. Jack Abramoff, for example, had become involved in politics while he was an undergraduate at Brandeis University. In the 1980 election, he helped organize, along with Grover Norquist (who was then a graduate student at the Harvard Business School), Massachusetts

college students who supported Ronald Reagan for president. After the election, Abramoff and Norquist moved to Washington where they worked with the activist Ralph Reed to transform College Republicans into a national force. Following his experience with the College Republicans, Abramoff directed a small grass-roots operation (Citizens for America), that lobbied for U.S. assistance to the anti-communist Nicaraguan Contras. The Republican takeover of Congress in 1994 convinced Abramoff to turn his energy toward lobbying. Abramoff met Tom DeLay's fund raiser in 1995, and the two men would quickly form a strong alliance (Schmidt and Grimaldi 2005).

The Abramoff and DeLay relationship was not unique. Following the election in 1994, Tom DeLay had sent a strong message when he put together a list of 400 of the biggest political action committees along with the amount of money that they had contributed to candidates. Having asked the lobbyists to come to his office, DeLay revealed whether they were in the "friendly or unfriendly" column of his list. "If you want to play in our revolution," he told them, "you have to live by our rules" (Confessore 2003). According to Grover Norquist, "Ninety percent of the new top hires are going to Republicans; it should be 100 percent . . . it would be suicidal of them to go to a Democrat" (Chaddock 2003). The K Street Project was a well-orchestrated effort to solidify a machine with its own spoils system, namely jobs in the private sector, which was comparable to the urban Democratic machines from the Gilded Age that relied on public patronage (Confessore 2003; Drew 2005).

After the 2004 election, emboldened Republicans moved to further weaken the constraints on party leaders. When the new Congress convened, Republicans pushed through a rule change stipulating that the House would be required to dismiss an ethics complaint if the House Ethics Committee found itself in a deadlock. Previously, as a result of a 1997 modification, an investigation was automatically triggered if the ethics committee (which was split evenly between parties) did not act on a complaint within forty-five days. The change adopted in January 2005 diminished the chances for new ethics investigations. To be sure, Republicans decided against moving forward with other changes—including when the caucus decided to reinstate a party rule whereby an indicted member could not serve in the leadership (which they had just overturned a few weeks earlier to protect DeLay). The GOP reversed the decision, however, only after DeLay told them in closed-door session that he was confident he would not be charged and that the leadership feared the political costs of the recent decision. This change, which prevented an investigation if the ethics committee was deadlocked, was significant. As Zach Wamp, a Republican from Tennessee, said, the change removed "a ball and chain around our foot" (Allen 2005).

Yet even in an era of homogeneous parties, united government, and skilled legislative leadership, the American state has not disappeared. In fact it has grown. During President Bush's first three years as president, federal spending increased from 18 percent of the economy in 1999 to 20 percent in 2003. Discretionary spending, which rose at a rate of 2.4 percent a year during the 1990s grew by more than 27 percent in 2002 and 2003 (*Albany Times Union* 2003). Much of this money went toward nonmilitary items such as transportation, education, and farm subsidies. Despite the emphasis of the 1994 class on balanced budgets, the government was drowning in a sea of red ink by its ten-year anniversary. "If Bill Clinton had tolerated this," noted the *Wall Street Journal*, "Republicans would be shouting from the rooftops" (*Wall Street Journal* 2003; see also Rosenbaum 2003). When House Republicans gathered in Arizona in January 2004 to reminisce ten years after the Republican revolution, most of the talk was about what had gone wrong and why so many "revolutionaries" had compromised their principles. "After three years or so," said Michael Franc, vice president of the Heritage Foundation, "they went from revolutionaries to members of a committee or a state's delegation. . . . They shifted their senses of identity, and it became a lot easier for them to say, 'Well we have to get this project.' They lost their way with respect to the size and scope of government." The new Republicans in 2005 promised that things would be different. "They came back to their senses," said Thomas Fitton, president of Judicial Watch, "We returned to our moorings, to our foundations. . . . Those of us who remain are more committed to the reform agenda that brought us here" (Klein 2005).

Republicans, moreover, have been struggling with the dangers that the legislative process poses to leaders of any party. During the period of reform in the 1970s, liberal Democrats had created numerous mechanisms that could be used to bring down congressional leaders in order to make certain that the legislative system did not facilitate the type of long-term, unchecked power that had existed in the committee era. Young conservative Republicans had depended on these mechanisms to attack Democrats when they were in the majority of the House and Senate and to weaken GOP leaders who had played to the center in the 1980s. Now, conservative Republicans are finding themselves struggling on Capitol Hill. Majority Leader Tom DeLay was forced to resign in April 2006 after being indicted for campaign finance violations and implicated in a massive lobbying scandal. Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist of Tennessee has been under investigation for ethics violations involving his personal finances. A congressional sex scandal involving Mark Foley's interaction with underage pages—and evidence that the Republican leadership had failed to act on earlier warnings of this—wrought havoc on

the GOP one month before the 2006 midterm elections. Key figures from the notorious K Street Group—including the lobbyists Jack Abramoff and Michael Scanlon and the legislators who they had worked with—came under intense scrutiny. Abramoff, the kingpin of the operation, pled guilty to criminal felony counts. Meanwhile, maverick Republicans and Democrats started to flex their muscle and cause serious problems for the GOP leadership.

As a result, one of the big questions today is whether conservative Republicans can survive the immense challenges that have emerged ever since the Bush administration stumbled in its response to Hurricane Katrina, faced its own ethics scandal with the indictment of Lewis "Scooter" Libby, and confronted questions about how it handled intelligence before starting the War in Iraq. "Conservatives are in power but out of sorts," complained the commentator David Brooks (2005). "Fifty years after the founding of the modern right, conservatives hold just about every important government job, yet the conservative agenda has stalled." Republicans lost control of Congress in 2006.

CONCLUSION

America's Congress underwent significant reform in the 1970s at the hands of liberals who hoped to make the institution more progressive and accountable. But reformers learned that it is impossible to control these kinds of changes as conservative Republicans proved to be extremely adept at operating in the new institutions to achieve political power. A new generation of Republicans who entered Congress in the 1970s and maintained close ties to the conservative movement, mastered the post-committee legislative process—both the decentralizing features that benefited the minority or mavericks, as well as the centralizing features that favored the majority leadership—and used the process to achieve influence in national politics.

But the political success of conservatism in Congress did not slay the dragon of the American state. Republicans watched as the state proved to be extremely durable in the conservative era—even as the GOP was able to chip away at its edges. Although there were some instances when retrenchment occurred, such as with welfare reform in 1996 and the federal tax intake after 2001, overall, the government remained substantial through 2006. Whether congressional conservatives can finally translate their political success into policy remains one of the most vexing puzzles of the twenty-first century. Republican leaders must also find out if they can succeed in the volatile nature of the political process upon which they have depended as they climbed to the top.

NOTES

1. These arguments and issues are explored in much greater detail in my book *On Capitol Hill* (2004). For an outstanding history of the tensions conservatives faced between ideology and the needs of governing, see Donald Critchlow's essay in *The American Congress: The Building of Democracy* (2004).
2. Newt Gingrich to Paul Weyrich, 18 December 1980, Tip O'Neill Papers, Kirk O'Donnell Papers, box 1, file: Newt Gingrich, 1982-1985, Boston College, Boston, Massachusetts.
3. Newt Gingrich to Republican Colleagues, 8 February 1983, Tip O'Neill Papers, Kirk O'Donnell Papers, box 1, file: Newt Gingrich, 1982-1985.
4. Newt Gingrich to Fellow Republican, 18 March 1982, Tip O'Neill Papers, Kirk O'Donnell Papers, box 1, file: Newt Gingrich, 1982-1985.
5. "Republican Agenda for the Remainder of 1983," 17 October 1983, Robert Michel Papers, Press Series, box I, file: Memoranda 1981-1988 (2), Dirksen Congressional Center, Pekin, Illinois.
6. David Obey to Tony Coelho, 3 May 1984, Tip O'Neill Papers, Kirk O'Donnell Papers, box 1, file: Newt Gingrich, 1980-1989.
7. Jack Kemp to Friends, 1984, Tip O'Neill Papers, Kirk O'Donnell Papers, box 1, file: Newt Gingrich, 1982-1985.
8. Newt Gingrich to Colleagues, 15 December 1987, Jim Wright Papers, RC box 18-4, The Capital, Suite H 324, Steering and Policy Committee, file: Newt Gingrich, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth.
9. Newt Gingrich to Colleagues, 17 February 1988, Jim Wright Papers, RC box 18-4, The Capital, Suite H 324, Steering and Policy Committee, file: Newt Gingrich.
10. Bill Alexander to Colleague, 7 April 1989, Jim Wright Papers, RC box 18-4, The Capital, Suite H 324, Steering and Policy Committee, file: Newt Gingrich.
11. U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Standards of Official Conduct, *Statement of Alleged Violation in the Matter of Representative James C. Wright, Jr.*, 101st Congress, 1st session, 13 April 1989.
12. U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, *Congressional Record*, 101st Congress, 1st Session, 31 May 1989, p. 10400.
13. Jerry Solomon to House Republican Leadership, 6 December 1990, Robert Michel Papers, Staff Series, K. Bullard, box 132, file: Legislative Agenda for 102nd Congress.
14. In the House, for instance, there were 5,388 House committee hearings in the 100th Congress (1987-88); 5,152 House committee hearings in the 102nd Congress (1991-92); 3,786 House committee hearings in the 104th Congress (1995-96); and 3,347 House committee hearings in the 106th Congress (1999-2000).