

Some of the faces of Newt Gingrich during a keynote speech at the Council of State Governments' spring conference in Lexington, Kentucky (photos by Lee Ann Paynter © 2008).

# Newt's Focus on the Future

## Former Speaker Continues to Speak Out

By Tom Schuman

**S**pending 25 minutes on the telephone (and viewing a presentation in Lexington, Kentucky earlier this year) with former U.S. House Speaker Newt Gingrich can best be described as an educational experience. Rarely do a few minutes go by without the former history professor and acclaimed author making reference to past moments or books that hold lessons about today's challenges.

Attendees at the Indiana Chamber's 19th Annual Awards Dinner on November 6 will hear from the self-described "risk taker" for at least 30 minutes. Gingrich follows the likes of Martin Luther King III, James Carville and Mary Matalin, Bob Costas and the late Tim Russert as keynote speakers at this event.

Mark Shublak, a partner at the Ice Miller law firm in Indianapolis, was among the attendees in Lexington. He offers: "Gingrich has always been a strong advocate of innovation. His point of view on how the U.S. has to change with the times – that America will continue to change and adapt and become more efficient – is most interesting. Whether you agree or disagree with his ideas, I would say he's always interesting."

**Our BizVoice® conversation with Gingrich:**

**BizVoice®:** In the speech at the Council of State Governments conference, you talked about China and India. From the U.S. perspective, is it worrying about what those countries are doing or more about how our country responds?

**Newt Gingrich:** "My view very deeply is that we need to focus on what does it take to make us the most competitive country in the world, not what they are doing to be the most competitive country in the world. We have the sheer resources, both capital and human, that if we are prepared

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## Newt Gingrich

### Current:

- Founder, Center for Health Transformation ([www.healthtransformation.net](http://www.healthtransformation.net))
- General Chairman, American Solutions for Winning the Future ([www.americansolutions.com](http://www.americansolutions.com))
- Chairman, Gingrich Group, communication and consulting firm

### Political service:

- U.S. House of Representatives, Georgia, 1978-1999
- Speaker of the House, 1995-1999

### Author:

- Published 16 books, including 10 *New York Times* best-sellers. Among the titles: “Real Change: From the World That Fails to the World That Works”; “Winning the Future: A 21st Century Contract with America”; “To Renew America”; and “Lessons Learned the Hard Way.” Six fiction books are active history studies in the lessons of warfare based on fictional accounts of historical wartime battles and their aftermaths

### More information:

- <http://newt.org>

to work on being competitive, I don't see any reason why we can't remain the most prosperous country in the world for another 100 years.

“But it does require a recognition (that change is needed). In our post-World War II triumphalism, we've acquired a number of really bad habits – from litigation to regulation to work rules that are counterproductive to large numbers of bureaucracies that just don't function very well. If we're going to be the most competitive country for the next 50 to 75 years, which I want for my two grandchildren who are seven and eight, then we've got to roll up our sleeves and decide to make the changes necessary so that we remain very successful in being creative, having the entrepreneurial energy and inventing new things faster than the old things are wearing out.”

**BV:** That ties in with how you talked about our political and government systems grinding down, not being as competent in many areas. How do we get that changed? How do we get started?

**NG:** “You have a good example when (Steve) Goldsmith was mayor of Indianapolis. Here is a guy who was fundamentally changing the rhythm and pattern of government. Imagine that happening in all 513,000 elected offices around the country. Imagine if there was a common understanding of what works. In a sense, this is what the Progressive Movement from 1896 to 1916 was all about. It was a continuing effort to try to force people to think about ... professional behavior; it established a

whole series of rules that we now take for granted, but which were very, very bold and dramatic back then.

“There was a nice article by (Connecticut Sen. Joe) Lieberman this morning in the *Wall Street Journal* about the changes the superintendent in Washington, D.C. has begun to make. She is actually offering teachers an opt-out contract that says if you give up all the union protections, you could make up to \$131,000 a year with a series of incentives for achievement and the ways you help children learn. That's a pretty radical, revolutionary change for Washington.”

**BV:** You will be speaking to our Chamber audience at our annual awards dinner. At this event last year, we honored former Fort Wayne Mayor Graham Richard, who brought Six Sigma and other measurement-based efforts to local government. How do we get to utilizing more of those sound business practices in government?

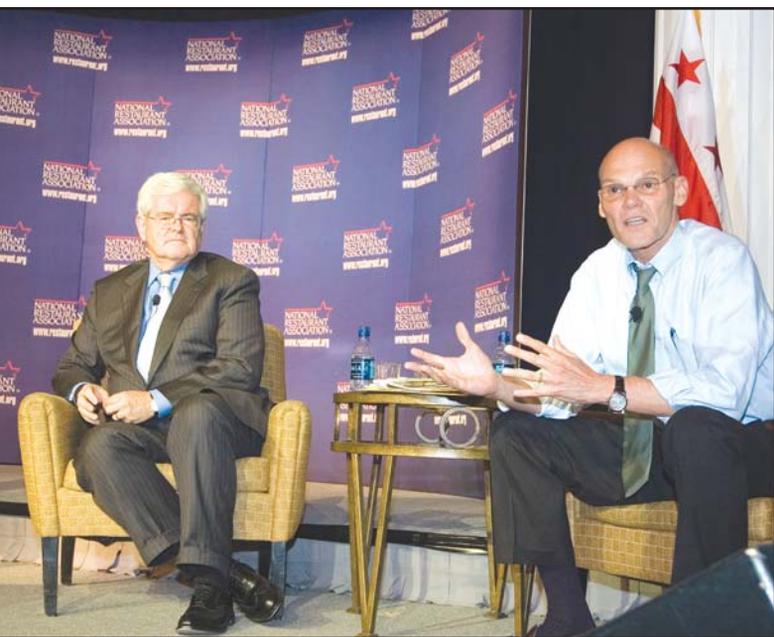
**NG:** “There's a similar process underway in Buffalo, where the county executive has announced his determination to apply a metrics-based system. We've created an organization, American Solutions. Our goal is to identify what works, to begin to build a network of people who are succeeding in doing it; then to develop the principles where you can go out and, for example, teach all 7,200 state legislators this is what's working and this is what you should apply to state government; then to go to the Capitol and teach House and Senate members, all the way to teaching the next Cabinet.

“This is a long process. It doesn't happen overnight. This has historically been a very good society in learning about the future and about what works, then gradually applying it. I don't see any reason for that not to be true in this cycle.”

**BV:** In Indiana, we have nearly 11,000 elected officials and we're operating on a system that was put together in the 1850s. Is looking at local government efficiency something that needs to happen all over the country?

**NG:** “Part of it is to recognize the Information Age. You're just going to see a constant process of enhanced capabilities that will change behaviors. You may end up, for example, with police districts that are multi-community or with emergency vehicle districts that are multi-community. You may end up with communities merging or you may end up with them keeping their own identity.

“We do work with doctors, for example. We tell them we're not committed to you going to work in a large group, but we're committed to you having the information database that (allows) you (to) function as though you're in a large group. You and I have the ability to talk by telephone because there are very large systems that are relatively invisible that network us together. We can then ship things back and forth to each other through UPS and FedEx because these are huge outsourcing institutions



**Newt Gingrich and James Carville take the stage together during a session at the National Restaurant Association's 2006 Public Affairs Conference**  
*(photo by Max Taylor).*

that make every small business a world business. That kind of thing is going to continue expanding.”

**BV:** Communication is so important today. As business leaders, how should people be communicating to their employees about government and political issues that are important to their companies and eventually to those individual workers?

**NG:** “I recommend strongly that you get the (book) “Education of Ronald Reagan” and give it to all of your major business leaders. It’s a study of ... Lemuel Boulware, who was the vice president for employee relations at General Electric, who in 1949 was at the Harvard Business School alumni day and gives a speech in which he says if we don’t start teaching our employees and our customers and our stockholders, we’re going to become a Socialist country.

“His CEO backed him and he built a very elaborate education program and he then hired Ronald Reagan to be the public face of the program. The book is about the eight years Reagan worked for General Electric, what he learned from it and how it changed him as a communicator and turned him into an educator at a

strategic level. It is absolutely the model for businesses to be looking at.

“We have a very small sample project underway ... the gap between the governing elites and the country on the issue of gas prices was so wide that there was an opportunity to mobilize public opinion. We’re trying to do everything on the Internet. We put up a petition drive called Drill Here. Drill Now. Pay Less, which since late May has got about 1,360,000 signatures. We’ve been using YouTube; we’ve got one video that has had about two and a half million views, which puts it in the competitive league with (Barack) Obama’s videos.

“It’s an interesting experiment in how you get people to pay attention, how you begin to communicate messages that have an impact. The Internet is going to be the place in which we can talk to each other, we organize with each other. One of the reactions to the gasoline prices has been a significant increase in Internet purchasing. I also think there is going to be a significant increase in working from home.”

**BV:** You’ve mentioned already a couple of our larger challenges – education/workforce development and our health care system. Does one come before the other? Do you prioritize between the two?

**NG:** “We have a book that Nancy Desmond and I did last year called the “The Art of Transformation.” It’s about how you take the scale of change you’re describing – it has in there very practical steps for how you want to think through it. I would argue that you actually want to have a holistic approach at the thinking level. You can’t work at everything at once unless you have thought through a general sense of where you’re going.

“You want to think about how your health program for your employees matches up with your work training program for your employees and your incentive program for your employees so they are all mutually reinforcing. Otherwise, you can create real disjoints, sending one signal in one zone and a totally different signal in another zone. I think it grows out of a holistic appreciation of if you want this to be the best place to work with the highest value added and the greatest productivity, that means we’ve got to have constant learning, which means your being healthy is valuable to us because we really want you to be at work with full energy and full engagement. And we really want you to be able to understand the metrics we’re going to use to decide whether or not you’re going to get a bonus. So now you can get up in the morning and be fully engaged.

“(Peter) Drucker wrote a very small book, the “The Effective Executive,” which I think is a work

**“If the question is McCain vs. Obama, I think Obama wins. If the question is Obama, I think Obama loses. It will be interesting to see how clever the McCain people are at lowering their profile and raising his.”**

of genius. It really outlines this notion that knowledge workers have to be led because you have no ability to command them. That was really the basis of (W. Edwards) Deming’s concept of quality; that you want to engage everybody in being a knowledge worker and everybody gets to contribute in improving productivity.”

**BV:** The Center for Health Transformation has current focuses on programs tackling diabetes and obesity. Talk about the wellness/prevention approach and why that is so important.

**NG:** “We have a program now in Columbus, Georgia that we’ve been growing out. Every doctor who deals with diabetics, and every hospital, they are all collaborating. We are also looking at a number of other cities in which we may begin to launch these. In Omaha, we have a very successful hospital, Allegiant, which has 93% of its 9,000 employees engaged in managing their own health. It has cut the rate of increase in health costs in half by having so many people engaged. We’re constantly looking for those kind of things.

“We also found a little project called Carena in Seattle, which delivers at-home doctor services for Microsoft. It actually saves them 30% of the cost of emergency room visits while increasing employee retention. If you work for Microsoft and you have a problem over the weekend, you can get a doctor to visit you at 2 in the morning rather than get your kids up and go to the emergency room. We’re looking right now at putting together, both on a community and company level, what is the optimal wellness, self-management and employee engagement program that will allow you to have better attendance at work, better energy and participation at work and lower costs than the current health system.

**BV:** Electronic health records: We see stories of some successes, while other areas are slow to adapt.

**NG:** (Answering before the question is asked). “If you don’t design the electronic health record around the doctor and if you don’t have the doctors’ workflow in mind, it won’t work. Doctors will not change their workflow to meet a machine. In every place you see a failure, you saw a failure to involve the

doctor from day one.

“On the other hand, we can show you a variety of stories. There’s a doctor’s office in Norfolk (Virginia), which started with four doctors in 1999. It went all electronic, built it into their workflows so it was automatic and easy. They were shocked to discover that instead of costing them money, it saved them \$33 per patient visit because they never realized how much time they and the nurses spent looking for paper. They took that out, increased the workflow of people coming through and because they now keep all the records in real time as part of the workflow, they have no transcriptions in the evening, they get done at 5:15 in the afternoon, they’ve grown from four doctors to 10, they’re at four different location, and they’re prepared to talk to any doctor in the country and say, ‘You’re foolish if you don’t go to this model.’ ”

**BV:** You’re going to be speaking to our Chamber audience two days after the election. Nothing like putting you on the spot three and a half months early, but if you had to make that speech today, what would you expect to be talking about?



**History, and what can be learned from it, is a favorite book subject for Gingrich.**

**NG:** After noting that he has to have all four speeches – Obama wins big, Obama wins narrowly and the same two scenarios for John McCain – ready, he explains, “I don’t think anybody knows. The Democrats are way out of position on energy. They’re probably out of position on taxes when you see a weakening economy. They’re way out of position on English as (the official U.S.) language. Obama is on the 13% side of an 83-13 (public opinion poll) split. If Obama can run a brilliant campaign and be above definition,

he can win. If the question is about the last eight years, he’ll win by a big margin. If the question is about the next four years and he gets pinned down on detail, he will do exactly what (Michael) Dukakis did. Dukakis was ahead 19 points in May (in 1988) and lost by six points in November. Every fourth American switched their position.

“You just don’t know right now. Certainly, I don’t know. Remember, I thought Hillary Clinton was going to be the Democrat nominee, and I thought John McCain was dead last August. So I’m not necessarily a very good prognosticator. If the question is

McCain vs. Obama, I think Obama wins. If the question is Obama, I think Obama loses. It will be interesting to see how clever the McCain people are at lowering their profile and raising his."

**BV:** How do McCain and members of Congress on the Republican side switch the argument from the last eight years to looking forward?

**NG:** "They've got to be for real change. I'm actually briefing the House Republican conference on Wednesday (in late July, two days after this interview) and my message is simple: If you're not for real change, if this is not about the future, you're dead. You've seen some shifting, McCain has shifted on drilling. The governor of Florida has shifted on drilling. The Republicans in the House and Senate are now holding joint press efforts on energy. The Democrats, I think, are in a box in September because they have to renew the ban on drilling, that and the ban on using the oil shale are annual bans. They've got to renew them. They have to have an affirmative vote. This may become a very dangerous environment to be the anti-energy party."

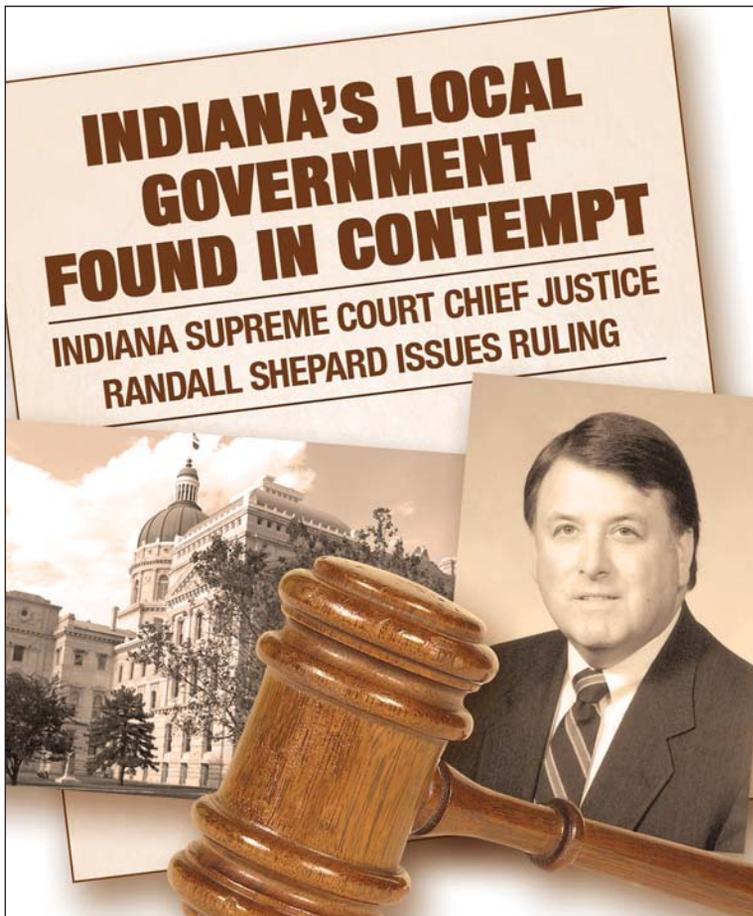
**BV:** What would you like to accomplish that you haven't already achieved?

**NG:** "I think to work with lots of smart people to create a set of solutions that enable America to be the most productive, the most prosperous and safest country in the world. To have a movement that is genuinely tripartisan – Democrat, Republican and independent – that is broadly committed to that achievement. I want to bequeath to my two grandchildren a country which is once again the most dynamic in the world. If we can do that, then I think I have done my part as a citizen."

**BV:** Are there things you think about throughout your career that you wish you had done differently?

**NG:** "Sure, there are things I wish I could have done differently. I've been very active most of my life, and I've been a risk-taker most of my life. There are a lot of lessons I wish I could have learned faster. There's the old story about the mother who took her child to first grade and said, 'Tommy is very sensitive. If he does something wrong, hit the child next to him.'

"I think sometimes if I had been smarter I would have watched the boy next to me getting hit. I have a tendency to lead with my chin, so there are a wide range of things if I were actually redoing it ... in fact, I wrote one book called "Lessons Learned the Hard Way," which outlines some of the mistakes I made as speaker."



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