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**Late Twentieth Century Congressional Leaders as Shapers of and Hostages to Political Context: Gingrich, Hastert, and Lott.**

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Commonly, political leadership is identified with executives. Not surprisingly, therefore, most of the contributions to this Special Issue focus either on presidential or prime ministerial leadership, or in some polities, both. Logically, however, if we want to examine political leadership within the American separated system (Jones 1994), we must look to political leadership emanating from Capitol Hill, as well as the White House. Indeed, with the return of split-party government, the strengthening of policy partisanship and partisan polarization (Jacobson 2000) and the increased activism of central party leaders in the House and Senate (Peters 1990; Rhode 1991; Sinclair 1992a, 1992b, 1995), the logic of congressional leadership – specifically, leadership exercised by formal majority party leaders of the House and Senate - has become more compelling.

## **Leadership Contexts**

Most contemporary explanations of legislative leadership in the American context eschew older theories informed by social psychology that explain leadership exclusively in terms of political leaders' personal attributes, goals, political and leadership styles, and interactions between leaders and followers. Instead, they postulate a version of contextual theory. Most notably, Cooper and Brady (1981: 423) argue that '[i]nstitutional context rather than personal skill is the primary determinant of leadership power in the House ... [and] leadership style.' 'Skill cannot fully compensate for deficiencies in the quality or quantity of inducements.' (423) For these authors, the key element of institutional context is party strength: 'The higher the degree of party unity or cohesion the more power in both the formal and party systems can be concentrated in the hands of party leaders and the more leadership style will be oriented to command and task or goal attainment'. (424) Party strength within the chamber is most importantly dependent on the state of the parties in the electorate, particularly constituency alignments (424). At the beginning of the twentieth century, party government prevailed in the House. This form of legislation organization gave rise to a highly centralized Speakership - typified by the 'Boss' rule practiced by Speaker Joseph Cannon (R.IL, 1903-10) – that was underpinned by highly disciplined and polarized legislative parties and party leaders who exerted near-monopolistic party control over candidate recruitment (415). Subsequently, as the parties' electoral constituencies became less polarized and significant intra-policy divisions developed, power drained from central party leaders to increasingly powerful committees and their chairs. In this era of committee government, a much more personalized, broker- style of leadership was necessary, epitomized by Sam Rayburn (D. TX). Contemporary pivotal voter (Krehbiel 1998) and partisan theories of legislative organization (Rohde 1991; Rhode and Shepsle 1987; Cox and McCubbins 1993; and Sinclair 1995) similarly understand congressional leadership through an emphasis on partisan context. Notwithstanding important differences in the role they ascribe to congressional parties and the nature of congressional policy outcomes, both these theories argue that majority party leaders' actions are determined largely by the preferences of party followers, which in turn are influenced by the preferences of partisan activists and voters. Thus, under contemporary conditions of 'conditional' party government far removed from the Boss rule that was characteristic of the Cannon era (Rohde 1991), rank and file party members – particularly when their party forms the majority - *require* and come to depend upon their central party leaders to provide assertive leadership. They expect them to use powers and resources granted them to promote and deliver from increasingly complex and conflictual issue and organizational contexts partisan legislative products that reflect the collective positions and priorities of the majority party, which diverge significantly from the chamber median (Aldrich and Rohde 1997, 2000) and are designed to promote the party's collective reputation among voters (Aldrich and Rohde 2001). In the Senate too, stronger preference homogeneity and policy polarization has persuaded copartisans to accept and participate in stronger and more elaborate party organization and work closely with their leaders in party teams, especially on issues that were most important to the party.

Beyond the internal and external partisan contexts, the importance of different formal institutional and policy contexts must also be taken into account in explaining leaders' policy and other achievements and failures. Whereas the House is a majoritarian, bureaucratic and hierarchical institution, the Senate is nonmajoritarian and much more receptive to the demands of individual senators and the minority party. Hardly surprising, then, that former Senate Majority Leader Howard Baker (R.TN) once likened leading the Senate to trying to 'push a wet noodle' and that,

even as party has strengthened, Senate floor politics are much less susceptible to leadership control (Sinclair 2001: 114-125; 2000: 64; Smith and Gamm 2001: 265-66; and Owens 1998: 46-57). Finally, we should expect differences in policy context to condition the exercise of congressional leadership. Apart from the general policymaking literature (e.g. Kingdon 1995), the impact of policy variance is explicit in partisan theories of legislative organization. Over the last few decades, budgetary politics, national service legislation, the patients' bills of rights, and anti-drug bills offered particularly good opportunities for central party leaders to exert leadership (Palazzolo 1992, 1999; Sinclair 2000a). However, for present purposes, because congressional leadership involvement is related much more to the public salience and importance of issues to the parties (Rhode 1991; Sinclair 1995) than to the intrinsic qualities of different policy areas, *a priori* the subsequent analysis will not formally consider the impact of policy variance on leaders' styles and effectiveness.

### **Policy Goals, Leadership Skills and Styles**

Contextual theories not only emphasize the importance of context. They deny that either leadership styles or effectiveness are influenced significantly by the personal characteristics of leaders. Cooper and Brady (1981: 423) argue that 'Skill cannot fully compensate for deficiencies in the quality or quantity of inducements,' (423) although they also observe that in the context of decentralized committee government in the mid decades of the twentieth century 'the personal, political skills of the leadership [Rayburn], rather than its sources of institutional power, [was] the critical determinant of the fate of party programs.' (420) Further, 'the main facets of the Rayburn style ...[were] personal friendship and loyalty, permissiveness, restrained partisanship, and conflict reduction, informality, and risk avoidance.' (420) Moving to the contemporary party government era, however, contextual theorists do not allow much scope for the behavior of individual leaders. While acknowledging that the different styles of leaders matter, they argue 'they will remain important [only] as long as the underlying forces that created this partisan resurgence persist.' (Rhode 1991: 172, 192; Sinclair 1995: 297-300; Sinclair 1998: 78, 85; Sinclair 1999: 423). Thus, Sinclair's analysis of the early leadership of House Speaker Jim Wright (D.TX), in creating a bold budgetary policy agenda for majority Democrats in late 1986, is largely explained by '[s]pecial political conditions' and '[t]he members expectations to which Speaker Wright responded.' (Sinclair 1995: 272) Rhode takes a similar line when he argues that '[t]he strategies and tactics of leaders are shaped in large measure by the preferences and attitudes of the members they represent'; although he allows a minor secondary role for stylistic differences between different leaders, as does Sinclair (Rhode 1991: 254; Sinclair 1998: 78).

Other scholars, however, pay much greater attention to the impact of leaders' personal characteristics. Burns, for example, distinguishes between 'transactional' and 'transforming' leaders. Most congressional leaders adopt a *transactional* style, which involves, essentially, 'initiating, monitoring, and assured completing of transactions, for settling disputes, and for storing up political credits and debits for later settlement.' They are less interested in pursuing policy goals that they can call their own; they follow rather than lead on policy matters. (Burns 1978: 344-45, 363; see also Hargrove 1989: 57; Hargrove 1998: 30-32. See also Skowronek 1997) Clearly, however, some legislative leaders do not pursue a transactional style. They want to be *transforming* and they often possess the necessary skills to achieve their goals. Transforming leadership is more complex and more potent than transactional leadership, Burns argues. The transforming leader 'recognizes and exploits an existing need or demand of a potential follower. But beyond that, the transforming leader looks for potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the full person of the follower' (4). Studies by Swift (1998) Peters (1990) and Strahan, Moscardelli, Haspel and Wike (2000) place three nineteenth century speakers Clay, Stevenson and Polk into the transforming leadership category and, more generally, emphasize the significance of their enthusiastic and imaginative policy leadership in changing public policy and/or the course of institutional development. Strahan's work on Reed's Speakership in the late nineteenth century similarly stresses the importance of policy and institutional reform goals and personal ambition in exerting effecting leadership (1992: 209, 208-217). Work on recent speakers O'Neill, Wright, and Foley by Barry and Palazzolo also make strong cases for the impact of these leaders peculiar leadership styles. On the basis of his study of budget politics, Palazzolo concludes: 'leader

preferences are important in defining leader-follower relations ... Leaders decide, within a given set of constraints, how to perform their roles. Thus Wright could pursue an activist style while O'Neill did not, *though both Speakers operated under similar conditions* [my emphasis]. Palazzolo goes on to argue that Wright expertise in budget policy (as a former member of the House Budget Committee) enabled him to 'adapt more easily to a condition that encourages a policy-oriented leadership.' (1992: 216-8; see also Barry 1989: 123, 143-56, 169-74)

Work by Peters (1990), Aldrich and Shepsle (2000), and Strahan (2002) - to some extent echoing work by Skowronek (1997) - has conceptualized congressional leadership as a series of interactive processes in which particular leaders or leadership styles are likely to be more effective in some decisionmaking and institutional contexts rather than in others. Recognizing that contextual theory may not be entirely determinative of leadership – at least in the congressional context – that leadership contexts and leaders' policy goals may change, thereby providing new leadership opportunities and constraints, Aldrich and Shepsle have urged the development of new explanations that take account of 'exogenous interventions of imaginative individuals' (41). Peters makes a similar point when he argues that '[t]he contexts that drive the "style" are themselves a part of a pattern of political and social evolution that must be studied ... At the same time, within the "contexts", individual actors and events that are not historically or contextually determined will influence the House.' (4) This theoretical perspective, of course, shares one of the key perspectives of this series of studies. It recognizes both that political leaders are subject to constraints imposed by the specific decisionmaking environment in which they seek to exercise leadership and it recognizes the likely personal contributions of individual leaders who are often able to shape decisionmaking contexts and the direction of public policies.

When leaders of the House and Senate are elected to their leadership positions, they encounter different political contexts or strategic environments - depending on the institutional equilibrium between competing power centers within their chamber, how they achieved their party's leadership, what were the results of the most recent elections, the size of their party's majority, the ideological and stylistic homogeneity of their party, whether their party also controls the other chamber and/or the presidency, as well as its public reputation. Depending on the strategic environment that a Speaker or Senate Majority Leader faces when he/she begins or continues his leadership office, it is logical that different leaders should pursue different leadership styles or governing strategies that reflect what they can reasonably be expected to accomplish. In this paper, I explore the styles and strategies of three recent congressional leaders – Speakers Newt Gingrich (R.GA) and Dennis Hastert (R.IL), and Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott (R.MS) - and the changing political contexts or strategic environments they encountered during their terms of office. The main purposes of the paper are to examine the extent to which these leaders made a significant difference to political and policy outcomes; and to identify the conditions under which these three leaders were effective and ineffective. Specifically, how, to what extent, and with what effects upon policy outcomes, did Gingrich, Hastert, and Lott – all Republicans - use their leadership powers and resources to shape the legislative agenda and political context, and influence the direction of public policy in the late twentieth century?

## **Newt Gingrich: From Shaping Context to Becoming Its Hostage**

### *Transforming Leadership: Seizing the Moment*

When Newt Gingrich became House Speaker in January 1995 – or, perhaps, earlier after his party had won a majority of House seats in the 1994 mid-term elections – he faced almost optimal conditions for policy leadership, many of which he had been instrumental in creating: not a single House Republican incumbent lost as Gingrich's party won control for the first time in 40 years, with a majority of 25; his party had ended the longest uninterrupted period of single party rule – by Democrats - in the entire history of Congress; and he could reasonably claim an electoral mandate for his party, uncomplicated by a presidential election. The chief architect, candidate recruiter, fundraiser, strategist, and party booster of House Republicans' successful 1994 campaign was Gingrich (Jacobson 1996, 1997; Pitney and Connelly Drew 1996; Gimpel 1996; Owens 1998). Uniquely, under Gingrich's guidance, House Republican candidates offered voters what was

essentially a party manifesto - the *Contract With America* – to provide a national focus for the party’s campaign. The vast majority of House Republican candidates signed the Contract in a showy ceremony on the steps of the Capitol in Washington. When the election results came in, it was obvious to most House Republicans who had played the most important role in creating the political context that made victory possible.

Once victory was declared, Gingrich announced his intention to be a transforming, if not revolutionary, leader (Drew 1996: 26). It was not so much that Gingrich wanted to advance his own personal policy agenda. Rather, he had the ambition and skill to be able to seize the leadership opportunities that the strategic environment now presented to promote a party agenda. The initial policy vehicle for this ‘revolution’ was the (less than revolutionary) Contract, which included proposals designed to scale back the cost and role of the federal government. Although most voters had not taken much notice of the Contract, and it certainly was not influential in structuring the vote, as a strategically minded leader whose political style reeked of audacious ambition and high expectations for his party, Gingrich clearly understood the document’s iconic value and political significance. He also recognized that for his party to implement its policy goals he would need to change the political and institutional conditions inside and outside the House (Drew 1996: 14-15). Disavowing Madisonian prescriptions, his chosen strategy would be party government: Republican colleagues would be to adhere to conservative principles, rather than following the nuances of logrolling politics, and demonstrate their loyalty primarily to their party - if necessary, over and above loyalty to constituencies and committees.

### *Enacting the Contract*

Immediately after the elections, Gingrich moved swiftly and methodically first to bolster his position as party leader and then to institute the most important changes to the House committee system since the 1970s, which strengthened the control of the party and the Speaker over committees and their chairs (Owens 1997: 249-53). But Gingrich’s institutional reforms did not stop with the House. On the basis of his party’s election victory, Gingrich claimed leadership of the entire country, beyond the House - as a Prime Minister or president within a parliamentary system (Cloud 1995: 333). Gingrich, moreover, would not be a hands-on legislative leader engaged in the detail of legislative action after the style of former Democratic Speakers (Barry 1989; Sinclair 1995: 74-80). That would be the responsibility of Majority Leader Dick Armey (R.TX) and Majority Whip Tom Delay (R.TX). Rather, in keeping with his previous reputation and predilection and the new party government dispensation, he would take responsibility for developing the party’s long-term strategy and policies and disseminating the Republican message to wider publics. (In his 16 years in the House, unlike O’Neill, Wright and Foley he had never been a committee leader or indeed a significant player in committee politics.) Even so, there was no question that Gingrich was in charge so that when Armey gave committee chairs their detailed marching orders all House Republicans knew they had the force of Gingrich’s authority (Owens 1997). By the 100 days’ deadline, by which time all ten Contract bills would be brought to a floor vote, Gingrich’s experiment in party government had achieved impressive results. With the single exception of congressional term limits, all the Contract bills were enacted by the House with levels of Republican party discipline worthy of most European parliaments and unprecedented in the House since the days of ‘Boss’ rule.<sup>1</sup> As Gingrich was acclaimed the most assertive Speaker since Cannon, President Clinton felt obliged in May 1995 to assure Americans that ‘the presidency is relevant’. On this reading, then, Gingrich’s leadership was decisive not only in dominating the airwaves, but also in effectively driving the national political agenda in directions favored by his party, in strengthening party government within the House, and in marginalizing the president (see

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<sup>1</sup> Mean Republican support for 31 Contract measures was an impressive 96 per cent (Owens 2000: 36-7, Table 2.1)

also Stid 1996: 1; Strahan 1996: 22; and Peters 1999).

### *The Transforming Style in Context*

Close reading of the events surrounding the formulation and enactment of the Contract suggests also that contextual factors were important, as well as other aspects of Gingrich's leadership. Party support scores among House Republicans had steadily risen in the early 1990s, as the number of liberals and moderates declined and the party became more ideologically homogeneous (Rae 1989). Predictably, following the party's election victory – particularly after 40 years as the minority party – party support rose. However, Gingrich could justifiably claim some responsibility for this increase since most House Republicans felt that they owed their majority status to Gingrich, accepted his insistence that under conditions of split-party control they bore ultimate responsibility for enacting 'the revolution', and in consequence were mostly willing to support his leadership. As a result, throughout the 104<sup>th</sup> House many Republicans (including committee chairs) engaged in what Krehbiel calls 'significant party behavior' (1993) on numerous issues, in that they modified their previous preferences in order to accommodate Gingrich and their party colleagues (Owens 1997: 264-68). So, Gingrich was the beneficiary of a deep reservoir of support in his party and a strong team spirit within his party – but he had played a large part in creating that.

The institutional context for aggressive partisan leadership was also propitious. The fact that House Republicans had not been in the majority for 40 years provided Gingrich with a clean slate on which to redraw organizational arrangements within the chamber. Unlike his Democratic predecessors (Barry 1989: 31-34), he did not have to contend with entrenched committee chairs who might resist his efforts to provide centralized leadership; not a single House Republican had any experience of serving in the majority. Only five of the new Republican committee chairs had served for more than two years as ranking minority members. Gingrich has also changed Conference rules so that *de facto* he was able to nominate new committee chairs if he disapproved of the incumbent. Understandably, when disagreements emerged over policy, they were fearful of challenging his authority, in certain cases because they owed their positions directly to his patronage. The 73 newly elected Republicans, unschooled in the House's institutional norms, were all too ready to follow Gingrich's lead (Owens 1997; Rae 1998: 91-5).

Finally, Gingrich and his leadership colleagues were obliged to accommodate to context. Even during the Contract period, let alone later Gingrich was not a dictator. He listened, made himself available to all sections of the party, and in pursuit of his long-term strategy, was frequently pragmatic. Willing to accommodate to the strategic environment he faced, notably within his own party's coalition, he was under no illusions that party unity might fracture easily on many issues as the euphoria resulting from the election victory dissipated. The expectations of the newly elected Republican, overwhelmingly conservative, 'revolutionaries' were high and had to be accommodated. Together with 48 sophomores elected in 1992, who were equally conservative, they constituted more than half the Conference. However, with only a 26-seat majority, the votes of 40 or so Republican moderates – many of whom held senior positions as committee chairs, were also crucial, especially on social cultural issues and the environment. So, at Gingrich's insistence, the Contract did not touch on controversial social issues, like abortion, that would threaten party unity. Arme, for example, wanted it to include a school prayer amendment to satisfy the Christian Coalition but Gingrich vetoed it (Maraniss and Weisskopf 1996: 83). In order to prevent a floor revolt and accommodate Republican moderates over the balanced budget constitutional amendment, Gingrich also agreed to drop the original provision of the Contract requiring that any proposal to increase taxes was approved by a three-fifths majority.

During the Contract period, Gingrich was able to resolve this and a number of other intra-party disputes. When, however, he and House Republicans turned to reduce the role of the federal government by requiring a balanced budget and tax cuts – his leadership became much more constrained by context. Indeed, these constraints might have been triggered earlier had he not made the strategic decision to relegate 'must pass' appropriations and budget legislation to a back burner in his determination to enact the Contract legislation. Again, he set his party an extremely ambitious agenda and a tight timetable.

*Transforming Style versus Context: The Budget D eb acle.*

The centerpiece of House Republicans' policy agenda and legislative strategy was to reduce federal spending, cut federal regulations, reorder federal budget priorities, and cut taxes. With the Contract's constitutional amendment requiring a balanced budget in jeopardy in the Senate, in February 1995 Gingrich boldly committed House Republicans to enact legislation that would reduce a federal budget deficit of over \$100 billion to zero within the space of seven years. As if this proposal was not ambitious enough, in keeping with Gingrich's party government governing strategy, Republicans would also bypass the usual authorizing committees in the House and use the 'must pass' budget resolutions and appropriations bills as legislative vehicles not only to reorder the budget and cut spending and taxes but also to reduce federal regulation and pass controversial social legislation to do with abortion, workplace safety, and environmental regulation.<sup>2</sup> By the end of May, Gingrich's ambitious strategy had paid off, at least to the extent that both the House and Senate had approved budget resolutions embodying Gingrich's timetable. Within a few weeks, Clinton had formally ditched his own budget and made a proposal to balance the budget in 10 years thus appearing to confirm Gingrich's claim that he and his party were driving the national policy agenda. Even so, passing a budget resolution still left Gingrich and his party a long way from gaining House and Senate approval for a budget reconciliation bill that would package together before the end of the fiscal year controversial spending and tax proposals and include elements from the party's controversial social agenda. Not only would the Democratic president need to be taken into account, among House Republicans themselves significant contextual factors would become increasingly pressing. In particular, the Republican-controlled Appropriations Committees would have to make extremely difficult and politically risky decisions that would open up divisions with the party. Predictably, Gingrich found himself heavily cross-pressured – from conservative hard-liners, including most of the newly elected Republicans, and from party moderates. During the inevitable intra-party negotiations that followed, the strategically minded Gingrich succumbed to pressures from his party and use the full powers of his office to broker compromises (Maraniss and Weisskopf : 87, 90-91). When Republican moderates rebelled in early August over three anti-abortion amendments attached by conservatives to a massive Labor and Health and Human Services appropriations bill, he threatened to bring the bill to the House floor under an open rule that would protect no amendments from points of order and make vulnerable a long list of unauthorized programs. Insisting on unity and the need to prepare for the inevitable fight with Clinton later in the year, Gingrich lobbied hard for the bill on the floor. Both sides conceded and the bill narrowly passed the House on a party line vote. At least one moderate Republican was willing to ascribe his vote to Gingrich's personal influence (Maraniss and Weisskopf: 93-97; Gibbs and Tumulty 1995).

Gingrich was not always successful in managing his party, however. Increasingly over the course of 1995, he became a hostage to the partisan context within the House. The window of opportunity that he had opened up by orchestrating a successful election campaign, and through pressure on the rank and file to maintain tight party discipline he had kept open during the Contract period, now began to close. In this new context, Gingrich's leadership style began to lose many of the characteristics of a transforming style and began to acquire those of a characteristic transactional legislative leader. In July 1995, for example, 51 Republicans joined with Democrats to kill 17 riders to the appropriations bill for housing, veterans, and independent agencies, which would have prohibited enforcement of pending and already existing EPA policies. Gingrich was forced to shut

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<sup>2</sup> Gingrich feared that if the relevant committees that usually handle this legislation were left to work their will they would not enact party priorities; and if separate bills dealing with these issues were brought to the floor on their own they would likely be defeated by a bipartisan coalition of Democrats and Republican moderates. Moderates would be less likely to desert their party on appropriations bills.

down the House for the day, and then reran the vote a few days later, at which time the defeat was reversed. Much more seriously, in what is by now a familiar story (Maraniss and Weisskopf 1996; Drew 1996; Morris 1997), conservative hard-liners continued to push him towards a confrontation with Clinton, demanding that the president accept more or less in total their agenda. Gingrich found himself incapable of resisting these pressures. So, in November 1995 whole rafts of highly controversial measures - to do with Medicare, welfare, education, the environment, as well as cuts in taxation and radical changes in Medicaid, regulations affecting business, and the abolition of several government departments and hundreds of federal programs - were loaded into a massive budget reconciliation bill and sent to Clinton for signature. Gingrich's pleading for Republicans to raise their expectations and be more ambitious in their policy demands now looked increasingly like hubris as he dared the president, at the insistence of his party, to endorse the proposals in their entirety or face closing down the federal government. Ultimately, Clinton called the Republicans' bluff, vetoed the reconciliation bill - as well as two continuing resolutions required to keep the federal government going - triggered the closing down of the federal government, and embarked on a public relations effort in which he deftly outmaneuvered Gingrich and his party. The confrontation resulted in a political *débâcle* for Republicans, not only legislatively but also in terms of the damage visited on the public reputations of Gingrich and his party.

A good deal of the journalistic interpretation of these events focus on Gingrich's publicly-confessed personal pique over being asked by White House officials to leave Air Force One by the back door after attending the Israeli Prime Minister's funeral and his determination as a consequence to send a tougher reconciliation bill to the president. This event probably damaged further his public standing. Yet, it would be a mistake to blame Gingrich's loose talk for the budget *débâcle*. It was one of a fairly long string of missteps that had its origins in Gingrich's failure to adopt a more transactional style in respect of the Senate and the White House. The consequence was hubris - the belief, frequently repeated by his colleagues (especially the newly elected hard-liners), embodied in Gingrich's party government governing strategy and reinforced by the misread lessons of the 1994 election results and the Contract period, that he and his party could effectively subvert the Madisonian system and control events from the House. Not surprisingly, when his internal partisan context began to constrain Gingrich's leadership in ways that it did not during the Contract period, his leadership was seriously questioned. The fact that at a very late stage Gingrich had tried to negotiate a budget deal with Clinton personally and, ironically, was seduced apparently by the trappings of the presidency and the White House merely corroborates the Republican leader's hubris. Not only had Gingrich misread the formal strategic context, comprising a Democratic president in the White House with a veto pen; he had misinterpreted Clinton's silence in the Contract period for compliance and badly underestimated the president's political skills. Gingrich's misjudgment was to underestimate the impact of context. Having weakened his reputation within the House and its leadership by trying to negotiate with Clinton, against the background of his declining support among voters, Gingrich then became a hostage to Armev, DeLay, and other hard-liners. Even though he privately opposed the confrontational tactics that would close down the government, which they advocated, he was not in a position to resist them (Maraniss and Weisskopf 1996: 149-177). And yet, despite the obvious political costs that he continue to pay throughout his Speakership, Gingrich and his party nevertheless made significant policy gains that might not have been realized, at least to the same extent, had House Republicans not opted for confrontation: by the end of the 104<sup>th</sup> Congress, Clinton had been forced to concede Gingrich's demand that the budget would be balanced within seven years - not the 10 years the White House had wanted - and that budget estimates would be based on CBO calculations. Moreover, this became the policy framework for all budget discussions for the remainder of the decade.

### *The Post-Shutdown Context and the Shift to Transactional Leadership*

The budget *débâcle* proved to be a watershed in Gingrich's Speakership. Whereas before the budget confrontation, Gingrich and the House Republicans had dominated the agenda, after, they were required to share influence with Clinton and the Republican Senate. In this new context, even Gingrich's claim to lead his party was challenged by the increased role played by Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott (R. MS) (Morris 1997: 293-308). Within the House, party government remained in place, but in the new political context those enduring forces of decentralization so characteristic

of congressional politics began to reassert themselves more forcibly constraining Gingrich's leadership: committees and their chairs acquired new latitude to write important legislation, grabbing back some of the power they had lost in 1995 to work quietly and effectively to craft legislation capable of bipartisan and presidential support. Many rank and file Republicans found themselves increasingly cross-pressured by constituency demands as the 1996 elections loomed and the president's popularity increased. In these new circumstances, Republican party unity weakened (Salant 1996: 3352) and a demoralized Gingrich concluded that a more transactional style of leadership would benefit his party more. In consequence, the last few months of 1996 came to be one of the most productive legislative periods in recent times: congressional Republicans and the Clinton White House largely cooperated with one another to produce a huge omnibus appropriations bill (reducing appropriations for 1995-96 by 9 per cent, as demanded by Republicans; but providing for additional spending for education, job training, and the environment as demanded by Clinton); an historic welfare reform bill that overturned 50 years of federal social policy; an increase in the minimum wage (inconceivable in 1995); a major revision of telecommunications regulation; immigration reform (but less than that promised by House Republicans); a modest health insurance bill; a line item veto (expedited rescissions), and much else besides. Congressional Republicans and the president also struck an agreement to balance the federal budget by 2002. Having (for the moment) learned some of the harsh lessons of previous failures, this time Gingrich was quick to claim victory, as did Democrats and the president.

Yet, in the 1996 elections, as Clinton romped home in the Electoral College, Gingrich remained an electoral liability – for ethical as well as political reasons. Republicans retained control of both houses, but lost nine House seats, the narrowest margin for any party since 1954. Despite the party's undoubted legislative and wider policy achievements, moreover, Gingrich and his party did not run on their record or for that matter on any new agenda. In consequence, in sharp contrast with 1994, Gingrich and his party convened the 106<sup>th</sup> House (1997-98) with little sense of political momentum or purpose. To make matters worse, a few days before the new Congress convened, a number of House Republicans (including one committee chair) announced that because of ethics violations by Gingrich they would not support his reelection as Speaker. Underlining the constraints imposed by this new political context – ethics problems, the party not running on its record, a slim Republican majority, and two Republican opponents running against him as protest candidates - Gingrich won reelection to the Speakership by just nine votes as for the first time since 1923 other majority party candidates received votes. Three weeks later, with 88 per cent of Republicans in support, the House formally reprimanded and fined the newly elected Speaker for 'bringing discredit on the House' and violating House rules. In this context, congressional policy leadership increasingly emanated from the Senate and Lott, especially on the important matter of negotiating the details of a balanced budget agreement with Clinton. Within his own party in the House, Gingrich's position became even more constrained as committee chairs continued to reassert control over the policy process (Hosansky and Rubin 1997: 1183). More generally, rank and file Republicans – now more experienced and frustrated by being excluded from earlier behind-closed-doors negotiations with the White House - began to discover the traditional advantages of a more decentralized committee system and even to demand successfully stronger representation in Gingrich's leadership team. Facing new and stronger intra-party pressures, and his own personal self-confidence considerably diminished, Gingrich eschewed the visionary transforming style of the Contract period, made further necessary political accommodations to his partisan context, and reverted to the traditional transactional style of most House leaders. As before the 1996 elections, Gingrich's new transactional style involved conceding ground to Democrats and the White House - especially on the FY 1998 budget – which in turn precipitated opposition from the tactically aggressive, conservative, hard-liners. So, when in March 1997 Gingrich floated the idea that Republicans might not pursue tax cuts in the FY 1998 budget until after a budget agreement had been reached with Clinton, conservative hard-liners (including Majority Leader Armey) threatened a rebellion and Gingrich was forced to disown the idea. A virtual rerun of the budget *débâcle* followed in mid-1997 over a new confrontation with Clinton after House Republicans supported a provocative Senate rider to a supplemental appropriations bill providing disaster relief for flood victims in numerous Midwestern states, peacekeeping operations in Bosnia, and other spending. Gingrich's net approval ratings plummeted to -48 per cent and congressional Republicans were blamed. This time, however, Gingrich moved to cut his party's losses: he sent the president a

second revised bill, without the offending rider, which he duly signed. When the revised bill came to a final vote, however, Gingrich was the only Republican leader willing to support it. Immediately after the vote, 50 House Republicans resolved to meet ‘to decide how to bring the GOP Conference, and Gingrich, back into the conservative line’ (Bradley and Vande Hei 1997: 1, 24; Dewar and Yang, 1997a: A6). With several calling for his resignation and wider rifts opening up with Majority Leader Armev, who refused to defend the Speaker against charges of ineptitude, the new *débâcle* precipitated the first of two attempted coups against Gingrich, involving Armev, DeLay, and other House Republican leaders. The coup failed only because of the absence of a viable alternative.

### *The Increasing Constraints of Context and the Final Coup*

Following this new *débâcle*, Gingrich sought to recentralize party decisionmaking and in the manner of a more traditional speaker paid more attention to the day-to-day leadership of the House (Koszczuk, 1997). In the second half of 1997, he was successful in persuading his party of the need to avoid yet another losing showdown with Clinton and won their support for a more pragmatic strategy on the FY 1998 budget. Under the agreement, negotiated by Gingrich (and Lott), House Republicans gained a further commitment to balance the federal budget by 2002, cuts in projected entitlement spending, mostly from Medicare, and substantial tax cuts. Most party and leadership colleagues supported the agreement, as did more than a quarter of House Democrats. However, the agreement was accepted only grudgingly by many conservative hard-liners, prompting Gingrich to concede three years after becoming his party’s leader: ‘[w]e have never learned to govern as a party. It is time we learn to govern.’ With Gingrich and his party highly unpopular in the opinion polls and concerned to avoid giving Clinton and congressional Democrats new opportunities in an election year, the Republican leader signaled no new policy initiatives at the beginning of 1998. Rather, the party would adopt a leisurely legislative pace, concentrate on the budget and appropriations, steer clear of further legislative confrontations, and hope to reap the political rewards from the Lewinsky scandal and later the Starr Report. As in the previous House, Gingrich repeatedly found himself a hostage to party context. In April 1998, for example, he was forced by rank and file pressures to order the chair of the Commerce Committee to rewrite an anti-smoking bill that had been approved by a large bipartisan majority (Balz and Yang, 1997: A1). Unwilling or unable to exert influence on a party insistent on large tax and spending cuts, Gingrich was again painted into a corner over the budget and appropriations bills. On a strict party line vote, House Republicans approved a budget resolution that neither Clinton (nor the Senate) would accept. Even though they had only a narrow seat majority, party pressures required Gingrich to try to pass appropriations bills entirely on a partisan basis. When these attempts failed, Gingrich was then obliged to negotiate from the confines of his office a last minute agreement with White House officials covering hundreds of disputed items in eight appropriations bills that had not passed. The agreement reached just 13 days before Election Day made major concessions to Clinton on spending, and excluded tax cuts and many of the policy riders favored by House Republicans. While Gingrich and other House Republican leaders took the time to claim the political credit, hard-line conservatives complained bitterly. The same partisan pressures also dictated Gingrich’s strategy as the Lewinsky scandal unfolded and the airwaves filled up with revelations of Clinton’s personal shortcomings. Convinced that his party appeared to face an open goal, Gingrich resorted to his older hyperbolic rhetorical style, claiming that the president’s behavior represented ‘the most systematic, deliberate obstruction of justice, cover-up, and effort to avoid the truth we have seen in American history’. Yet, by the end of the year Gingrich was the most conspicuous casualty. Inside the House, the Speaker encouraged the Judiciary Committee’s grossly partisan handling of the impeachment process and when the impeachment articles were reported to the floor insisted that Republicans’ floor votes would be subjected to strict party discipline. Meanwhile, in the last few days before the election, while voters were more focused on the booming economy and distinctly

leery about removing an incumbent president,<sup>3</sup> Gingrich opted to focus the Republican campaign on the Lewinsky scandal rather than his party's record. When the results came in, the president's party had actually gained seats in a midterm election during a second term for the first time since the early nineteenth century. The chief architect of that campaign was Gingrich; and the party's chief legislative strategist within the House was Gingrich. Against the wishes of the conservative hard-liners, it was Gingrich who had decided not to push his party's conservative legislation in 1998. Gingrich had also persuaded his colleagues to accede to Clinton's demands for more spending and no tax cuts in the FY 1999 omnibus appropriations bill. This time, however, for the first time since the 1995, a viable alternative leader was available in the person of Robert Livingston (D.LA), chair of the Appropriations Committee, who had been garnering support within the Conference for a serious challenge to Gingrich over the previous year. Faced with a post-election ultimatum from Livingston, Gingrich resigned. Had House Republicans increased their majority, Gingrich's electoral and legislative strategies would likely have been deemed successes; and, as in 1994 and 1995, he would have been able to see off Livingston's challenge. Had Gingrich not been such a significant emblematic figure and leadership of the party been shared, he might have survived as the blame was allocated more widely. But, as within the British Conservative Party, there is a Republican party culture absent among House Democrats that has generated a history of dumping leaders deemed unsuccessful – Martin in 1958, Halleck, in 1966, Rhodes in 1980, and Michel in 1994.

### *Gingrich: Style and Context*

It is clear then that Gingrich's leadership presents us with two studies in fact each of which nicely points to a series of interactions between style and context that provide valuable theoretical insights into the nature of political leadership. The first phase of Gingrich's leadership - from the 1994 elections through the 'revolution' to the budget *débâcle* – reveals Gingrich as one of those imaginative leaders identified by Aldrich and Shepsle who was both creator and master of context. *Contra* contextual theory, which relegates the importance of personal skill and sees leaders as the agents of strong parties and sharp partisan differences in the electorate, Gingrich's leadership during this phase tells a story of a leader who was able to transform context (albeit temporarily), initially within his own party and then for a time in the House and the Washington environment, and deliver significant policy results. Clearly, as the earlier discussion showed, contextual factors were important, notably the fact that Gingrich led the first Republican majority in 40 years and that so

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<sup>3</sup> In the 1998 Voter News Service exit poll, the proportion of respondents who said that their family's economic situation had improved over the two previous years compared with those who said that it had not was over 3 to 1. *National Journal*, 8 November 1998, p. 2667. See also Paul R. Abramson, John H. Aldrich, and David W. Rohde, *Change and Continuity in the 1996 and 1998 Elections*. Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1999, pp. 254-57.

many House Republicans were inexperienced and willing to follow his lead. But Gingrich's vision, rhetoric, and insistence on party government principles were essential ingredients that galvanized House Republicans, raised their expectations about what their party could achieve electorally and legislatively, and produced policy results. It is far from clear that under another leader – for example, Gingrich's predecessor – the same policy decisions would have resulted. Gingrich successfully created new conditions, including consolidating power within his party and the House, and then successfully exploited the policy leadership opportunities he partly created.

In the second phase - from the budget confrontation to his resignation - Gingrich became a characteristically transactional leader who was largely a hostage to context, partly because of his own missteps but partly also because of the actions of others, notably his party in the House, the president and, to a lesser extent the Senate. During most of this period, he was required to juggle the often-conflicting demands and requirements of these contexts to deliver policy results. Not surprisingly, he often failed – as when he led House Republicans into battle with Clinton over the 1996 budget and the longer-term campaign to balance the budget. Arguably, if he had been able to bring a greater store of legislative leadership experience to these battles and had been more closely involved in the detail of legislation, he may have exerted greater influence. Certainly, his skills in these areas were found wanting. But by far the greater obstacles to successful policy leadership during this period were contextual: a new multi-dimensional strategic environment, in which a highly capable president proved over and over again his ability not only to dominate the competition of political and policy messages but to design messages that resonated far better with the voters; and the familiar partisan environment comprising the House Republican Conference, whose policy prescriptions were either imposed on or accepted by Gingrich only for him to discover that they were badly at odds with those of the attentive public. As a consequence, Gingrich was constantly caught in an impossible dilemma: by going along with the context that was his party in the House, as he was surely expected to, he risked unpopularity and legislative defeat at the hands of the president and the public. However, even when he opted for a more pragmatic governing strategy that accommodated to the realities of split-party government and a recalcitrant Senate, as well as the preferences of voters, and reflected a willingness to compromise, he frequently found himself in trouble with his party political base, particularly the hard-liners who previously had been his most enthusiastic supporters. Predictably, at the end, the greater risk for Gingrich turned out to stem from leading his party unsuccessfully into an election and from being seen to be out of tune with it. Having had their expectations raised, and now after four years having experienced yet another electoral failure, House Republicans disposed of him. Ironically, Gingrich's party government maxim prescribed exactly this course of action for a leader who no longer served his party's interests.

And yet, despite a long list of political and policy failures, Gingrich led the Republican Congress in achieving some fairly impressive legislative results - particularly if allowance is made for degree of difficulty. These include welfare reform, reduction in Medicare spending, telecommunications and financial services deregulation, increased military spending – and, most significant, the agreement to balance the budget by 2002 and House Republicans' insistence that the growth in federal spending was minimized. It is true that the booming American economy made this commitment easier but it is far from certain whether either a Democrat-controlled or a Republican House under Speaker Michel would have forced Clinton to the bargaining table. The same is also true of other major policy changes that would likely not have been made had House Republicans not won the 1994 election and Gingrich not become Speaker. More than any other single individual, Gingrich shifted the terms of policy debate in Washington and the country to the right and he was able to do this because he was able to help create the political context in which such a development was possible. As Strahan has argued, 'Newt Gingrich has to be considered one of a number of extraordinary figures in the history of the House – not only for his success in establishing a new party government regime, but also for having helped create the critical moment in institutional time that made change on this scale a possibility' (1996: 22). The theoretical significance of Gingrich's case study underlines the point that congressional leadership is a series of interactive processes in which particular leaders or leadership styles are likely to be more effective in some decisionmaking and institutional contexts rather than in others.

## **Dennis Hastert: Going With the Flow**

Gingrich's successor as House Speaker was not Livingston. Just before the House began voting to impeach the President, the Speaker-Elect announced in the well of the House that he had committed adultery, would not run for the Speakership, and would shortly resign from the House. Facing yet another leadership crisis within the space of a few weeks, House Republicans rallied round the Deputy Chief Whip, Dennis Hastert (R. IL), a conservative but congenial deal-maker who had been chosen by Gingrich to bring tactical skill to the Republican whip team and to counter the more abrasive, hard-line, DeLay. Through a process akin to that which existed within the British Conservative Party before 1965, the 'great and the good' within the party in the House decided that in the context that then existed Hastert would be a more effective leader than either Armev or DeLay. Put differently, and without implying any deterministic equilibrium relationship between the new leader and extant context, given the constraints imposed on Gingrich by context after the Contract period – and now in the context of another leadership crisis – House Republicans opted for Hastert in the belief that an essentially transactional leader skilled at putting together partisan and bipartisan coalitions would provide 'a good fit' and would be attentive to the strategic environments that existed within the Republican Conference and beyond.

### *A Constrained Context*

Indeed, neither the institutional context within the House, nor the wider political context outside, augured well for anything but the kind of transactional style that Hastert offered. Against Republican predictions and much historical experience, House Republicans had lost seats in the 1998 midterm elections. Voters in the House elections had not been persuaded by House Republicans' message. Most viewed the party's handling of the impeachment process as blatantly partisan, indeed, sordid in parts, and illegitimate. Certainly, Clinton's reputation was damaged, particularly after the hard fought and bitter trial in the Senate, but so was theirs. Instead of reaping the political dividends from Clinton's misdeeds, the booming economy, the first federal budget surplus for 30 years, and declining crime and welfare rolls, Hastert and his party were highly unpopular and they were left with the smallest majority since 1953. Moreover, having gambled most of their chips on removing Clinton, and having failed to do so, House Republicans were not identified with those issues that most concerned voters and so had no viable message that they could use to construct a legislative agenda for the new Congress. Indeed, it was the issues raised by the president and the Democrats – education reform and assistance, protecting social security, and health care reform – that dominated the national political agenda. Inside the House too, all the available evidence pointed to a partisan context that offered limited policy leadership opportunities – at least on the issues that most concerned Republicans. Regicide had reigned immediately after the elections. Gingrich had been disposed of immediately; Livingston, six weeks later. Livingston's disclosure of his extra marital affairs was the public cause of his departure. However, it was also clear that his brusque leadership style had raised the hackles of many in the party. It seemed obvious, therefore, that the partisan context that had been so instrumental in getting rid of Gingrich might also close down many of Hastert's leadership opportunities. The nature and source of the complaints against Livingston were all too familiar: in the wake of Clinton ordering a military attack on Iraq, the Speaker-elect had shown insufficient deference to hard-liners in postponing the House debate on the president's impeachment.

### *A Transactional Leader: Skills and Governing Strategies*

There was a certain irony in House Republicans' choice of the affable, steady, Hastert. Gingrich's successor was a protégé and confidante of Bob Michel, whom Gingrich had forced out in 1994. He was also the first Speaker in 80 years never to have been elected to any previous leadership position. Hastert's forte was his political skills. Unlike the early Gingrich, he would not be a speaker who would try to change the world. Like 'Tip' O'Neill, his favored terrain was the House floor rather than the airwaves or the lectern. During his 12 years in the House, he had gained a well-deserved reputation as a congenial dealmaker that would go to considerable lengths to bring together his often-divided party and sometimes reach across the aisle to Democrats. As Deputy Chief Whip, he had proved himself an effective medium both for sounding out rank and file opinion within the

Conference and corraling votes for the leadership. It was not surprising, then, that soon after he was elected Republican leader he promised to eschew Gingrich's revolutionary rhetoric and grand vision, work with the context given him, and concentrate on advancing issues demanded by the party through new legislation and oversight. In his maiden speech as Speaker, he promised to change the atmosphere in the House, begged his colleagues not to seek solutions in 'a pool of bitterness', and offered to meet Democrats 'half way – maybe more so on occasion' in addressing important issues such as Social Security, Medicare, taxes, and education. The overall thrust of Hastert's message was that Republicans would finally learn to govern.

True to his early statements, Hastert took advantage of his honeymoon period to focus on agreeing a legislative agenda with his party, promoting that agenda through legislation and public statements, and managing the different factions within the Conference. During Clinton's trial in the Senate, Hastert carefully steered clear of any involvement, concentrating instead on working with committee chairs and other House Republicans to produce a legislative agenda. Foremost on this agenda were bills relating to politically salient issues like social security and additional education spending that Democrats had emphasized in the 1998 elections, in addition to familiar Republican issues such as, tax reductions and missile defense. Cognizant of a partisan political context in which committee leaders had accumulated a considerable volume of knowledge and experience, the new Speaker announced that substantial legislative authority would return to committees and their chairs. The public persona of the Conference would also change: different Republican members would act as spokespersons for the party while Hastert would take responsibility for the day-to-day running of the chamber and negotiations among committee and other leaders (Vande Hei 1999a: 22). When several intra-party rebellions erupted in the early months of 1999 - over committee funding, a controversial package of census measures, and emergency spending - Hastert was able to cobble together intra-party agreement. On various issues important to House Republicans' agenda - including the budget resolution, the party's 'Ed-Flex' education measure, and national missile defense - he led successful efforts to pick up the support of several 'Blue Dog' Democrats (Vande Hei 1999b: 21).

#### *Constrained Leadership in a Constrained Context*

Yet, like Gingrich in the post-Contract period, Hastert found his scope of action severely constrained by his party's wafer-thin majority and partisan polarization, particularly when issues came to the House floor that were very important to his party. In this constrained context, moderate Republicans under pressure from their own reelection constituencies frequently threatened to vote with Democrats on environmental and other issues, unless Hastert would make concessions. If he made concessions to the moderates, then, he risked handing legislative victories to the Democrats and the president. But, he also risked invoking the ire of the conservative hard-liners - often led by Arney and/or DeLay - who objected to deals negotiated by the Speaker that compromised their conservative principles. Conversely, if Hastert bowed to the conservative hard-liners, depending on the precise circumstances, he would commit his party to new losing strategies that made his party unpopular, look irresponsible in the eyes of press and much of the attentive public, and often hand new political victories to the president. Often, in these circumstances, the amiable Hastert adopted the line of least resistance and sat on his hands or, like his predecessor, he sided with the hard-liners so that the leadership he offered was weak and ineffective.

Probably nowhere was Hastert more constrained than in his activity on budgetary policy, and particularly the debate during consideration of the FY 1999 budget: Republicans demanded massive tax cuts; Clinton and the Democrats wanted to shore up the Medicare and Social Security trust funds and pay off part of the national debt. When the inevitable differences among House Republicans surfaced, Hastert opted not to lead from the front; rather, he would let committee chairs sort out differences, appeal for party unity, and delay harsh decisions until the last moment. Republican moderates (and Democrats) demanded more spending; Republican hard-line conservative grumbled that the cautious Hastert had set Republican objectives too low and proceeded to use guerrilla tactics to great effect on the House floor, taking advantage of their party's tiny majority to hold up appropriations bills. Within his own party, Hastert was accused of pursuing a 'do-no-harm strategy' and providing rudderless leadership (Doherty and Martinez 1999: 1122-23; Vande Hei 1999c: 1, 28; Cohen and Bauman 1999: 1592-93; Pianin and Eilperin 1999: A1) House Republicans won passage

of a budget resolution and later a reconciliation bill composed primarily of large tax cuts that had no chance of being accepted by Clinton (Vande Hei 1999d: 1, 26; Broder, 1999: A19). Once again, the party's ratings in the polls fell. When Clinton threatened to veto the tax bill part of their budget package in August 1999, Hastert launched a major publicity campaign that flopped. Ultimately, for the fourth time in five years since 1994, Clinton successfully outmaneuvered Hastert and his party in a budget confrontation. When Clinton vetoed the bill, Hastert did not even attempt to override the president's veto, and Republicans were forced into accepting an agreement that excluded tax cuts and appropriated funds instead for Social Security and Medicare. Forced to abandon tax cuts, Hastert then opted for a strategy aimed at limiting spending in the 13 appropriations bills by passing each bill separately so that the end-of-year appropriations debacles of previous years at the hands of Clinton might be avoided. Hastert's strategy was successful in the House - all but one appropriations bill won House passage - but failed when the president proved more adept at playing his hand than Hastert and his party. The final end-of-session agreement gave the Clinton most of the spending he wanted, deleted most of the legislative riders attached by conservatives, and severely limited House Republicans' scope for a tax cut the following year (Wynn 1999: 2846).

In the Kosovo crisis of 1999, Hastert found himself similarly constrained by his partisan context. In March 1999, Hastert succumbed to strong party's demands orchestrated by DeLay and agreed to hold a floor vote (against President Clinton's advice) specifically authorizing Clinton to send US troops to Kosovo. Supporters of the move wanted to pin sole responsibility on the Clinton Administration for US involvement in Kosovo. As four out of five House Republicans refused to support the president on what was a major aspect of US foreign policy, Hastert joined a bipartisan coalition in support of Clinton's policy (Pomper 1999: 621-22). Two months later, similar pressures from his party, including public opposition from DeLay, Armev, and Conference chair J.C. Watts, made it impossible for Hastert to rally congressional support for the president's Kosovo policy. As solid majorities of House Republicans opposed the president's policies for air combat and peace operations in Yugoslavia in a series of floor votes on a Defense Authorization bill, Hastert could do little as DeLay used the party's whip operation and his considerable influence to oppose the resolution. Hastert voted to support Clinton's policy, but he was left publicly defending a party that looked irresponsible and excessively partisan on an important foreign policy issue (Martinez 1999: 1038-39). His handling of the issue again provoked accusations of weak and ineffective leadership (Editorial 1999a; Editorial 1999b). On other highly salient issues, Hastert's leadership of his party followed a similar constrained course. In the wake of the killing of school children in Colorado in June 1999, Hastert spent weeks negotiating a package of gun control measures that he could bring to the House floor but was then forced to back down when Armev and DeLay publicly refused to support his proposals. While opinion polls reported strong support for gun control, Hastert was fearful of alienating his party and in a series of floor votes repeatedly efforts to water down control proposals offered by Clinton and the Democrats (Carney 1999c; Carney 1999d). Later in 1999, Hastert was similarly unsuccessful in promoting the preferences of most House Republicans on managed health care reform, another highly salient and controversial issue. Fearing that the popular bipartisan Dingell-Norwood patients' rights bill would win floor support, as Republican moderates deserted their party and joined with Democrats, Hastert hastily appointed a party task force with a remit to develop a Republican alternative and then, following months of negotiation and delay, felt obliged to support the task force's bill in order to regain control of the House agenda, even though he opposed one of its central principles. On the House floor, however, first the leadership-backed bill was defeated as 29 Republicans deserted their leaders, and then 68 Republicans (almost one-third of the Conference) ignored Hastert's pleas for party unity and supported the Dingell-Norwood bill (Koszczuk 1999).

### *Style in Context*

Hastert's leadership, then, like Gingrich's after 1995, demonstrates the limited utility of leadership skills when the context - primarily the partisan context - constrains available leadership opportunities. When he was elected Speaker, most House Republicans had resolved that they did not want another visionary like Gingrich who would throw his weight about. Rather, they wanted a leader who would work hard with his party to produce collective legislative products for members to

take to the voters at the next election yet leave individual members with maximum discretion to pursue their own policy and stylistic preferences within the party. These very immediate contextual factors explain House Republicans' acceptance of Hastert's leadership from his first election to the time of writing. However, they also largely explain why his leadership has been so ineffective. Eschewing a strong-arm leadership style, he opted for a healing, consensual, style that allowed free expression of the party's will. However, this style has also proved ineffective in maintaining Republican party unity once, inevitably, it interacted with the same partisan context that Gingrich had to contend with on issues crucial to the majority party. It has also failed to prevent the party suffering further debacles when it has tried to pursue policies that are either unpopular or give the appearance of party irresponsibility or both. Critics might argue that, like John Major, the 'gray' British Prime Minister, Hastert lacked the communication skills and fiery delivery that came naturally to Gingrich, especially in front of the television cameras. It is doubtful, however, whether superior communication skills would make him a more effective leader. As we saw in respect of Gingrich's leadership after the Contract period, Hastert was essentially a hostage to contextual factors: the party's tiny majority in the House; sharp polarization between the parties on major policy issues; the insistence by significant numbers of House Republicans that he resist compromises on many issues salient to party activists; President's Clinton's deft handling of legislative issues and public communications; the strong party discipline of Democrats that helped the minority party snatch control of the agenda on a number of salient issues; and, finally, the evident reluctance of Senate Republicans to move legislation wanted by House Republicans out of fear that the votes of vulnerable Republican senators might sink their reelection prospects and, therefore, the party's prospects of maintaining their Senate majority in the 2000 elections.

### **Trent Lott: Testing the Limits of Institutional Constraints**

Our third case study focuses on contemporary leadership in the Senate. Trent Lott (R.MS) became Senate Majority Leader in June 1996 in a lop-sided vote after his predecessor, the mercurial, deal making, Bob Dole (R.KS) resigned to run full-time for the White House. As in the House when Gingrich succeeded Michel, Lott's election appeared to signal a shift to a more aggressive, highly partisan, leadership style. Like Gingrich, Lott was an ambitious exponent of combative, hard-line, conservative positions who had won rapid promotion within his party. Indeed, before becoming in 1988 the first Republican since Reconstruction to be elected from his state to the Senate, he had been Gingrich's mentor and ally as House Minority Whip for eight years. Just four years after entering the Senate, Lott won the post of Conference Secretary; and, then, immediately after Republicans retook majority control of the Senate in 1994, he threw his hat in the ring ahead of two other conservative contenders for the party's second-ranking position, challenging the incumbent who was less aggressive and less conservative and supported by Dole. Helped by the new intake of conservative hardliners, Lott won the majority whip election by one vote. As Whip, Lott promoted hard-line conservative causes, sometimes with the aid of the Republican whip organization, and sometimes against Dole's wishes. In March 1995, for example, he sided with hard-line conservatives in an effort to strip moderate conservative Senator Mark Hatfield (R.OR) of his chair of the Appropriations Committee for providing the only Republican vote against the Contract's constitutional amendment requiring a balanced budget. So, when Lott was elected Majority Leader, his party's hardliners might reasonably harbored strong expectations that their new leader – assisted by other hardliners who occupied the party's other three leadership positions – would adopt more aggressive tactics to promote their conservative agenda and attack the strategies and policies of the Clinton Administration more forcefully. Yet, Lott's reputation both in the House and the Senate was not as a 'bomb-thrower' after Gingrich's style. **'Lott is a politician first and a conservative second'**, Lott's friend has argued (Morris 1997: 76). Even in the heady days of 1995, he did not always support the uncompromising stances of House Republicans and was sometimes willing to cooperate with Senate Democrats. In the budget confrontation with Clinton in late 1995 and early 1996, Lott tried very hard to work out a compromise between Gingrich and the White House through his friend and political consultant, Dick Morris, who was now Clinton's adviser. 'Everyone loses if there's a train wreck', he cautioned colleagues (Drew: 306, 305-309, 336; Morris 1997: 172-76, 185-86). Indeed, an important reason why his partisan colleagues had elected him Leader was his ability to balance his natural sympathies with his party's conservative hardliners with successful party management, aggressive promotion of commonly agreed party positions and

delivery of legislative products demanded by his fellow partisans. He was also hard working, well-liked and trusted by his fellow partisans who valued his smooth communications skills, clever tactics, and methodical, disciplined, approach to the running of Senate operations.

### *A Constraining Context*

The context that faced Lott once he became Majority Leader was hardly favorable. Although Republicans enjoyed a majority in the Senate and hard line conservatives had enhanced their influence in the Conference and the leadership following the 1994 elections and Dole's departure, the peak of the Republican 'revolution' had passed. Much of the Contract legislation had become bogged down in Senate committees. Lott's party had been trounced in the legislative and public relations battle with Clinton over the FY 1996 budget, and in the aftermath the president had reclaimed a central place in Washington politics. Moreover, while political and policy conditions might become more favorable over time, Lott's leadership would inevitably be constrained by the Senate's nonmajoritarian nature, the absence of a filibuster-proof supermajority (a condition that persisted throughout Lott's tenure as Majority Leader), and senators' increasing recourse to filibusters or filibuster threats in an era of strong policy partisanship and polarized parties (Sinclair 2000b: 145). Lott's approach to this problem was two-fold. In certain instances, he pursued a partisan strategy while in others his approach was bipartisan

### *A Transactional Leader Trying to Transform: Skills and Governing Strategies*

Following the 1996 elections, in which Republicans picked up two more Senate seats (55 Republicans, 45 Democrats), and with House Republicans experiencing new problems and continuing unpopularity, Lott seized the legislative initiative and became his party's *de facto* leader. In the 105th Senate, nine new Republican senators, all hard-line conservatives, swelled the party's ranks. Lott took up the partisan cudgel, proposing as one of his first actions a \$4.4 million Senate committee investigation of illegal campaign funding practices directed exclusively at the Clinton White House. This overtly partisan move was thwarted, however, when ten Republican senators fearing that their party would be accused of covering up its own misdeeds objected. In the minor public relations battle that ensued, Lott was forced to broaden the investigation. In further episodes, Lott demonstrated an equally strong appetite for pursuing partisan issues but again met with limited success. In March 1997, he led a second attempt to win Senate approval for his party's balanced budget constitutional amendment. Despite Republicans having increased their Senate majority in the 1996 elections and Lott staking his prestige on passage, the attempt failed again. This failure was followed by another in June 1997, when Lott sponsored a demand by conservative hard-liners to attach a rider designed to prevent another government shut down. The rider was attached to a 'must pass' supplemental appropriations bill providing disaster relief for flood victims in numerous midwestern states, as well as spending for peacekeeping operations in Bosnia. Lott's tactic proved a major miscalculation as Clinton exploited the situation to accuse Republicans of not providing timely relief to flood victims. A week after the debacle, he appeared on ABC's *This Week* and conceded that '[w]e haven't been doing a good job of [insisting on this Congress being a co-equal branch of government]' (Dewar 1997a: A4-5). Then, in a fourth episode in October 1997, after months spent postponing floor consideration, Lott was forced by adverse media comment and Democratic tactics blocking other legislation to bring the McCain - Feingold campaign finance legislation to the Senate floor. Having been forced to allow the bill consideration on the Senate floor, however, Lott first tried to kill it by offering a highly provocative amendment that was bound to be opposed by Democrats' labor allies and then resorted to a procedural bag of tricks to force a Democratic filibuster. Predictably, Democrats retaliated by bringing floor business to a halt. In the ensuing public relations battle, it was Lott and his party who received most of the blame (Dewar and Yang 1997b: A8). Having been forced to agree to a full debate on the McCain-Feingold bill, in the following year, Lott again resorted to tough parliamentary tactics. As Senate Republicans were blamed in the media for trying to stymie the legislation and Senate Democrats proved determined to press their advantage, Lott was forced to withdraw bill after bill from the floor to prevent Senate Democrats from attaching measures high on their agenda - notably managed health care reform - to non-appropriations bills Republicans wanted.

Lott's efforts to enact a predominantly partisan agenda frequently met a similar fate in the 106<sup>th</sup> Senate (1999-2000). Pressed by party hardliners to pursue exclusively partisan agendas and strategies on numerous issues - despite the party's failure to increase its majority in the 1998 elections (as voters paid more attention to the Clinton economy than to the Lewinsky scandal) – the Senate leader typically found it impossible to find ways that would reconcile these demands with the strategic institutional and partisan contexts that he and his party faced. A classic example of Lott's predicament occurred over education reform legislation. With the issue high on the public agenda, Lott scheduled the Education Flexibility bill for floor consideration in March 1999. Fearing that Senate Democrats might take over the issue, he opted for an almost exclusively partisan legislative strategy that involved blocking Democratic amendments. Predictably, the stratagem backfired as Senate Democrats blocked any action on the bill until Lott agreed to allow debate on a series of amendments designed to implement Clinton's proposals (Kirchhoff 1999: 6075). Lott's strategy with respect to gun control legislation in the wake of the Colorado school shootings in 1999 followed a similar stratagem and provoked similar reactions and results. Republican ties to the gun lobby led the Senate leader to ignore polls demanding new restrictive legislation. In the policy hiatus that was then created in the Senate, and as public clamor mounted - fuelled by Clinton's call for new restrictive legislation - Democratic Minority Leader Tom Daschle (D.SD) threatened to attach gun control amendments to any measure scheduled by Lott for floor consideration (Carney 1999a: 1028). Democrats then proceeded to filibuster an unrelated measure and Lott was obliged to concede a debate on gun control. In the ensuing floor debate, Lott was then forced to give further ground as public pressure on Senate Republicans mounted. On a crucial amendment requiring background checks on gun sales at gun shows, many Senate Republicans (including Lott) changed their votes from positions they had supported the previous year in order to support restrictions (Carney 1999b: 1205; Doherty 1999: 1206).

In the 105<sup>th</sup> and 106<sup>th</sup> Senates, then, any hopes harbored by Lott and his party of winning floor approval for exclusively partisan legislation were dashed by the realities of institutional context and party arithmetic, with the results that his leadership was frequently ineffective and his party was left frustrated.

Yet, as the earlier discussion mentioned, Lott did not always pursue exclusively partisan governing strategies in the 105<sup>th</sup> and 106<sup>th</sup> Senates. As Senate Leader, he was also practical politician willing to relegate his conservative policy preferences and rhetoric to accommodate to context in order to achieve legislative results (Barnes 1996). Barely a month after becoming Majority Leader, with the 1996 elections looming and imagines of the party's budget *debacle* and hard-line images strong in voters' minds, Lott shocked Republican hard-liners happy to continue brawling with Clinton over welfare, health care, immigration, environmental protection, and other measures by summoning colleagues to the Senate floor and chastising them for holding up legislation. Emphasizing the need for congressional Republicans - as well as Clinton and the Democrats – to deliver tangible legislative products to the voters in November, he entered into negotiations with Clinton and Senate Democrats (Morris 1997: 293-99), over the objections of Republican Whip Nickles and other hard-line conservatives. Suddenly, the bipartisan Kennedy-Kassebaum health insurance portability bill was brought to the floor and won approval. Lott negotiated a deal with the White House whereby a pilot scheme of medical savings accounts – one of the last items in the Contract – would be authorized. Soon after, Senate Democrats were offered the first increase in the minimum wage since 1989 in return for new tax allowances demanded by Republicans for business. Finally, Lott astutely persuaded his party colleagues to withdraw Republican demands for cuts in Medicaid entitlements in the welfare reform bill, which Democrats would never accept, thereby making it extremely difficult for Clinton to veto a welfare bill for the third time (Morris 1997: 297-302) and at the same time yielding his party a major political victory. With Clinton looking increasingly like a winner in the 1996 presidential elections, passage of bipartisan legislation on welfare, environmental protection, safe drinking water, and education spending provided Lott's House and Senate party colleagues with enough political protection to prevent electoral losses in the congressional elections.

At the beginning of the new Senate, Lott was successful in persuading Senate Republicans to tailor their demands better to the strategic context that they faced and in creating a bipartisan dialogue with Clinton that, at least in terms of its tenor, contrasted with the president's relations with

Gingrich. Most significantly, he worked with the White House on ratifying a new chemical weapons convention and agreeing the basis for a budget deal. Under the threat that the Chemical Weapons Convention would be implemented without US participation, Lott negotiated with Clinton 28 clarifications in the convention as well as other concessions on arms control and State Department and UN reform, which allowed just over half Senate Republicans to claim that the treaty was 'safe and acceptable' and enabled Foreign Relations Committee chair Jesse Helms (R.NC) and other hard-line conservatives to allow a floor vote in April 1997 that resulted in treaty ratification (Baker and Dewar 1997: A1; editorial, 1997: C6). To right wing charges that he was becoming a 'Clintonian' Republican, Lott effectively negotiated a crosspartisan agreement with the White House on the FY 1998 budget that incorporated less spending and tax cuts demanded by conservative hardliners but committed the parties to reduce the budget deficit by \$204.3 billion over five years. After four days of Senate floor debate in May 1997 and over 50 amendments, Lott won approval for the fragile agreement, in the process successfully persuading Clinton to issue a public statement opposing a deal-breaking bipartisan amendment to increase taxes on cigarettes in order to provide Senate Republicans with political cover (Palazzolo 1999: 113-15). The following year, Lott again resisted pleas from Republican hard-liners that he not make too many concessions (Bresnahan 1998: 22; Rogers and McGinley 1998: A2) and successfully reached another budget deal with the White House. On the final floor vote on the package, 20 Republican senators, including Republican Whip Don Nickles (R.OK) refused to support the legislation. Lott's pragmatism also showed when the House sent over impeachment articles against President Clinton in early 1999. Realizing that the chances of winning a two-thirds majority to convict Clinton were small, but nevertheless needing to satisfy Senate Republican hard-liners as well as party activists throughout the country, Lott opted to limiting further political damage to his party. At a different time and in different circumstances, he might have tried to force through the Senate a more partisan *modus operandi*. Instead, after several missteps, he cut his party's losses, reached an agreement with Daschle that allowed the Minority Leader to veto further witnesses, and opted for a strategy that sought to uphold the dignity of the Senate and inter-party civility.

### *Style in Context*

Lott's leadership style as Senate Majority Leader was – like Hastert's - essentially transactional. Although a fierce policy partisan, Lott was not a visionary or transforming leader like Gingrich during the Contract period. He was by nature a pragmatic politician who, when necessary, accommodated to contexts outside his party's ranks. His approach to Senate majority leadership fluctuated between exclusively partisan leadership strategies to more pragmatic, crosspartisan, approaches. As a fierce policy partisan, he was clearly most comfortable with the hard-line conservatives in the Senate Republican Conference who insisted constantly that he pursue exclusively partisan strategies, often reinforced by tough parliamentary tactics. However, his leadership was sufficiently astute to recognize that in a nonmajoritarian institutional context, where the actions of single senators are significant, he frequently lacked the political wherewithal to win enactment of hard-line conservative policy preferences. In these circumstances, and when issues were very important to Senate Republicans, he frequently opted for compromising and accepting something less than the full loaf rather than risking political defeat. When he wanted to, he could negotiate and close deals with his political adversaries – more successfully, it appears, than either Gingrich or Hastert. That is, when he wanted to - and the partisan and institutional contexts allowed - he opted for establishing a favorable record for his party and accommodating to the wider political and institutional contexts of the Senate instead of an exclusively partisan strategy. Even so, Lott - like Gingrich and Hastert - often adhered to policy prescriptions and exclusively partisan strategies that were jarred with those favored by the attentive public. As a consequence, like them, he frequently overreached and, in the context of a nonmajoritarian chamber, found himself unable to deliver. Thus, the defeats at the hands of Daschle and Clinton, and the badly misjudged defection of Senator Jeffords in 2001.

Given, however, the complex and conflicted strategic environment that any Senate leader would have faced in the late 1990s, it is difficult to imagine another leader overcoming all these contextual obstacles – given the partisan imperatives that party leaders must obey in the congressional context of highly policy polarized parties. The juxtaposition of favorable contextual

factors that existed for Gingrich in 1994 and 1995 certainly did not exist for Lott at any time during his tenure as leader. Another Senate Republican leader might have pursued a transactional style that was more accommodating to moderate Republicans and sought more compromises with Democrats. Another leader might have been a more skilled articulator of his party's policy positions; but given the institutional context that is the contemporary Senate, and the polarization of the respective parties' policy preferences, contemporary Senate leadership and effectiveness is inevitably highly constrained by context - thereby heavily circumscribing the real discretion that leadership skills can exercise. As in the House, the task of leadership becomes even more difficult when one's party insists on policy agendas and preferences that are out of tune with those of the voters.

## Conclusion

In a minimal sense, all party leaders bring some additional element to the task of leading their parties. The issue considered here is the extent to which they are able to shift political outcomes away from the median point of preferences among their party or chamber colleagues. If this were not so, there would be little point in party members empowering their leaders. The key questions addressed in this series of studies are how much do leaders affect policy outcomes and under what conditions. The three congressional leaders considered in this article offer a fairly broad range of leadership styles, Gingrich being the most unusual in pursuing a transforming style during the Contract period, while Hastert and Lott offered essentially transactional styles. The discussion has made a strong case for viewing Gingrich during the Contract period as a transforming leader, one who fits definitions offered by Strahan and Aldrich and Shepsle of 'exogenous interventions of imaginative individuals.' Gingrich was the architect of House Republicans' victory in 1994, as he was the single most important individual leader responsible for challenging President Clinton and effectively shifting the political center of gravity in the US firmly in a more conservative direction. Clearly, neither Hastert nor Lott fall into the transforming leader category - although as leaders of conservative parties they played important supportive roles. Three theoretical conclusions arise from this finding. First, transforming leadership is rare as a style of legislative leadership; but nevertheless possible given the right person and the right conditions. Second, logically, it follows that the characteristics of an individual legislative leader can be unusually significant in affecting policy outcomes. Gingrich had the vision, the personal political ambition, and the skill first to lead a successful election campaign and, then, to lead his party in the House to successful enactment of a good part of a policy agenda that transformed key aspects of federal policy, especially in respect of welfare and the budget. Third, Gingrich played a large part in creating the context that reinforced his efforts to enact important policy changes, notably in raising expectations within his party in the 1994 election campaign, in recruiting candidates for his party, and raising money - all factors that helped bring the party victory. After the election, his insistence on tight party discipline and a party government approach to decisionmaking were instrumental in gaining approval for most of the Contract and pressuring President Clinton into accepting new commitments to reform welfare and balance the federal budget within seven years.

A second important conclusion is that, obviously, as the contextual theorists argue, context matters, and it matters very much. In the case of Gingrich during the Contract period, he created *part* of the context that made policy changes possible but he could not create that part of his context that was exogenous including, for example, that series of institutional developments that had occurred after the early 1970s that led to stronger party organizations and stronger central leadership in the House. The conditions that Gingrich created by winning the 1994 elections and then in early 1995 when he changed certain party rules and practices were a significant additional increment to those conditions that existed before the election. However, as the subsequent discussion showed, those aspects of context that are exogenous (i.e. conditions not created by an individual leader) became increasingly pressing on Gingrich, and later on Hastert as well, to the extent that they consumed his leadership of the House. The same is true of Lott's leadership of the Senate.

Thirdly, the skill with which an individual leader is able to juggle pressures emanating from different, often conflicting, contexts also matters. The willingness and ability of all three leaders to

accommodate to contexts beyond their party conferences on certain critical issues at certain times enabled them to achieve policy results, which had they stuck to exclusively partisan strategies would probably not have resulted in so many policy gains. Negotiations entered into by Gingrich and Lott - on welfare reform and, eventually, on the 1996, 1997, 1998, and 1999 budgets - provide good examples in this respect; as do Hastert's negotiations on the 2000 and 2001 budgets, and Lott's negotiations on the Chemical Weapons Convention and educational reform. It could be argued, of course, that the budget negotiations were to a large extent forced on these leaders by the 1995 debacles and other subsequently. However, the previous discussion has showed that in many cases (notably the budget) these leaders at least, if not many of their potential followers, had learned their lessons and shifted their strategies accordingly.

Fourthly, different types of context interact with one another as they do with the leaders' styles; and these different types of context matter in different circumstances. Institutional context seems to be a decisive factor in providing opportunities for transforming leadership. Quite simply, the nature of the Senate as an institution does not lend itself to transforming leadership. Rather, in its contemporary institutional form, with its emphasis on the prerogatives of individual senators, it is contextually conducive to transactional leadership. In contrast, the House's majoritarian institutional context facilitated Gingrich's transforming style, although it was not sufficient in itself. Within the contemporary context of policy polarization between the parties coupled with hard-line styles, party context is crucial i.e. the contexts provided by party activists, who tend to hold more extreme policy preferences than most voters, and party conferences within the House and Senate. Whether this is exclusively a phenomenon of the Republican party and related therefore to party culture (Peters 1999: 67) is beyond the scope of this paper since all three leaders are Republicans. The case studies have also shown that the public/electoral arena is vitally important, especially when one of the parties or a bipartisan coalition, such as that favoring campaign finance reform or an increase in the minimum wage, activates public pressures on party leaders pushing them in policy directions different from their own party activists and/or personal policy preferences. Finally, this article has provided numerous examples where congressional leaders face conflicting types of contexts. Conflicts between party context and institutional context are particularly important in the nonmajoritarian Senate, as Lott frequently discovered when Daschle effectively used procedural devices only available in the Senate to send out important messages on policy issues highly salient to public audiences (Evans and Oleszek 2001); but on a number of occasions all three leaders found the pressures emanating from his party conflicted with public demands on such issues as spending priorities, spending versus taxation priorities, patients' rights, and campaign finance.

Most of the time, then, different kinds of contexts – often in conflict with one another - are most important in conditioning effective policy leadership. Only in rare moments in history has an individual congressional leader been able to transform contexts to enable him (or her) to realize policy objectives to a greater or lesser extent. Gingrich was one of those rare individuals; Hastert and Lott were not.

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