



Iowa Faith and Freedom Coalition: Is Gingrich a Player?

Gingrich — a former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives who began the presidential race with a devastating resignation by much of his campaign staff — had been judged not a viable candidate. He was even [parodied](#) several times on *Saturday Night Live* as a "curio from a bygone era." Yet Gingrich has gradually risen in the [polls](#) after performing well in recent debates, and has been scoring in the high single digits in national polls in recent weeks.



The national Faith and Freedom Coalition is run by former Pat Robertson functionary Ralph Reed, who served as head of Robertson's Christian Coalition. Both the Christian Coalition and the Faith and Freedom Coalition focus upon social issues such as the sanctity of marriage, abortion, and opposing the homosexual agenda.

The additional irony of the strong crowd enthusiasm for Gingrich (other than his personal life) is that the former House Speaker's record is far from the conservative crowd's well-known small government preferences. Gingrich's [record](#) has proven he's no friend of limited government, even though much of his rhetoric sounds good. As a Congressman, Gingrich [voted](#) with President Jimmy Carter to create the U.S. Department of Education as a cabinet-level agency, backed liberal Republican Nelson Rockefeller's campaign for Governor of New York, and blinked when President Bill Clinton called his bluff in 1995-96 on some very small spending cuts and shut down parts of the federal government. As Speaker of the Republican-dominated House of Representatives, Gingrich had the clout to shut off the spending spigot, but instead caved in to President Clinton's demands for spending increases.

Gingrich [said](#) his presidency would wrest controls from the U.S. Supreme Court, using [Article III, Section 2](#) of the U.S. Constitution (an idea long sought by his rival, Rep. Ron Paul), citing as an example the activist court that wrote the *Roe v. Wade* decision. He told the audience to loud cheers that he believes a President who appoints conservative judges is not enough to stop an activist court: "Most of our major crises in our culture are driven by radical judges who violate the American Constitution, violate American history, and are doing things that are fundamentally destructive. And for 40 years, conservatives have said 'I will appoint better judges.'" Interestingly, as Speaker of the House Gingrich rebuffed efforts by Ron Paul and others get a floor vote in the House to use Article III, Section 2 to rein in the courts.

Gingrich also [claimed](#) at the Faith and Freedom Forum he would suspend *habeas corpus* liberties [guaranteed in the U.S. Constitution](#) as President: "Franklin Delano Roosevelt, upon capturing 14 German saboteurs, explained they would be tried and they would be executed. And he would not accept



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a Writ of Habeas Corpus from the Supreme Court and he sent his Attorney General over to say 'Don't issue it. I am commander-in-chief, we're in the middle of a war.' And they didn't. As President, I would instruct the national security apparatus to ignore the three most recent Supreme Court decisions on terrorism and I would say, those are null and void and have no binding effect on the United States. And as commander-in-chief I will not tolerate a federal judge risking the safety of the United States with some misguided interpretation."

The three most recent Supreme Court cases Gingrich was describing, [Padilla v. Rumsfeld](#), [Hamdan v. Rumsfeld](#), and [Boumediene v. Bush](#), dealt with whether a President had the power to throw a person into prison *forever* without ever charging the individual with a crime. In the case of Jose Padilla, it involved the power for a President to apprehend a native-born U.S. citizen inside the United States and throw him into prison forever without either a trial or formally charging him with a crime. Despite the explicitly dictatorial nature of his position, Gingrich's remarks were met with wild cheers from the audience. "I think these are largely my people," Gingrich [told](#) the *Des Moines Register* after the forum. "I'm a Georgia conservative. I share most of their values, and I think they want somebody who can actually get the job done."

By way of contrast, Rep. Ron Paul [told](#) the audience of the lesson of Samuel in [chapter eight of the first Book of Samuel](#) in the Bible's Old Testament. In that story, the Israelites wanted a king and were warned that "Samuel responded by advising them strongly," Paul explained, "don't choose a king. A king is going to do you harm. A king is going to raise your taxes; they will draft your young people." Paul also advised a healthy respect for civil liberties protected by the U.S. Constitution.

Ron Paul got warm applause, but that applause did not approach the enthusiasm that followed Gingrich's remarks. Indeed, some have already noticed that Gingrich's star is rising. Conservative newspaper *Human Events* has published a [story](#), "Newt on a Roll," that quoted RedState.com's Erick Erickson as saying of Gingrich in the previous debate, "He gave the most solid answers throughout the night with only one stumble — when he admitted his prior support for an individual mandate."

Front-runner and former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney was noticeably absent from the forum. Perhaps his record as Governor of Massachusetts would have been difficult to explain. As Governor, he asked for [doubling the funds](#) for his Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth, which had created a number of scandals in Massachusetts. The Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth was described by Massachusetts family activists as "perhaps the largest government-sanctioned promoter of the homosexual agenda to children in the United States." Romney eventually abolished the Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth by [executive order](#) because the legislature had created a more powerful "Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth," making the Governor's commission redundant. Romney's executive order said the commission had been abolished for fiscal rather than policy reasons, noting that it was abolished with an eye "to reducing duplication and bureaucracy, and to eliminating unnecessary boards and commissions."

The other current front-runner, former Godfathers Pizza CEO Herman Cain, appeared at the forum and was warmly received. But even though he remains ahead of Romney in some polls, a [devastating YouTube video](#) of Cain's many flip-flops has gone viral on the Internet. In that video, Cain is also pressed to name just one regulation to repeal or spending program to cut, and can't do either. Cain appears headed for the same also-ran status as Minnesota Rep. Michele Bachmann and Texas Governor Rick Perry, who topped the polls in August and September, respectively.

Bachmann, the front-runner in August, continues to see her campaign collapse, with at least four of five



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New Hampshire staffers [resigning](#) last week, allegedly because they [hadn't been paid in a month](#). Even her calls for abolishing several cabinet departments at the Faith and Freedom Forum appeared to be hollow imitations of Ron Paul's more aggressive and specific [plan to cut \\$1 trillion in spending](#) during the first year of his presidency.

September front-runner and Texas Governor Rick Perry tried to patch his failing campaign together during the forum, even making a self-deprecating [quip](#) about his own debate performances. Perry has none of the financial problems Bachmann has reportedly encountered, but it's unclear whether the Faith and Freedom Forum helped his campaign.

Photo of Newt Gingrich: AP Images



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