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Support gathering for new conservative Congress bill

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Republicans are assembling a mammoth grassroots lobbying machine to promote their "Contract With America," built of conservative interest groups and trade associations that can energize supporters on short notice.

The informal structure includes the Christian Coalition, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and several business associations, and it is getting its first test in the fight over a balanced-budget amendment to the Constitution. The groups have at their disposal computerized databases, fax networks, mailing lists and media outlets that can generate millions of calls and messages to Capitol Hill.

"We are going to make a concerted effort to have our allies who have huge organizations of Americans work with us to pass the contract," said Rep. John Boehner, R-Ohio, chairman of the House Republican Conference.

The Republicans hope to create a continuing network that can support conservative issues without the need to reinvent it each time a close vote looms, said Tony Blankley, spokesman for House Speaker Newt Gingrich.

"Generating national support for an issue is like setting up a medium-size company for one sale. It's a big enterprise, and to be able to generate that again and again is challenging," he said. A ready-made network "would be an evolutionary advance from where we've been."

Boehner has hired Joyce Hamilton, a former lobbyist for the National-American Wholesale Grocers Association, to coordinate the outreach effort, which includes her former employer.

Others who met with Boehner last Thursday in Gingrich's office suite include:

—John Motley, chief lobbyist for the National Federation of Independent Business, which flexed its grassroots muscle last year in helping kill President Clinton's health care proposal. The group's

membership includes more than 500,000 small businesses, an average of 1,200 in every congressional district.

—Grover Norquist of Americans for Tax Reform, which has 60,000 members nationwide and grassroots links to 1,800 state and local taxpayer groups and another 800 property-rights groups, as well as relationships with conservative talk show hosts across the country.

—Bob Bannister of the 180,000-member National Association of Home Builders, which is particularly interested in the balanced-budget amendment and the issue of unfunded mandates on the private sector. The group maintains 12,000 "key contacts" across the country, people who

have personal relationships with members of Congress.

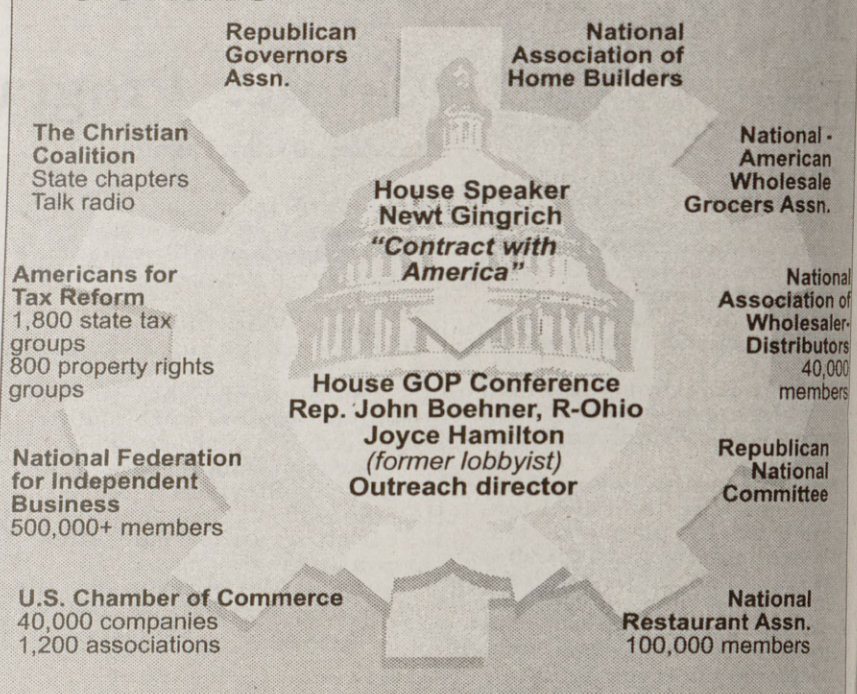
—Alan Kranowitz of the National Association of Wholesaler-Distributors, a federation of 115 wholesale trade associations with more than 40,000 members and 150,000 places of business nationwide.

—Bruce Josten of the Chamber of Commerce, whose Grassroots Action Information Network is a computerized bank of 40,000 individuals and companies, 2,700 local chambers and 1,200 associations.

Also present were representatives of the Christian Coalition, the National Restaurant Association, the Republican National Committee and the Republican Governors Association.

Lobby machine

Conservative interest groups in Washington have mobilized a virtual "lobbying machine," ready to hit Capitol Hill with millions of phone calls, letters and messages. How the network will operate:



AP Graphic

Political biographies really 'pay off'

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former House Speaker Jim Wright says his first reaction when he heard Newt Gingrich was offered \$4.5 million for a book deal was "Wow."

Then the sense of irony set in.

Of all Democrats, Wright may have the most reason to savor the current speaker's predicament.

The Texas Democrat was driven from office in 1989 — ending a 34-year career — because of an ethics probe of his personal finances, including a controversial book arrangement.

The investigation was spurred and fueled by Gingrich. "The supreme irony is that the speaker has risen to his position by criticizing and trying to attack the reputations and characters of others," Wright said in a telephone interview

from Fort Worth, Texas.

"In so many instances we find in life that he who poses as a purist and points the finger strongly at others is quite often involved in the very same enterprise himself," Wright said.

Among other things, Wright was accused by the House Ethics Committee of using bulk sales of his book, "Reflections of a Public Man," to evade limits on outside income.

Gingrich's situation involves his relationship with a publisher owned by communications giant Rupert Murdoch's company — and Murdoch's ownership of TV stations with legal cases before the U.S. government.

Even though Gingrich gave up the \$4.5 million advance from HarperCollins, saying he would take only \$1 up front, Democrats have still cried foul and want a special prosecutor.

The issue intensified with revelations that before the book deal was concluded Gingrich met with Murdoch and a top lobbyist for his Fox TV holdings, which are being challenged by NBC before the Federal Communications Commission.

Wright and Gingrich have not been the only public figures to reap financial benefits from books. It's a long-established tradition.

However, most such books don't wind up biting their authors.

1948, the government gave a triumphant Gen. Dwight Eisenhower a special tax break for his World War II memoirs, "Crusade in Europe," for which he was also paid the then-princely sum of \$600,000 by publisher Doubleday.



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