

Everything that rises must converge and these boys are rising fast: one writes

# The GOP's Three Amigos

**Idea Men:** They have Ph.D.s, Newt's gratitude—and a big stake in the party's future

BY JOHN SEDGWICK

THEY NEVER MET IN THE COURSE OF the campaign, never swapped e-mail, hardly spoke, and yet three fresh-faced strategists combined to engineer the Republican blowout in November. Bill Kristol, 42, Dan Quayle's former chief of staff, mapped the party's political strategy with a series of killer memos. Frank Luntz, 32, once a pollster for Ross Perot, combed survey data to help Newt Gingrich go national on such initiatives as his "Contract With America."

And Ralph Reed, 33, executive director of the Christian Coalition, delivered the mammoth evangelical vote—currently one third of the electorate—for the Republican Party.

They know each other now. Everything that rises must converge, and these boys are rising fast. They are also the envy of the Democrats. "If we don't get a group of dedicated young pros like them," says Democratic strategist Tony Coelho, "we're going to be a minority party for a long time."

**The Unabomber as Memoist:** Bill Kristol is the grand old man of the trio. The son of Trotskyite-turned-neocon Irving Kristol and historian Gertrude Himmelfarb, he is genetically conservative, both in politics and in style. He also exudes a certain know-it-all quality that his political opponents would like to scrub off him with a Brillo pad. Unfortunately, he may very well know it all. The New Republic once dubbed him "Dan Quayle's brain." Now he might be the cerebral cortex for the entire GOP.

If there was a single act that determined the outcome of the election, it was probably the memo that Kristol wrote on Dec. 2, 1993, declaring that the Clinton health-care plan was a dud, and that Republicans should try to kill it outright. Even though public support for the plan was dwindling at the time, it was a daring position. Just a year earlier, George Bush had gone down for his apparent unawareness of the national recession. Now the Republicans were pooh-poohing the health-care crisis? "It was cynical as hell," Coelho admits.

"But, as a strategy, it was brilliant."

The surprising part was that anyone paid attention to Kristol at all. His tiny Project for the Republican Future was not exactly the Heritage Foundation. It lacked only a basketball hoop over the trash basket to come across as a dormitory for poli sci postgrads. And it had been running for only a month. But there was something arresting about Kristol's the-sky-is-not-falling message, not to mention his supremely confident tone. Dole seemed to pay attention, the Washington press took heed, other pols started checking out the memo and, Kristol marvels, "the whole thing kept snowballing."

As if it weren't enough just to deep-six the health-care bill, on which Clinton had staked his presidency, Kristol proceeded to zing the administration's supposedly criticism-proof crime bill as little more than pork. And then, just when the Democrats were getting some traction with their charges that the "Contract With America" would endanger Medicaid and social security, Kristol published a secret memo from Alice Rivlin,

Clinton's director of Management and Budget, purportedly showing that the administration itself was considering trims on those very programs. "It gave the party a boost at a slightly down time," Kristol says.

Kristol is often accused of being merely an obstructionist tactician, the Unabomber as memoist. But he shows what he is for by identifying what he is against, namely big-government liberalism. His years in the liberal wilderness of Harvard University, where he collected a bachelor's degree and

#### NEWSWEEK POLL

**78% would be upset if many poor mothers have to give up their welfare benefits and send their children to orphanages or foster homes**

THE NEWSWEEK POLL,  
DEC. 27-28, 1994

#### Bill Kristol, Frank Luntz and Ralph Reed

THE GOP BRAIN TRUST

Kristol, 42, is the triumvirate's elder and GOP intellectual. Luntz is the party's populist, capturing voters of "the radical center." Reed, based in Bible country, brings evangelical Christians to the polls.

a Ph.D. in government, merely confirmed his antipathy. "Harvard helped give me confidence that liberalism was weaker than it seemed," he says. "It's a place where liberal ideas are dominant, but pretty unimpressive in other ways." As a Harvard assistant professor, he made a fateful trip to Washington to watch the Reagan administration in action. He selected Bill Bennett for close study; when Bennett took over as





## Machiavellian memos, one polls, one delivers Christian voters

Education secretary, he returned the favor by hiring Kristol.

Kristol quickly developed the slash-and-burn tactics that served him so well this fall, taking on the nabobs of higher education and, later with Quayle, attacking Murphy Brown. He also perfected his skills as a champion leaker, so much so that the Bush White House eventually had to exclude him from certain strategy meetings. His current outfit is about the most media-friendly in Washington, which always helps for favorable coverage. (Asked for references on Kristol, communications director David Tell obligingly responded,

"You want happy quotes or hate quotes?")

Along the way, Kristol was working up his unified field theory of politics, which was, as he wrote in a key Commentary piece in 1993, that "welfare-state liberalism" was like the Soviet Union circa 1977—"utterly dominant [but] utterly hollow," just one pin prick away from collapse. As evidence, he points to what might be termed Clinton's program-itis, in which every social ill, from teen pregnancy to illiteracy, is to be cured by a massive federal program.

That's the big message, but there may be something tactical

about Kristol's personality that keeps him from quite spelling it out. Asked what advice he would give Clinton, he says he would tell the president to move left, not right. Otherwise, Clinton will be merely a "dime-store Republican," when Dole and Gingrich are ready to offer the 10-dollar variety. Yet as Kristol goes on about this

in his dry monotone, you have the dizzying feeling that he is really hoping Clinton will move left and provide a fatter target. Are you being spun? You'll never know.

**Renegade Wordsmith:** If Kristol represents the intellectual strain of the resurgent Republicans, Frank Luntz is its resident populist. He had an uncanny feel for the grumpy mood of the electorate, especially that disaffected core of voters sometimes called

"the radical center." It was his job to capture those centrists for the GOP.

To get them, Luntz conducted twice-weekly focus-group sessions in living-room-like settings, searching for what his idol Tony Schwartz calls the "responsive chord." He test-marketed Gingrich's "Contract With America" to find the most popular elements and the most salable packaging. He fine-tuned Kristol's just-pork critique of the crime bill, which forced Clinton to spend two precious weeks last summer stripping out \$1.5 billion in crime-prevention programs. "That gave the Republicans a major megaphone," Coelho says. And Luntz often traveled with Gingrich to wordsmith key ideas so they'd click with the electorate. He says he was trying not to "nationalize" the election, as was commonly supposed, but to "personalize" it, to make the Republican themes hit home.

Luntz is quite a package himself, a peculiar mix of insight and hokum. In his own public appearances, he often tosses around a Nerf football emblazoned with the words TALK TO ME to loosen up his audience. He extols his parents in Hallmark Card terms, calling his father, a West Hartford dentist, "the nicest, kindest, most honest individual I've ever met." In his push for sincerity, Luntz has also stripped the jackets and ties off GOP candidates to make them seem more down-home. "Republicans always appear stiff and out of touch," he complains. (He once compared Sens. Orrin Hatch and Richard Lugar to morticians.) Luntz himself is tieless, with a flannel shirt/blue blazer/tan pants ensemble that will not win him any fashion awards. "I don't buy new clothes," he confesses sheepishly. "Two congressional spouses shop for me."

Other pollsters had more clients in the last campaign, but Luntz had that handle on the radical center that he developed in his

### NEWSWEEK POLL

**73% would be upset if new limits on welfare cut off benefits to poor families even when no work is available**

THE NEWSWEEK POLL,  
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JOHN FICARA—NEWSWEEK



## Top Democrats must wonder why they can't get hot young brains like these

brief stints with Perot and Pat Buchanan in 1992. "I get involved with the electorate more than with those running for office," he says—which was wise, because the voters were still around even though the candidates were not. He calls these centrists "post-partisan" in their rejection of party affiliations. (That's why the "Contract With America" nowhere mentions the GOP.) They are relatively poor, moderately well educated, aged 30-to-40 and located everywhere but the Northeast Corridor. They are motivated less by concerns about their standard of living than by their declining quality of life—worsening education, crime, housing. And their faith in the American Dream is wavering. "My greatest fear is that people will not buy into the dream and will not teach it to their children," Luntz says.

These centrists broke 2-1 for the Republicans in 1994. "I guess I identify with them."

No Gen X slacker, Luntz says his chronological age is deceiving. "Working 17 hours a day, seven days a week, you age pretty quickly." And he has accumulated a lot of experience. As an undergraduate at the University of Pennsylvania, in an eerie prefiguration of the '94 congressional race, he headed up a slate of candidates running on a common agenda rather than the traditional every-man-for-himself approach. "We put in some fraternity people, some people from the band, some people from the nursing school, from ROTC," he recalls. "They all came from different backgrounds, but I created a way that each could draw from each other's base of support. It was almost like relations between the Perot voters, Christian conservatives and traditional Republicans." When Luntz's slate won, the university responded by forbidding such slates in the future.

Later, as an adjunct assistant professor at Penn, Luntz conducted an elaborate survey of Ivy Leaguers that revealed, among other things, that Penn was considered the worst of the Ivies. The university tried to squelch publication. When it failed, it "defunded" Luntz's class and eliminated his department.

The Republican Party reacted similarly to Luntz's sojourn with the renegades Perot and Buchanan. "I went off the reservation," he says. He clawed his way back in by winning a Washington Post "Crystal Ball" award for coming closest to predicting the outcome of the 1992 elections, and then by scoring with Rudolph Giuliani's mayor-

al campaign. Gingrich noticed he had a way with the Perot voters, and Luntz was in. The Democrats have taken note. "Frank is one of the bright new young stars in the political system," says Coelho.

**Born-Again Baby Huey:** Unlike Kristol and Luntz, Ralph Reed is not an inside-the-Beltway regular. His office is in Bible country—in an industrial park in Chesapeake, Va., just down the highway from Pat Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network and Regent University, lit up with its neon cross. This is the home of the Christian Coalition, a \$20 million-a-year operation that cranked out 60 million pieces of mail in the last election. Its executive director, Ralph Reed, is the Baby Huey of political operatives: his boyishness only enhanced by his

suspenders and booming voice.

If the Democrats have the unions, the Republicans have the evangelicals, and the

last election showed which group is more valuable. According to Luntz's polling, 33 percent of the electorate is in the evangelical camp—either as born-again Protestants, church-going Catholics or Greek Orthodox—up from 24 percent in 1992. The evangelicals voted almost 3-1 for the Republicans and supplied an astonishing 43 percent of their support.

More than anyone else, it was Reed who led the evangelical voters to the GOP in such numbers. Pat Robertson founded the Christian Coalition as a way to hang on to the political organization he developed in his 1988 presidential run. He turned it over to Reed, whom he'd met at a Bush Inauguration party, in 1989. A former head of the College Republicans, Reed was completing a Ph.D. from Emory at the time. He recognized that religious conservatives were, in his word, "ghettoized" by the perception that they were

interested solely in "moral issues" like abortion, homosexuality and school prayer. He set about to develop a wider "pro-family" agenda that addressed mainstream economic issues like the balanced-budget amendment, the child tax credit and welfare reform.

Reed counts himself among the born-again Christians, having had a conversion experience in his early '20s, when he jettisoned Methodism as too

genteel and ultimately became a Presbyterian. Even now, he gets lathered up as he holds a December cartoon from the Los Angeles Times showing a star shining over Washington, with the caption "For unto you is born a savior who is called Newt."—Christian Coalition. "This is an outrageous example of bigotry," he fumes, "suggesting that I equate my savior with a political figure."

With such sentiments, he wasn't inclined to take the Christian out of the Christian Coalition entirely, but he was willing to downplay it. "Somehow, there was the idea that if we spoke for economic issues we were getting off message," he explains. "That was a setup we fell for. That's what the left wanted us to do. But that's like telling the feminist movement, 'You can't talk about the glass ceiling; you can only talk about abortion.' If feminists had only talked about abortion, they'd have gone nowhere for 25 years." But aren't there limits to what feminists should do as feminists? "I'm not going to get into that box," he snaps.

By moving the religious conservatives into the mainstream, he effectively put them in play, encouraging candidates to bid for their support. Many of the ostensible GOP presidential hopefuls like Quayle, Bennett and Dick Cheney now pay court to the coalition. Reed emphasizes that it does not endorse candidates; it sends out comparisons of their positions on key issues. He is merely a broker in the marketplace.

This time around, the Republicans made the better offer. In

fact, Reed could have written the party's "Contract With America" himself. Yet he shrewdly makes clear that evangelicals are free to renegotiate at any time, and he can imagine linking up with Democrats someday. He is also leery of having school prayer be for Gingrich what gays in the military was for Clinton. "We think school prayer's important, and we want it voted on," Reed says. "But we do not want to lead with it. Vote on the Contract first, then we can take the political capital we have gained and consider school prayer."

The Christian part, in other words, comes later—possibly a good deal later. "My historical training has been helpful," Reed says. "Most political operatives think in two-year cycles. I think in quarter centuries."

With Ph.D.s like these working for the GOP, the Democrats must wonder: if the universities are so liberal, where are the Democratic brains?

### NEWSWEEK POLL

**73% would be upset if tax cuts lead to a major increase in the federal budget deficit**

THE NEWSWEEK POLL, DEC. 27-28, 1994

### NEWSWEEK POLL

**61% would not be upset if Congress passes a constitutional amendment permitting prayer in public schools that is offensive to non-Christians and nonbelievers**

THE NEWSWEEK POLL, DEC. 27-28, 1994

### NEWSWEEK POLL

**73% would be upset if cutting back on government seriously weakens or eliminates environmental regulations**

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