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THE CONSERVATIVE OPPORTUNITY SOCIETY

Just as one person can look at a half glass of water and say it's half empty, and another can look at the same glass and say it's half full, so one observer can look at the world and see gloom and doom, and another can see hope. Democratic Convention Keynoter Mario Cuomo looks at the nation and sees "despair" and people who are "unlucky and leftout," but Congressman Newt Gingrich (speaking in San Francisco three days earlier) looks at the nation and sees "a window of opportunity."

Mario Cuomo's keynote address played to every fraction of our society as though it were a string on his violin, and he reminded them how unfortunate they are. He didn't say how he would better their lot in life, he merely commiserated with them.

Congressman Newt Gingrich, a former college professor whose district includes the Atlanta airport, was speaking to a conference called Family Forum III, a program which will be repeated the week before the Republican National Convention in Dallas. Gingrich spoke on behalf of a small group of Congressmen who call themselves the "Conservative Opportunity Society": Vin Weber, Ed Bethune, Dan Coats, Mickey Edwards, Judd Gregg, Duncan Hunter, Dan Lungren, Connie Mack, Mark Siljander, Barbara Vucanovich, and Bob Walker.

This "COS" group thinks that, if the aspirations and ambitions of the American people are geared to seeking solutions from government, they are doomed to dead-end jobs, fighting over handouts, and continuing power struggles over allocation of scarce resources. But, if we can factor in freedom and the innovation it produces, the exciting breakthroughs in computers, biology, and space will make possible new jobs and new adventures on a scale unimagined since Christopher Columbus discovered the New World.

This is what the COS group calls the "window of opportunity." The computer will open up changes in our lifestyle as great as the transformation which electricity brought about in our homes, our industries, our farms, and our communities.

Gingrich thinks that the exciting opportunities in biology will make it possible to banish hunger from the earth, that the exciting opportunities in space will open up new

jobs as well as banish the threat of nuclear war from the world, and that the exciting opportunities in computers and information science will allow us to work and to learn at home, thereby helping all Americans to live a better quality of life.

Gingrich gives an example of how the government bureaucracy is so backward compared to the innovation that is bursting forth in the private sector. If you have an account with one of the big money market firms, you can call a toll-free number, punch in your access code, and a computer will tell you your money balance and the interest rate you paid in the previous week and month.

But if you try to get information about the taxes you've paid into the Social Security system, you must write a letter. Months later you get a reply saying that the Social Security Administration is several years behind in processing such information.

As a historical example, Gingrich cites Senator Daniel Webster's speech to the U.S. Senate in 1850 against the annexation of California, denying that it was useful land, predicting that the agricultural products of California "never will be equal to the half part of those of the State of Illinois; no, nor yet a fourth, or perhaps a tenth part." Of course, California today is our premier agricultural state.

Webster was a learned man and splendid statesman, but he was not a prophet. He could not have foreseen what electricity, farm machinery, and irrigation could do for farming. All the more reason why our future should not be limited to the vision of politicians.

Gingrich thinks that, when those who dream are ignorant of technology, they envision a future in which we are running out of everything, in a world of rising pain as people outpopulate resources. They proclaim a limit on growth and a need for massive bureaucracy to spread the misery equitably. But there is no limit on our horizons if we build a philosophy of faith in the future and freedom in which to innovate and invest.

Our society is now being changed in tremendous ways by an information revolution based on the interaction of computers, cable and telephone wiring, satellite distribution for long-distance transmission, television and radio broadcasting, and the miniaturization of components and systems. This surge in communications and computers will allow work to be decentralized so that the young, the old and the handicapped will find useful employment, and all of us can enjoy a better life than we ever dreamed possible.