

# Newt Gingrich speaks on Capitol Hill in Second Life

## Launches series of “American Solutions” workshops

by Pollywog Gardenvale

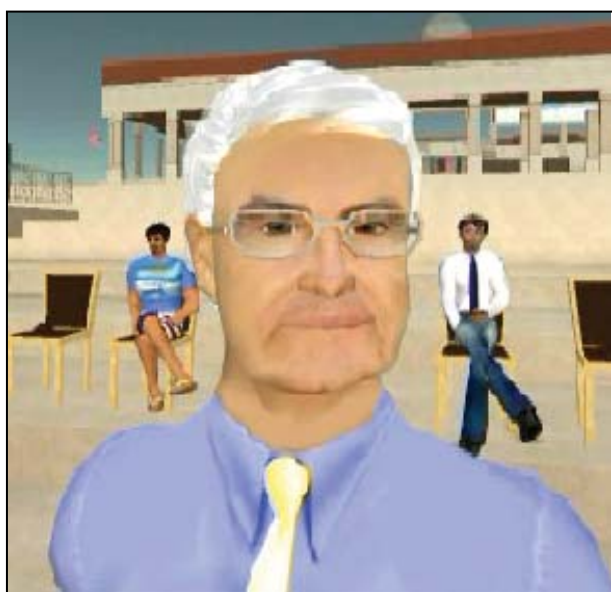


Second Life Capitol Hill is a nonpartisan region created by Clear Ink for the benefit of the Second Life community as a venue for political discussion and education.



Former Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, Newt Gingrich, speaks at the West Front of the U.S. Capitol in Second Life.

CAPITOL HILL—Security was tight Wednesday, September 26th, as Newt Gingrich, former Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, appeared live at the West Front of Capitol Hill in Second Life to launch a series of workshops to be produced by his organization, “American Solutions for Winning the Future.” The first workshop was scheduled to be held in Second Life later that evening, with another real world session two days later in Atlanta.



Newt Gingrich

Speaker Gingrich operated his own avatar as he flew to the steps and addressed the audience from the podium using Second Life voice technology. The audience included Republicans, Democrats, and journalists from both the real world (CNN, Reuters, and PR Newswire) and Second Life press, as well as avatars wearing everything from business attire and fairy wings to not much of anything at all. A limited number of protesters were allowed into the sim,

but were restricted to an area of lawn a short distance away.

The event was managed by Clear Ink, the Berkeley-based interactive agency that created the Capitol Hill sim. Security was provided by the Metaverse Mod Squad who added a touch of kick-butt glamour in a Diana Rigg (as Emma Peel in the Avengers) or Barbara Feldon (as Agent 99 in Get Smart) sort of way. (If those names don't ring a bell, think Lucy Liu, Drew Barrymore, and Cameron Diaz of Charlie's Angel's.) As moderators of the event, they hovered about as necessary to keep an eye on things.

This was a highly organized and well-orchestrated event with the feeling of an exploratory presidential campaign. When asked by avatar Kiwini Oe if he was, in fact, running for president, Speaker Gingrich replied, “My answer is ‘I don't know.’ I have been committed all year to focusing totally on American Solutions, which is a bipartisan series of workshops which we're having this evening and again on Saturday. After those are over, I'll start next Monday looking at it. But at the present time I am not a candidate, I'm focused totally on developing a bipartisan, collaborative approach to new ideas.”

Avatar Brodie Biddle pressed the issue further by asking, “You said you were going to run for the Republican nomination if your supporters could raise \$30 million dollars. Does this include Linden dollars?”

To which Speaker Gingrich replied, “No, and I'm not sure what the exchange rate is of Lindens to regular dollars, and we don't need to raise the money. I have said that Randy Evans will be starting next Monday to see if we can find pledges for \$30 million and if he can find that by October 21st, I will be glad to tackle the challenge of being a citizen leader. If they don't, I'm going to focus totally on the second annual American Solutions workshop in 2008 next September.

Then in a dramatic turnaround only three days later, Gingrich announced that he would not seek the Republican nomination for the President of the United States.

During a Sunday morning press conference, Gingrich explained that the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2001, (McCain-Feingold) requires that he step down from his position as Chairman of the American Solutions organization to conduct even an exploratory political campaign.

The law was designed to eliminate soft money contributions to political campaigns and to regulate advertising, but also redefines what constitutes coordination between candidates and outside groups. The law carries criminal penalties for anyone found to be in violation.

When asked how, at this late date, he did not know there was a conflict of interest, he explained that he came to understand the implications for the

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American Solutions organization only that morning.

He said that after working for over a year on the American Solutions effort, that he was not going to walk away. Then added, "I want to make sure that we create a new generation of solutions more than I want to be president."

It was clear from his speech on the steps of the Capitol in Second Life only three days earlier that he believes that 3D environments like Second Life will play a prominent role in the new generation of solutions he spoke about.

In the article, "Newt's Second Life On the cyber-stump" in the October 3, 2007 issue of *The Weekly Standard*, journalist Jonathan V. Last claims that Speaker Gingrich was quoting him when he said, "Second Life in many ways is the first successful manifestation of an idea known among futurists as a 'metaverse.' The metaverse—that is, a virtual world inhabited by real people—was pioneered in science fiction novels. Notably William Gibson's 1984 *Neuromancer*, and Neal Stephenson's 1992 *Snow Crash*. The first intellectual treatment of the metaverse came in the form of David Gelernter's 1994 book, *Mirror Worlds*."

Speaker Gingrich also referred to a possible project in the works with IBM to create a sub-division in Second Life called "Legislative Life" that would be offered to all 7,200 state legislators around the country.

"Imagine if every legislative committee that wanted to work on the environment, could get together in Second Life with his peers... without having to travel and fly. You would dramatically expand the rate of innovation and the rate of new ideas. So we are actively at American Solutions, going to be exploring metaverses and how we can develop these approaches to maximize the interaction of human beings with minimum travel."

Noting that Harvard law school professor Charles Nesson taught a class in Second Life about law and the court of public opinion, he continued,

"I think you're going to find more people engaged in study groups and in work groups in this kind of Second Life and other kinds of metaverse environments because they are so effective."

"It's important to realize that this is rapidly going to extend beyond gaming. As Second Life CEO Philip Rose-dale said in *Wired* magazine, 'I'm not building a game, I'm building a new country.' I think it's a parallel country. It's a parallel that enables us to do things that would be much more difficult to do in the real world." ❧

**EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW**

# Holding events on Capitol Hill

## Balancing free speech, security, and protesters

**Interview with Kiwini Oe of Clear Ink**

by Pollywog Gardenvale

Avatar Kiwini Oe is Steve Nelson, co-founder, Executive Vice President, and Chief Strategy Officer of Clear Ink, an interactive agency based in Berkeley, California.

**Pollywog:** I noticed in the Q&A that Speaker Gingrich mentioned that his organization rented the West Front of Capitol Hill, but then in the chat, TROI Timtam said that it had not been rented. Do you normally charge rent for the use of the facilities at Capitol Hill, and if so, was this a special arrangement?

**Kiwini:** Normally the Capitol Hill region is open and free for events. It's only been closed and invite-only twice: when it first opened in January and on Thursday. Usually people meet up there on their own, and in case of things that may need a watchful eye (like protests) or a sign or two built (like the ACLU event), we go ahead and do it.

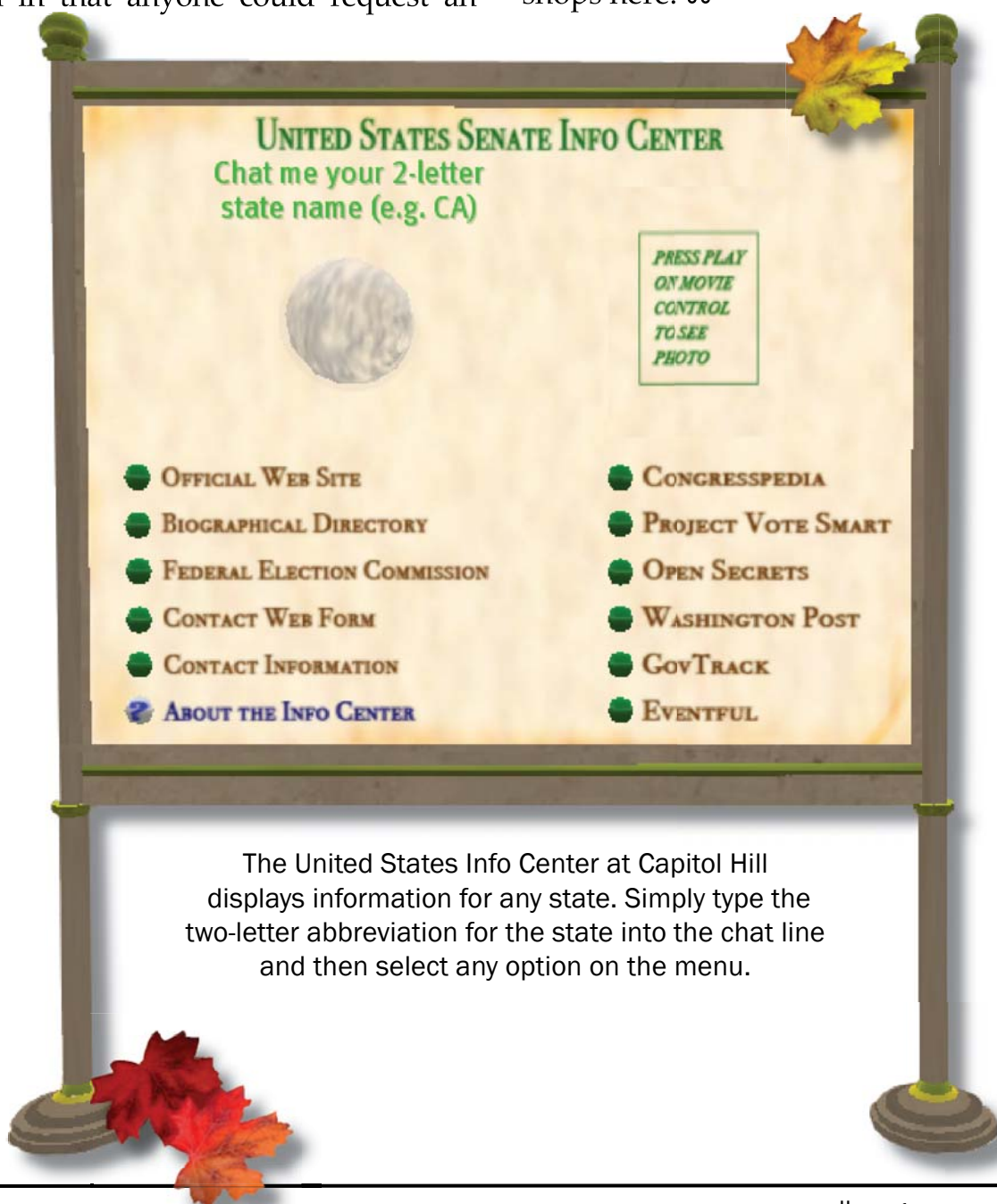
The Solutions Day event took more planning and management, and because of the expected capacity and security required, the venue was restricted to invitations and RSVPs. The event was open in that anyone could request an

invitation and most were granted if received in time. We talked to the protesters about possibly limiting their numbers just to keep balance with the people who wanted to be workshop attendees, and the press, organizers, security, etc.

I tried to strike the right balance with the protesters, and spent time meeting with them beforehand. They were very respectful about our concerns for grieving and we were clear with them about our commitment to free speech.

American Solutions paid for Clear Ink time to plan, organize, facilitate, manage, etc. but I don't consider that renting the space. All they paid for was our hours, and there deliberately wasn't any extra charge on the bill for space rental.

Because the opening of SL Capitol Hill in January was centered around the new congress and Speaker, and featured George Miller, there was a lot of talk that it was a Democratic party sim, or paid for by the Democrats, or that our agenda was biased. Subsequent uses of the venue for protests and Congressman Nadler and the ACLU reinforced this notion. That's why I was glad when we were approached by American Solutions about holding one of their workshops here. ❧



The United States Info Center at Capitol Hill displays information for any state. Simply type the two-letter abbreviation for the state into the chat line and then select any option on the menu.