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Freshman congressman set to make splash

FRESHMAN, From 1A

That quote is a reminder that Weldon, after all, is part of a screaming message voters sent this year by giving Republicans an overwhelming mandate.

He beat a better-known candidate, conservative Democrat Sue Manney, the former head of the Cocoa Beach Area Chamber of Commerce.

He is an unabashed supporter of Newt Gingrich, R-Ga., who has grabbed headlines of late for helping engineer the Republican landslide.

Weldon even signed Gingrich's Contract with America, a document that pledged to bring a laundry list of conservative issues to the House floor for a vote.

They found a balanced budget amendment and term limits. In turn, Gingrich, the next speaker of the House, stumped for Weldon in Melbourne.

"I realize he is bold and innovative," Weldon said. "When anybody who is bold and innovative makes a speech, it's easy to cut out and make them sound like a radical."

Still, it surprised Weldon that Gingrich seized on one of the most emotional issues in his moment here.

He was "uncomfortable" protesting outside of the Aware Women Center for Choice in Melbourne on the one occasion he tried.

So in 1990 Weldon helped found the Space Coast Family Forum, an advocacy group that supports candidates who oppose abortion and support family values.

Dana Gartzke, a former Harris County engineer who now is Weldon's top aide in Washington, D.C., and Ray Unterberger co-founded the group with him.

Unterberger's involvement in the group became troublesome when he began compiling an arrest record for illegal activities during abortion clinic protests, including one for adding to the delinquency of a minor.

Unterberger increasingly was involved in more radical organizations and left the Family Forum.

The group currently is inactive, but likely will reorganize under a different leader before the 1996 elections, Weldon said.

Manney tried to make abortion a major issue in the general election. She called Weldon an extremist for his abortion stance and used phrases such as radical right to describe his political philosophy.

Munsey declined to comment on Weldon for this article.

For his part, Weldon downplayed the abortion issue.

He characterized the issue as a difference of opinion, in as simple a

Faith and politics

That does not mean, however, he's willing to compromise his politics. For much of his politics are intertwined with his faith.

Weldon grew up Catholic on Long Island, N.Y., the only boy in a family of four. His mother was a public school foreign language teacher, his father a postal worker.

Through his education and his travels in the U.S. Army for six years, Weldon began to explore other faiths.

He and his wife, now members of the non-denominational Zion Christian Church in Palm Bay, sampled several different religions.

They attended a Catholic church during Weldon's residency in San Francisco and a Protestant congregation during his time in Fort Stewart, Ga.

Slowly they found themselves preferring a non-denominational church whose membership is predicated upon natural similarities in faith rather than dogma.

"The denomination thing is not that big a deal, we're just Christians," said Weldon, who grew up in a family that had a similar philosophy.

Weldon moved to Brevard County in 1987.

He soon became active in the Space Coast Family Forum, an advocacy group that supports candidates who oppose abortion and support family values.

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He characterized the issue as a difference of opinion, in as simple a

manner as people would disagree about how to reform health care or whether or not to pass a trade agreement.

That was the strategy adopted nationwide by the Republican Party this year. People who know him say that's Weldon's style, anyway.

Weldon's style

"It's quietly efficient," said Dr. Tim Poirier of Melbourne Internal Medicine Associates, who works closely with Weldon.

Both are doctors of internal medicine, and they take care of each other's patients when one is out of town.

Poirier is a registered Democrat. "That doesn't mean anything anymore," he said, only half joking. But he voted for Weldon and supported his campaign.

"He's very strong in his commitment, but he's never tried to force his beliefs on anyone else," said Poirier. "He's never pushed his abortion stance on anybody, or preached or anything like that."

Poirier describes Weldon as a hard worker and secondly Nancy Weldon's belief that helping people is Weldon's top motivation.

"To be honest, when I told me he was going to run, I didn't think he had a prayer of winning."

"He's not a one-issue candidate, and he must have gotten that point across to more than half the voters."

His issues

While some conservatives are criticized for being punitive, Weldon's friends and family say his philosophy is based in compassion.

That helps explain Weldon's penchant for quoting sources as varied as John F. Kennedy and Gingrich.

Helen Voltz, a registered nurse and Weldon's campaign manager, tells of a time in March of 1990 when Weldon paid her a surprise visit.

Her son, Norman, 18, had just died of cystic fibrosis.

Weldon, aware of the financial and emotional strain caused by such a loss, handed Voltz an envelope full of money.

"He said, 'You guys just need to get away for a while,'" Voltz recalls.

Weldon's political platform is based on the kind of support he practices, from charity work to activism to helping neighbors in a crisis.

Prior to his job offer, Weldon said, his primary service work was done with his church.

For example, he wants to reform the welfare system because the current system is a "trap," he said.

A reform would include some government benefits, but also

would call on more support from neighbors and family.

"I really believe the family values program he espoused during the campaign is important to him," Poirier said. "He thinks if we're going to fix problems, unless we get economic and family conditions better, we're not going to do anything."

Contrasts

So, Weldon is a "conservative Republican doctor"—three words that mean he's a dull, narrowly focused guy, right?

Nancy Weldon says anybody who tries to stereotype her husband is making a mistake.

She said Weldon has a broad range of interests, from music to art. Weldon plays the guitar in a church group and played the flute when he was younger.

That's one of the things I really liked about him. A lot of people who are scientific are kind of dry," she said.

On a trip to Paris, Nancy was amazed at how much her husband appreciated beauty.

He spent hours in the Louvre adoring the Mona Lisa and everything else there was to be seen.

"He's the kind of person that, if you went on a vacation, he would want to go to museums," Nancy said. "A lot of people just do it because it's something you are supposed to do."

Weldon's reading has focused on politics in recent years, including his regular fix of the *National Review*.

Some selections on his bookshelf include works by retired U.S. Army Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf, Winston Churchill and John Locke.

In his car you might find taped versions of *The Wealth of Nations* by Adam Smith or *The Communist Manifesto* by Karl Marx.

In other words, Weldon's interest in politics was not borne of his abortion beliefs, he said.

Before focusing on medical school, Weldon had considered law and a career in politics. He even thought about music as a profession.

Now he wants to be what he calls a "citizen legislator."

"If I have a career in politics, I want it to be punctuated by periods in which I go back to my medical practice," Weldon said.

While a congressman, he will see patients in his Melbourne office once a month, for several reasons.

It will help him maintain his

medical skills and his license, as well as provide some additional income.

Most of all, he says, it's because he enjoys it too much to give it up completely.

On to Washington

Weldon can't say how long he will be in politics. He has pledged to be a representative for no more than eight years.

Weldon already has found a rental home for his family in Alexandria, Va. Shortly after Christmas, they will tow a U-Haul trailer full of furniture up the East Coast.

Hardly a glamorous part of the job.

He's already enrolled in his adoptive daughter, Cate, 8, in school. Now it's time to report to Congress.

Weldon knows the first year of the Republican Revolution is critical.

He won't say the change has really taken effect, though, until the Republicans maintain control for four years or more and make their marks on the country.

"When I got in the race in May, I thought I was going to win. But I had no idea how sweeping the changes made by voters would be," said Weldon, noting the added responsibility of being in the running party.

"My vision was to go to Washington and battle the Democratic majority for what we need in the district," he said. "As a member of the minority party, I could always say the Democrats prevented me from doing it."

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