



**THE FDA WANTS
TO TAKE HIS
CIGARETTES.
Don't Let Them**

(PAID FOR BY THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY)

Mike Luckovich ATLANTA CONSTITUTION

The neo-nihilists in Congress

By Kenneth Janda

We can thank Ivan Turgenev, the prerevolutionary Russian writer, for helping us understand what has been going on in the House of Representatives. In his novel, "Fathers and Sons," Turgenev coined the term "nihilism" to describe the philosophy held by many Russian revolutionists who opposed the czar's government in the latter 1800s. Nihilists agreed on the need to destroy existing political institutions more than they agreed on anything constructive. In the words of Yevgeny Bazarov, the novel's protagonist, "At present the most useful thing of all is renunciation—we renounce!"

Bazarov's fervent nihilism is echoed by the Republican revolutionaries in Congress concentrated among 73 freshmen who provide House Speaker Newt Gingrich with muscle by their voices and votes. Like a chorus of Bazarovs, they renounce the government in Washington. More concerned with destroying than building, they have cut programs and slashed funding with little regard for public consequences.

Even when faced with a shutdown of government services to large segments of the public—even against the advice of their erstwhile leader—the freshmen revolutionaries stood steadfast. Their position was expressed by freshman Rep. David M. McIntosh of Indiana after a recent meeting with Gingrich, "We will not reopen the government."

Turgenev helps us understand that the neo-nihilists in Congress not only regard cutting the budget as an end in itself, but that they envisioned shutting down the government itself as a sublime achievement. They take as gospel Ronald Reagan's

comment in his inaugural address: "Government is not the solution to our problem. Government is the problem."

If government is the problem, the nihilists temporarily solved the problem by shutting it down. This explains why they were deaf to claims of the consequences: that federal courts would be unable to conduct trials; that agencies would cease enforcing standards for health and safety from meat inspection to earthquakes; that national support of scientific research would be interrupted; that U.S. and foreign travelers would be unable to obtain visas and passports; that medical and health services to the poor and elderly would be disrupted.

When one understands the nihilistic tendencies among the Republican revolutionaries, one understands their cavalier attitude toward the government shutdown. As expressed by freshman Representative Ray LaHood of Illinois, the best way to force the president to reach a balanced budget is "to hold his feet to the fire ... causing a lot of anxiety and heartburn by keeping the government shut down."

After all, if government is the problem, why all the fuss about shutting it down? Were he a Republican freshman in the U.S. House of Representatives, Bazarov would be at home among the neo-nihilists.

Kenneth Janda, a political scientist at Northwestern University, has been teaching American government for more than 25 years. He is co-author of the leading college textbook on American government, "The Challenge of Democracy."