

Gingrich Urges Weaker Gambling Review Bill

Speaker Opposes Subpoena Power for Panel

By Blaine Harden
Washington Post Staff Writer

House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) has recommended a substantial weakening of a bill to examine the runaway growth of legalized gambling in America.

Speaking Monday at a fund-raiser in a Las Vegas casino, where he raised \$70,000 for the reelection campaign of freshman Rep. John Ensign (R-Nev.), Gingrich said that a House bill to create a federal gambling commission should be modified so that the commission does not have the power to issue subpoenas.

The \$40-billion-a-year gambling industry, which recently has become a major donor to congressional Republicans and has hired a number of well-connected GOP lobbyists, fervently opposes subpoena powers for the commission. Casino interests claim that giving a panel such power would compromise confidential records and be an unwarranted abuse of federal power.

Gingrich said the gambling commission should only have the power to request that Congress issue a subpoena. The House bill, passed unanimously last month, would grant wide-ranging subpoena powers to a gambling commission. A similar bill has been mired in committee in the Senate for months, primarily because of objections raised by Nevada senators and casino lobbyists who oppose the powers of the proposed gambling commission.

The principal author of the House bill said yesterday that if Gingrich's proposal to modify the bill is approved it would mark "a major weakening" of the commission.

"My very strong and adamant position is that this commission ought to have and must have subpoena power if it is going to be able to do its job," Rep. Frank R. Wolf (R-Va.)

contributions in the nation today and getting bigger all the time."

"It is not unexpected that while receiving campaign contributions from the casino industry, Gingrich would not say anything that is critical of the industry," Simon added.

Gingrich made his remarks in a breakfast fund-raiser at the Mirage, one of the largest and most profitable casinos in Las Vegas. The night before the breakfast, according to Las Vegas newspapers, he had dinner with Steve Wynn, chairman of

Gingrich made his remarks during a fund-raiser at the Mirage casino in Las Vegas.

the board of Mirage Resorts and a major donor to GOP candidates.

Gambling industry critics draw an analogy between casinos and the tobacco industry, saying both have confidential and potentially damaging research data they want to hide. Estimates by nonindustry experts show that problem and compulsive gamblers, who account for about 5 percent of all players, contributed about a quarter of profits to casinos and state lotteries.

Anti-gambling activists believe an examination of casino records and business strategies would show how the gambling industry intentionally victimizes psychologically vulnerable people. The American Gaming Association, the Washington-based lobby for the casino industry, denies there is any such strategy. It claims the agenda behind the congressional inquiry is being driven by anti-gambling zealots of the religious right.

An aide in the speaker's office said yesterday that Gingrich was reconsidering the powers of the gambling commission because it was only after the bill was passed in March that "everyone said Holy Cow, this commission can go in and get any records it wants. . . . This is an extremely powerful and dangerous tool."

said. "To say that you have to come back to Congress for a subpoena . . . I don't even know how that could work. Come on, you can't do that."

Sen. Paul Simon (D-Ill.), key sponsor of a similar Senate bill, said yesterday that Gingrich's proposal to modify the powers of the gambling commission marked a setback to a bipartisan effort in Congress to examine an industry that has become "one of big forces of political contri-