

Gingrich Says Clinton Misleads Elderly

Speaker Attacks Democrats' Criticism of GOP Medicare Proposals

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House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.), continuing the Republican Party's effort to impugn President Clinton's integrity, yesterday accused the president and the Democrats of deceit and immorality in the partisan battle over Medicare reform.

In appearances before Republican Party leaders and on NBC's "Meet The Press," Gingrich said Clinton "has systematically, consistently for six months said false things" about Republican proposals to slow the growth of Medicare, and when asked directly whether he believes Clinton is "a man of integrity who tells the truth," he replied, "No."

"The job of the president of the United States is to lead the American people, not to mislead them," Gingrich said during a GOP luncheon at which the controversial speaker was greeted with several standing ovations and sustained applause.

The White House sent out a response to Gingrich via national economic adviser Laura D'Andrea Tyson, calling on Gingrich to join Clinton in reaching agreement on a balanced budget. "Speaker Gingrich should drop the political attacks and look at the facts," her statement said, adding that various medical and elderly organizations also have described the Republican Medicare changes as "cuts."

Gingrich said "it is shameful to have a president of the United States base a large part of his campaign on frightening 75- and 85-

year-old Americans with false information" about the Republican proposals on Medicare, the government program that pays hospital and doctor bills for the elderly and disabled.

He likened the administration's tactics to those of con artists preying on elderly citizens. "What is the moral difference between deceiving somebody for their money and deceiving somebody for their vote?" he asked.

Gingrich said his own current unpopularity stems from mistakes he made and the pounding he has received from television advertisements that have run in scores of congressional districts around the country. But he predicted that the Democratic strategy of trying to turn the fall presidential election into a referendum on his record, rather than a contest between Clinton and Senate Majority Leader Robert J. Dole, will fail.

"They can try to make me radioactive, as you put it," Gingrich said on NBC's "Meet the Press." "We [Republicans] tried that with [the late House speaker Thomas P.] Tip O'Neill [Jr.]. We didn't get control of the House. We tried that with [former House speaker] Jim Wright until he had to resign. We didn't get control."

Gingrich said that by this fall he will be a secondary figure in the public dialogue, but said it is emblematic of the Democrats' "inability to take Dole on personally head-to-head that they want to somehow rap me."

In his speech to GOP leaders, Gingrich continued to take issue with

the organizers of Saturday's "Stand for Children" march in Washington. "I have every agreement with the heart of yesterday's gathering and every disagreement with the analysis of many of the organizers," he said.

Gingrich said the nation "has an obligation" to help provide every child in America with the opportunity to succeed, but contended that it is fruitless to continue to pursue old policies because "the welfare state doesn't work" to protect children.

"We would say to our friends on the left, 'If something hasn't worked after \$7 trillion has been spent on it, maybe it's because it doesn't work,'" he said.

Gingrich said the differences between Republicans and Democrats are "profound and simple" and will be the basis of the fall elections. "This is a key test of the 1996 campaign," he said. "Which way are we going to go and how are we going to get there?"

On the issue of same-sex marriages, Gingrich said he would not attend such a ceremony if his sister, Candace, who is gay, married another woman. "In the first place, I wouldn't regard it as a marriage," he said. "I think a marriage is between a man and a woman."

Gingrich said he has been with his sister "when she's had her girlfriends with her" and was not offended by that. "But I think it's different to say what standard do you set as a society, what do you mean by family, and what is best for children," he added.