

Panel Rejects New Probe of Gingrich Backer

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The House ethics committee voted yesterday against a further probe of a telecommunications entrepreneur's volunteer service in the office of House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) but admonished Gingrich about how he runs his office.

In March, the panel ruled that Donald G. Jones's role in Gingrich's office violated House rules but did not discipline the speaker.

The panel acted yesterday after the House turned back a Democratic attempt to direct the ethics committee to release its outside counsel's summary of evidence on whether a college course Gingrich taught violated federal tax law.

The ethics committee said it would not reopen the case of Jones, a GOP donor whose holdings include cable television systems and a service that sells Internet access, and his volunteer service in Gingrich's office.

In April, Rep. George Miller (D-Calif.), who brought the earlier ethics complaint involving Jones, asked the

panel to reopen the matter in light of news reports that Jones was more involved in advising on telecommunications issues than had been reported.

Yesterday, the ethics panel concluded the matter "does not merit further inquiry." But the panel also told Gingrich that "your conduct of allowing the routine presence in your office of Mr. Jones demonstrates a continuing pattern of lax administration and poor judgment."

In the past, the panel has admonished Gingrich for allowing political adviser Joseph Gaylord to work out of the speaker's office in violation of House rules, but took no disciplinary action.

Tony Blankley, the speaker's press secretary, issued a statement encouraging the committee "to dismiss the rest of the complaints against the speaker expeditiously."

Those other complaints include allegations that Gingrich used his college course, which was funded with tax-deductible charitable contributions, to further a partisan agenda in violation of federal tax law.

Earlier, the House voted 225 to

179 to block a resolution offered by Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.) calling on the ethics committee to release a report from its outside counsel on that matter. Ten lawmakers, most of them ethics committee members, voted "present."

Republicans engineered the defeat after voting 395 to 9, with 10 voting "present," to kill a resolution brought in an admitted act of retaliation by Rep. John Linder (R-Ga.), a Gingrich ally, that would have had an outside counsel appointed to investigate real estate deals by House Minority Leader Richard A. Gephardt (D-Mo.).

Gingrich and other House GOP leaders have said the ethics committee should be allowed to continue both probes without interference.

Democrats said they would file motions to force additional votes on releasing the report. Moreover, House Minority Whip David E. Bonior (D-Mich.) said Democratic challengers should raise the Gingrich issue in their campaigns. The matter "goes to the integrity of the House of Representatives and its leaders," he said. "It's a major issue."