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DeLay: Gingrich won't abandon post

WASHINGTON (AP) - In the face of mounting evidence the ethics storm swirling around Newt Gingrich may be eroding his support among Republicans, House Majority Whip Tom DeLay flatly predicted the Georgian will not step down from his post as House speaker.

"Newt Gingrich is not going to step aside - I'm absolutely confident of that," Mr. DeLay said Sunday. "He will be elected (speaker) on Jan. 7."

Mr. DeLay's remarks on NBC's "Meet The Press" came after a week in which Republicans began voicing unease about the House ethics committee's probe of Mr. Gingrich. The speaker has admitted filing inaccurate statements to the panel regarding a college course he once taught at a small Georgia college.

Mr. Gingrich and other Republican leaders are calling on the panel

to make a decision on what penalty, if any, should be levied against the speaker on or before Jan. 7, when the House convenes to elect leaders for the 105th Congress.

If the panel - and the full House - should take the unlikely step of voting for censure, Mr. Gingrich would be stripped of his speakership. An official reprimand, the most lenient penalty available, would not require Mr. Gingrich to quit the leadership.

Political costs associated with a prolonged public airing of the panel's findings on Mr. Gingrich, however, could diminish the speaker's power. That explains in part why Republicans are eager to put the two-year ethics investigation behind them.