

Ethics Panel Deliberations To Follow Leadership Vote

Gingrich Punishment May Be Decided Jan. 21

By Helen Dewar
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The House ethics committee announced yesterday it will begin deliberating on punishment for admitted ethical breaches by House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) next Wednesday, the day after the House votes on whether to retain Gingrich as speaker.

The schedule, worked out in several days of telephone conference calls by committee leaders, means the House will be voting on Gingrich's fate as speaker before knowing the severity of the punishment that the committee will recommend.

Some Republicans have expressed qualms about having to do so, and yesterday the two GOP members of the ethics subcommittee that investigated allegations against the speaker took steps to reassure nervous colleagues by declaring they will vote for Gingrich's reelection.

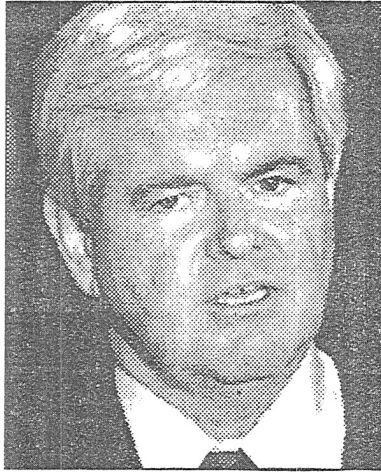
"We know of no reason now, nor do we foresee any in the normal course of events in the future, why Newt Gingrich would be ineligible to serve as speaker," Reps. Porter J. Goss (Fla.) and Steven Schiff (N.M.) said in a letter to House GOP Whip Tom DeLay (Tex.).

This implied the committee was unlikely to recommend any sanction serious enough to require that Gingrich be stripped of his leadership job, suggesting the likelihood of a reprimand by the House, which many Republicans have been predicting.

Goss and Schiff said they were disclosing their intentions because they had hoped the Gingrich case would be closer to resolution by now and because "we believe it would be valuable for members to have as much information as possible before the vote for speaker." While House rules prohibit discussion of matters pending before the committee, they do not bar anyone from discussing a leadership vote, they said.

Their letter was promptly circulated by DeLay to GOP House members.

Gingrich admitted Dec. 21 to violating House ethics rules in providing inaccurate information to investigators and failing to seek the legal advice nec-



FILE PHOTO

SPEAKER NEWT GINGRICH

... endorsed by GOP panel members

investigative subcommittee. While committee Chairman Nancy L. Johnson (R-Conn.) said she wanted to reach a decision before the speakership vote, ranking committee Democrat Jim McDermott (Wash.) said there was no time for careful and complete review of the evidence.

The schedule released yesterday by Johnson and McDermott anticipates a two-week process concluding Jan. 21 with final action by the House on punishment for the speaker, which, under House rules, could range from a reprimand to censure to expulsion.

The committee will meet in closed session next Wednesday to receive the findings of the four-member investigative panel and to vote on accepting Gingrich's waiver of a trial by the full committee, which sources said was a formality required by the House parliamentarian. Between now and then, members will review the subcommittee's findings.

The committee will hold a public session—which sources said could start Jan. 9 or 13—to receive "submissions" by special committee counsel James M. Cole and Gingrich's attorney on the punishment the committee should recommend to the House. At the end of the hearing, the committee will meet in private to reach a decision.

Johnson and McDermott also said the House is expected to adopt rules when it formally reconvenes Tuesday to continue the current committee in operation until Jan. 21, resolving a problem created by the fact that many of the panel's members do not want to continue serving on it in the next Congress.

essary to assure that he complied with laws barring use of tax-exempt funds for political purposes. The case arose from a course Gingrich taught at two Georgia colleges.

But the full 10-member ethics committee has not reviewed all the information compiled by the four-member