

Challengers Highlight Gingrich Probe

House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) isn't the only GOP lawmaker feeling the heat from Democrats over the House ethics committee's investigation into his actions. Democratic candidates challenging at least two Republicans on the panel are trying to make the lengthy probe an issue in their uphill races.

In Connecticut, Democrat Charlotte Koskoff is pressing Rep. Nancy L. Johnson (R), head of the ethics committee, to release outside counsel James M. Cole's report on whether Gingrich violated federal tax laws by using tax-deductible charitable contributions to further partisan goals through a college course he taught.

Gingrich has repeatedly denied doing anything wrong.

Noting the committee's protracted consideration of the complaints against Gingrich, Koskoff, a Plainville, Conn., attorney, has been calling her opponent "Stonewall Johnson" and said she has turned the ethics committee into the "Gingrich Protection Committee."

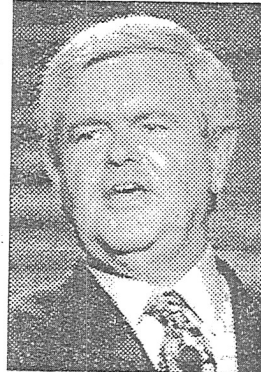
Johnson has defended the committee's probe, saying it is following "the process required by our rules, which govern our work." The ethics committee is made up of five Republicans and five Democrats.

Johnson defeated Koskoff in 1994 with 64 percent of the vote and is favored to win an eighth term this fall.

In New Mexico, meanwhile, investment banker John Wertheim has leveled similar criticisms at Rep. Steven Schiff (R), a member of the ethics panel's subcommittee investigating the complaint against Gingrich. "It's Steve Schiff's job to make sure that Gingrich is held to the highest standards," he said. "Instead he's falling down on the job."

Schiff has said he cannot comment on the specifics of the subcommittee's work, citing the panel's confidentiality rules, but he said the panel is following its rules.

Schiff, who has never been reelected with less than 63 percent of the vote, is favored to win a fifth term in his district, which is centered around Albuquerque.



GINGRICH