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Gingrich Probe May Outlast Congress

Ethics Chair Inquires About Meeting After Fall Adjournment

By John E. Yang
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Two years after the first ethics complaint was filed against him, a House ethics committee investigation still looms over House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) amid signs the matter may not be resolved before Congress heads home for the fall campaigns later this month.

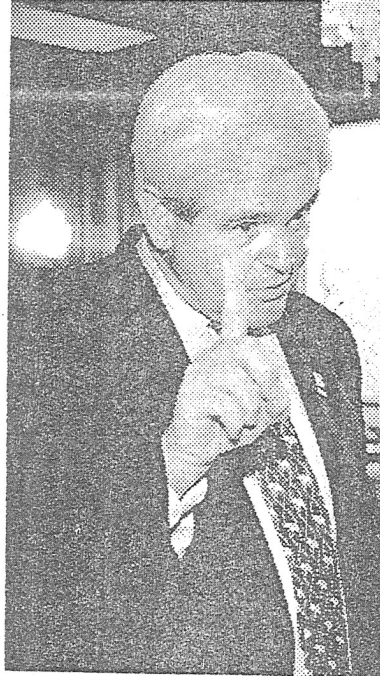
House Majority Leader Richard K. Armey (R-Tex.) said yesterday that Rep. Nancy L. Johnson (R-Conn.), the ethics committee's chairman, had asked to meet with him to discuss whether the panel could meet after Congress adjourns.

"It is my understanding that the committee can meet after adjournment," Armey said at his weekly briefing for reporters. "We want to make sure that parliamentary rulings are complete and reliable."

Because all members of the 10-member panel, which is equally divided between Republicans and Democrats, are candidates for reelection Nov. 5, it is unlikely they would meet during October, putting off a resolution of the investigation until after the elections.

James M. Cole, the Washington white-collar criminal attorney the committee hired to assist in the investigation, has submitted his report on whether Gingrich violated federal tax laws by using tax-deductible charitable contributions to further his political agenda through a college course he taught at two Georgia schools from 1993 to 1995. Armey said he did not know whether the report exonerates or implicates the speaker.

Earlier this week, officials at the two Georgia schools, Kennesaw State University and Reinhardt College, acknowl-



BY RAY LUSTIG—THE WASHINGTON POST

Speaker Gingrich criticized IRS audit of the college courses he taught.

edged that the Internal Revenue Service is conducting a separate audit of the course, which was financed by tax-deductible donations, to determine whether it met IRS rules for tax-exempt activities.

If the IRS determines the course violates tax rules, it could revoke the tax deductibility of the two groups that financed the course, the Kennesaw State University Foundation and the Progress and Freedom Foundation, a conservative think tank run by Gingrich allies.

The IRS audit was reported Tuesday by the Associated Press.

Gingrich has steadfastly denied doing anything wrong and has said the questions about his ethics are politically mo-

tivated. Last month, he said Democrats had "become sort of the anti-Newt party" as they seek to "demonize" him in this fall's campaigns.

Yesterday he criticized the IRS audit of his course, "Renewing American Civilization."

"I think it is a fascinating issue to have the power of the federal government come down on one course. . . ." Gingrich said. "Have you ever, anywhere in your life heard of one course being audited? You call the IRS, ask them their guidelines, ask how many colleges they've audited one course in."

Armey said Coles's report has been referred to the committee's investigative subcommittee made up of two Republicans and two Democrats. Under committee rules, the subcommittee will decide whether to draw up a Statement of Alleged Violation based on the report. If that happens, Gingrich would have 30 days to respond—already taking the process beyond the scheduled adjournment.

Then the six panel members not on the subcommittee would hold hearings to determine whether the allegations "have been proved by clear and convincing evidence. The full committee would then recommend a sanction, subject to approval by the House.

This whole process was launched Sept. 7, 1994, as part of a House campaign, as former representative Ben Jones (D-Ga.) filed the first ethics complaint as he was running against Gingrich in that year's election.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To read the House ethics manual, click on the above symbol on the front page of The Post's site on the World Wide Web at

<http://www.washingtonpost.com>