

Gingrich Reelected GOP Leader

In Conciliatory Speech, House Speaker Vows A Different Approach

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By John E. Yang
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House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) was unanimously reelected the House Republicans' leader yesterday and promised a conciliatory approach in dealing with the Clinton administration that was in sharp contrast to the uncompromising chord he struck when his party took control of Congress two years ago.

"We find ourselves here with a Democratic president and a Republican Congress and we have an absolute moral obligation to make this system work," he said. "If the last Congress was the 'Confrontation Congress,' this Congress will be the 'Implementation Congress.'"

A perfunctory party line vote on Jan. 7 will make Gingrich the first Republican in 68 years to serve as speaker for more than one term. But in an emotional 25-minute acceptance speech, Gingrich frankly acknowledged his shortcomings as party leader and party spokesman and he already has signaled that he intends to turn back some of the power he had concentrated in the speaker's office in 1995 to committee chairmen.

"This will be a different Congress; therefore, as speaker I'll probably function a little differently," Gingrich told reporters afterward.

It was, the speaker said, a "bittersweet day." Hours before Gingrich was reelected by his colleagues, Robert Gingrich, the 71-year-old retired Army officer who adopted Gingrich when he was 3, died of lung

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cancer, on his mother's birthday. "That makes it hard," he said.

Gingrich appeared to be fighting back tears as he approached the lectern in the Cannon Caucus Room. His voice choked with emotion and he wiped his eyes as he thanked his wife, Marianne, for enduring his opponents' assaults over the last two years.

Recalling his father's Army career, which so shaped the speaker's fascination with the military, Gingrich said House Republicans had "a great obligation to reflect on duty, honor, country as we work together. . . . We bear the unusual burden of reaching out to a Democratic president and saying, 'Together, we are in fact going to find common ground.'"

Gingrich's call for bipartisanship was echoed by other Republican leaders.

Rep. Richard K. Arney (R-Tex.), reelected majority leader without opposition, urged his colleagues: "Let's put rancor aside and manage our disappointments and even manage, on our side, our exuberance. Let's respect one another."

The theme was sounded as well by Democrats. On the other side of the Capitol, Senate Minority Leader Thomas A. Daschle (D-S.D.) said the

ard A. Gephardt (D-Mo.) sounded skeptical. "The only thing that counts is action, not words," he said. "The proof is in the doing not in the saying."

Gingrich, who wrote that he decided to dedicate his life to "the cause of freedom" when he was 15, framed the urgency of working together in global terms, rejecting "any suggestion of isolationism. . . . Our goal is not to withdraw from multinational efforts, it is to ensure that they are managed intelligently and properly."

House Republicans "have to work with this president to find a new framework for American leadership on the planet," he said. "In all honesty, there is no other country capable of leadership."

Last year, Gingrich refrained from speaking out in support of Clinton's use of U.S. forces in Bosnia when it became clear the bulk of the House GOP opposed it.

Gingrich also called on House Republicans to work to balance the budget, cut taxes, improve education and health care, curb drug use, protect the environment and make Washington "the finest capital city in the world."

The speaker avoided such contentious social and cultural issues as abortion and school prayer that motivate



BY RAY LUSTIG—THE WASHINGTON POST

At GOP news conference are Reps. Arney, Gingrich, Jennifer Dunn and DeLay.

new Congress presents "an historic opportunity for Democrats and Republicans to work together" on issues from the budget to campaign finance reform.

Daschle said he has been encour-

aged by amicable conversations with Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott (R-Miss.) and by signs Gingrich "wants to be a different speaker than he was two years ago."

Only House Minority Leader Rich-

many conservative House Republicans.

Many House Republicans acknowledge having mixed emotions about the speaker. While he masterminded the GOP's return to the majority in the House in 1994 after four decades of Democratic rule, he also threatened the party's gains by appearing to be petty by complaining about the way Clinton treated him aboard Air Force One and by being outmaneuvered in budget talks with the president.

In addition, a House ethics subcommittee is still gathering information it its investigation of whether college courses Gingrich taught were used as political organizing tools. A handful of House GOP lawmakers called on Gingrich to step aside until the matter is resolved, but the effort never gained momentum.

"I made a few big errors," Gingrich acknowledged in his speech. "I was both the speaker of the House and our leading advocate and some days I didn't do it very well."

Yesterday, lawmakers focused on the positive. Playing off the speaker's leadership mantra of "listen, learn, help and lead," Rep. J.C. Watts (R-Okla.) nominated Gingrich by saying, "Newt has done a wonderful job over the last two years listening to us all,

helping us all, encouraging us to learn from the process and he has boldly led."

House Republicans also reelected their entire leadership team without opposition, including House Majority Whip Tom DeLay (Tex.) and House Republican Conference Chairman John A. Boehner (Ohio), the top non-Southerner in the leadership.

In their organizational meetings, House Democrats elected Rep. John M. Spratt Jr. (S.C.), a moderate, to be their top member on the House Budget Committee. Spratt defeated the more liberal Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (N.Y.) on a 106 to 83 vote. Rep. Henry B. Gonzalez (Tex.), elected this month to a 19th House term, held on to his spot as the House Banking Committee's top Democrat, turning back challenges from Reps. John J. LaFalce (N.Y.) and Bruce F. Vento (Minn.).

Staff writers Helen Dewar and Eric Pianin contributed to this report.

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