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Gingrich Investigation

■ Democratic leaders want to allow current members of the House ethics committee to finish their investigation of House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) before they rotate off the committee. Under this plan, a second committee composed of new members would consider any other ethics matters that arise in the meantime, according to the Democratic proposal.

House Majority Leader Richard K. Armey (R-Tex.) and House Minority Leader Richard A. Gephardt (D-Mo.) discussed that option in a meeting yesterday but made no decisions. They are to meet again early next month.

"We intend to make every effort to find a fair, impartial and bipartisan solution," Armey and Gephardt said in a joint statement.

The leaders are grappling with what to do about seven of the 10 House ethics committee members who will have served three terms on the panel—the maximum length of service House rules allow—when the current Congress goes out of existence in January.

Committee Republicans, including chairman Rep. Nancy L. Johnson (Conn.), have said they would like to leave the panel as soon as possible. Democratic leaders say they are worried that handing the Gingrich case to a new committee would lead to further delays.

The committee, assisted by Washington lawyer James M. Cole, has been looking into whether the speaker improperly used tax-deductible charitable contributions to further a partisan, political goal. The panel also is investigating whether Gingrich provided accurate statements to the committee.

Gingrich has steadfastly denied any wrongdoing.

—John E. Yang