



BY RAY LUSTIG—THE WASHINGTON POST

Rep. Jim McDermott has been told that the case files are "voluminous."

Swift Vote on Gingrich

Ethics Panel's Senior Democrat Says Resolution Is Unlikely

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The senior Democrat on the House ethics committee joined other members of his party yesterday in throwing a major roadblock in the way of Republican hopes of resolving the ethics case of Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) by early next week.

Rep. Jim McDermott (D-Wash.), ranking minority member of the House Committee on Standards of Official Conduct, said it would be "almost impossible" for the panel to recommend appropriate disciplinary action against

the embattled Gingrich before the House reconvenes Jan. 7 to elect its speaker.

Republicans yesterday continued to insist on a speedy resolution of the case and accused Democrats of trying to drag it out to divert attention from controversy over President Clinton's pursuit of campaign contributions, including allegations that the Democratic National Committee illegally accepted foreign funds.

"They want to keep Newt . . . in the public eye as long as Clinton is being accused of laundering money," Rep. John Linder (R-Ga.), a leading Gingrich defender, said on "Fox News Sunday."

Faces Hurdle

Before Election of Speaker

Although at least eight Republicans said recently they want more information before deciding how to vote, GOP leaders denied any deterioration in Republican support for Gingrich, who on Dec. 21 admitted to violating House ethics rules in connection with a college course that he taught. GOP leaders also predicted Gingrich will easily be reelected speaker and brushed aside suggestions that he might step down.

"We have seen no erosion whatsoever," House GOP Whip Tom DeLay (Tex.) said on NBC's "Meet the Press." DeLay said Gin-

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GINGRICH, From A1

grich's troubles arise out of "blatant partisan politics" and said Republicans will reelect him, even if his case is not resolved by Jan. 7. "Democrats have been screaming about 'get it over with, get it over with.' Let's get it over with," DeLay said.

But Rep. Peter T. King (R-N.Y.), who after Gingrich's admission rallied behind the speaker despite earlier reservations, said Saturday that a dozen of his colleagues are "very nervous" and added: "If any more serious revelations come out, it's going to be very difficult for him to be re-elected." With Republicans controlling the House, 227 to 208, Gingrich could lose if 20 Republicans refused to vote for him.

Many Democrats said Gingrich will eventually have to resign, and some leading conservatives have recently called on him to step down or at least consider doing so, including New York Times columnist William Safire and Judicial Watch Chairman Larry Klayman. Paul M. Weyrich, a Gingrich mentor who heads the Free Congress Foundation, has also said conservatives are troubled.

They were joined yesterday by conservative hero and unsuccessful Supreme Court nominee Robert H. Bork, who said Gingrich's offense was "mild" but that he should "consider stepping aside on the grounds that he can't be effective as speaker."

Gingrich "began that in the last term, when the Republicans became unpopular, he began cozying up to the Democrats and downplaying their divisions," Bork said on "ABC This Week." It would be "very unfortunate . . . if he went into the second term and did the same thing and did not advance conservative causes aggressively," Bork added.

Democrats noted that Gingrich, arguing that a speaker should be held to the highest standards, spearheaded an ethics challenge to then-House Speaker Jim Wright (D-Tex.), who subsequently resigned. Gingrich should apply the same standards to himself, Democrats said. Wright, appearing on ABC, said Gingrich "will have to examine his own conscience" about what to do.

It was the second Sunday in a row that Republicans and Democrats took to the television talk shows to argue about the seriousness of the rules violations to which Gingrich admitted. They involve the use of tax-exempt funds to finance a col-

lege course, which he told donors would be a recruitment tool for Republican candidates and workers, and contradictory statements he gave the ethics committee about the involvement of his political action committee in developing the course.

Republicans insisted again yesterday these were technical violations deserving only mild sanction, while Democrats argued they were so serious that Gingrich should step down at least temporarily as speaker.

In a telephone interview from Florence, Italy, where he is on vacation, McDermott said the ethics committee deliberations should "be as speedy as possible, [but] I'd be surprised if we could make a



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REP. TOM DELAY

... "let's get it over with"

thoughtful, intelligent judgment in less than a week or two."

McDermott said he expected to have another phone conference today with the committee chairman, Rep. Nancy L. Johnson (R-Conn.), and its special counsel, James Cole, and was prepared to return to Washington "as soon as the process has been decided" instead of waiting another week, as he had planned. "I'm not intending to hold it up," he said, "but I don't think this can be over in one hearing on one day."

The ethics committee is composed of five members of each party, so Johnson must win the concurrence of at least one Democrat to move into the punishment phase of the case. She said Friday she hoped to conclude the case this week.

But McDermott said that he and five other committee members were "shielded from all information" while the four other members worked with Cole to develop facts on the complex financial transactions and determine that there was reasonable cause to believe Gingrich violated House rules.

The procedure, McDermott said, "envisaged that the other six of us would participate in an adjudicatory process, judging whether there was clear and convincing evidence such a violation had taken place. But the speaker short-circuited that by saying he agreed with the statement of charges."

"At this point, none of the six of us is clear what really occurred. If there are to be public hearings before we set the speaker's punishment, we have to be prepared to ask intelligent questions of Mr. Cole and the speaker's attorney and the speaker himself, if he chooses to appear."

McDermott said he had been told by another member of the ethics committee that the files and notebooks they have to review are "voluminous," adding, "It's very hard to see how that can be done next week, and the parliamentarian has advised us that the committee ceases to exist at noon Friday, Jan. 3," the last day of the 104th Congress.

Complicating the situation is the unresolved question of whether the current committee members will

continue to serve in the next Congress. McDermott and other Democrats have said they want to remain and finish the Gingrich case, but several Republicans, including Johnson, want off the committee, and leaders of the two parties have not reached agreement on a solution.

When McDermott was asked what he thought the House should do on Jan. 7 if the ethics question has not been decided, he said: "That is up to the Republican leadership. The Republicans clearly have the votes to do whatever they want to do. But the election of a speaker should not become the force that drives the ethics committee to make an ill-considered decision."

Republicans have been pressing for ethics committee action by Jan. 7, believing the panel will not discipline Gingrich severely enough to jeopardize his reelection as speaker. And they want a quick end to the whole ordeal.

King suggested one reason for speed. He was taping a New York television show with two Democratic lawmakers, and, before he could make his case against Clinton on campaign funding abuses, the Democrats "came right back with Gingrich," King said. "Every day, very

serious revelations are coming out on Clinton, and we're totally incapable of taking advantage of them. In the public eye, these things become equal," he argued.

The difficulty was apparent in an exchange yesterday between Reps. Christopher Shays (R-Conn.) and John Lewis (D-Ga.) on CBS's "Face the Nation." Shays contended that administration improprieties make Gingrich "look like a saint." Lewis responded by accusing Gingrich of using tax-exempt contributions meant for unprivileged children for political purposes. "That's like taking money for the Salvation Army . . . and [using] it for political campaigning," Lewis said.

Democratic strategist Robert Shrum suggested another set of problems for the Republicans. Keeping Gingrich "makes him an issue in the 1998 midterm campaigns," which will help Democrats, Shrum said on the Fox show. But getting rid of him means choosing a successor, possibly House Majority Leader Richard K. Armey (R-Tex.), who "makes Newt look like Mother Teresa" by comparison, Shrum added.

Staff writer Michael Weisskopf contributed to this report.