

# Gingrich Plans to End Daily News Briefings

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House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) has tentatively decided to end his practice of holding daily news conferences while Congress is in session.

Spokesman Tony Blankley said yesterday that he "expects" the speaker to discontinue the practice and that other formats, perhaps involving other Republican leaders, are being considered. Gingrich's daily briefings have attracted an unusual degree of attention because he has allowed C-SPAN to broadcast them.

"Some of the questioning was a tad flamboyant and got in the way of serious discussion of the news," Blankley said. "It provided an opportunity for obscure journalists to come in and harangue him on their pet points. He was just too juicy a target for some of these folks to resist."

In March, Pacifica radio reporter Amy Goodman asked why Gingrich did not "apologize to American women" for calling Hillary Rodham Clinton a name recounted by his mother. When Gingrich tried to deflect the question, Goodman said: "You're calling your mother a liar then?"

"No, I'm calling you a remarkably foolish person," Gingrich replied.

The daily sessions have been a

House tradition for at least 30 years, and Blankley said Gingrich would remain accessible and was not trying to tighten control over his image. "There is always a balance between what an official wants to say and what a reporter wants to ask," he said.

Mike Christensen of the Atlanta Journal and Constitution, chairman of the congressional Standing Committee of Correspondents, called the move "extremely unfortunate," saying: "It's a point of access to the speaker on the important issues of the day. It would put him on the same footing as the White House, where you may or may not get crumbs from the press office."

Kenan Block, a "MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour" producer, said the briefings benefited Gingrich and the press. But, he said, "there may have been a feeling [among Republicans] that he was crowding out some of the attention they wanted to disperse to other members. Newt is not good at holding his tongue. It's hard to keep Newt on message."

Democratic media consultant Mandy Grunwald said the sessions sometimes hurt Gingrich "because he tends to talk before he thinks. Your job as a politician is to make news on what you want, not from some explosion at some reporter who annoyed you that morning."