

'Too Busy' for GOPAC

Gingrich Stepping Down From Political Group

5/4/95
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House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) said yesterday he is relinquishing the chairmanship of GOPAC, the engine behind his national fund-raising network and a training tool he credits for sending a new generation of Republicans to Congress and city halls and statehouses across the country.

Gingrich, who in recent weeks has shed outside interests such as a college course he taught on weekends, said he was "just too busy" to be "general" chairman of the GOP political action committee that raised millions of dollars for candidate training but also emerged last year as a focus of one of the ethics complaints against him.

The speaker had signaled his intention last fall to resign as chairman and over the weekend made it official in private conversations with donors. A GOPAC spokeswoman said about five House members are being considered

for the job and the selection process will begin in earnest later this month.

In an interview, Gingrich also called on GOPAC to account more fully for its roughly \$2 million in annual income, saying it should model itself after the Republican National Committee in publicly disclosing precisely where it raises funds—nearly \$490,000 in the first three months of 1995.

"They were clumsy in how they went through it," Gingrich said of GOPAC's first two rounds of financial disclosure, which were criticized for being short on detail and in some instances misleading.

"Frankly, never having done it before, I think they didn't take enough time to sit down with the RNC and look at the system the RNC uses, and I've encouraged them to do precisely what the RNC does," he said.

The Republican National Committee, like its Democratic counterpart
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and other political organizations, regularly itemizes its expenses and individual contributors of \$200 or more and files the information with the Federal Election Commission, where it is readily available to the public.

GOPAC, by contrast, did not reveal donors during most of Gingrich's tenure as chairman, and the FEC sued the committee for failing to register as a federal PAC while engaged in federal elections activity. Large GOPAC donors have included textile magnates, capital investment giants and major real estate developers, but the group also had donors of as little as \$1.

GOPAC was an integral part of Gingrich's rise to power within the Republican Party. He inherited the chair-

manship from former Delaware governor Pierre S. "Pete" du Pont IV and soon expanded the organization into a significant tool for helping Republican candidates not only at the state and local levels but nationally as well. Along the way, Gingrich earned the loyalty of many younger Republicans who won election to the House.

Gingrich resisted calls for GOPAC to disclose all its contributors, arguing that because most of its resources were devoted to state and local races, it was not covered by federal disclosure requirements. But last fall he announced that in the future GOPAC would make public its donors.

Recently, GOPAC began listing givers by home town only, not revealing their business affiliations as the FEC customarily requires.

Last month, after a corporate gift of \$10,000 was reported as the donation of a solitary District resident, GOPAC executive director Lisa B. Nelson said she would probably list all corporate contributors in the future.

Nelson said yesterday that Gingrich began spreading word of his decision to leave the chairmanship this past weekend, at the regular spring meeting here of major GOPAC donors.

Nelson said GOPAC is most interested in the "intellectual leadership" of an "idea-oriented" successor to Gingrich. "The fund-raising responsibility is kind of secondary to the message we want to get out," she said.

Gingrich said he hopes the next chairman will refine GOPAC's major product, the training tapes that provide novice candidates with the how-

tos of politics. "It takes a member who is willing to spend time looking at ideas and putting together a tape program and making it work," Gingrich said of the next chairman.

The first of four ethics complaints against Gingrich alleged that he violated House rules by using GOPAC, as well as a tax-exempt foundation run by a former GOPAC official, to support his college course. The complaint by former representative Ben Jones, a Democratic rival, said GOPAC worked closely with course organizers in planning and financing the lectures.

Gingrich has denounced the Jones complaint and the others as nothing more than partisan sniping. The House ethics committee resumes its closed-door sessions on the complaints with two meetings next week.