

# Gingrich Questions FBI Appointment

*Speaker Predicts Slower Action on Clinton's Antiterrorism Legislation*

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House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) said yesterday the appointment of Larry A. Potts as deputy director of the FBI will slow congressional approval of antiterrorist legislation by stoking the "genuine fear" that many rural Americans have of the federal government.

Gingrich said the promotion of acting deputy director Potts a month after he was censured by the Justice Department for his role in the bureau's 1992 siege of white separatist Randall Weaver raises legitimate questions and sends a "signal that watching the FBI is not legitimate."

But Gingrich commended FBI Director Louis J. Freeh as a "very smart man" who is sure to get the deputy he wants, and said he opposes legislation introduced by a GOP freshman to re-

quire federal authorities to notify local officials before arresting or using force against local residents.

Following the April 19 bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City, President Clinton asked Congress for legislation that would give federal authorities enhanced powers to investigate terrorist groups—powers many organizations say they fear would lead to abuses of their rights.

Gingrich, on NBC's "Meet the Press" yesterday, said that he wanted a strong FBI but that he did not think the civil liberties concerns were "inappropriate."

In a wide-ranging interview, Gingrich said Senate Majority Leader Robert J. Dole (R-Kan.) was the most likely GOP presidential nominee in 1996, but after repeated questions, said of his own candidacy, "I refuse to rule it out."

In his terrorism remarks, Gingrich was less strong in his criticism of citizen militias than Clinton has been, arguing against condemning "any group as a group."

"It may be emotionally satisfying to run around and find new groups to get mad at, but I think the message ought to be much narrower," Gingrich said. "We are opposed to violence, we condemn violence, we are going to treat violent people as criminals."

The FBI should have a stronger hand against violent people, he said, endorsing part of Clinton's bill that would permit certain military experts to participate in domestic law enforcement. And he said he did not support the local notification bill proposed by Rep. Helen Chenoweth (R-Idaho).

"The federal government has a peremptory right to maintain the order of the Constitution, which does establish physical security," he said.

But he noted that the bill reflects a "genuine sense of fear" in rural areas that federal agents will "use force without warning," as some people viewed the 1993 siege of the Branch Davidian compound near Waco, Tex., and of Weaver in Idaho.

Last week's appointment of Potts, he said, "will further slow down the terrorist legislation and will mean even greater concern over civil liberties, which I don't think is inappropriate."

Potts was censured by the Justice Department for failing to adequately supervise the siege of Weaver's cabin in Idaho in which Weaver's wife was killed by an FBI sharpshooter. Freeh, who recommended the censure, said later he retained "utmost confidence" in Potts, who heads the Oklahoma City investigation.

"If he thinks he's the right man," Gingrich said of the FBI director, "I suspect that he's going to get him . . . but I think he's also sent a signal that watching the FBI is not illegitimate and that that decision at least re-raises the question: Why would you put in that position a man who's already been censured?"

Justice Department spokesman Carl Stern said Gingrich falsely suggested that he has "no control over what happens in Congress" and that "if he has an intention to slow down anti-terrorism legislation, he should explain what his reasons are."