

Gingrich Again Accused Of Ethics Violations

Bonior Cites Promotion of GOPAC on House Floor

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By R.H. Melton
Washington Post Staff Writer

The second-ranking Democrat in the House filed yet another ethics complaint against Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) yesterday, focusing new attention on the Republican fund-raising machine GOPAC in an effort to build pressure for the appointment of a special counsel to investigate the speaker.

The move by Minority Whip David E. Bonior (D-Mich.), a relentless Gingrich critic, marked the latest turn in a concerted effort by some Democrats both to bedevil Gingrich as he assumed control of the new Republican majority in the House and to construct a case, brick by brick, that Gingrich grievously abused his office.

Yesterday's complaint is the fifth filed against Gingrich. It accuses him of violating House rules and federal law by promoting the GOPAC political action committee in several speeches from the House floor in early 1990.

Steve Jost, a Democratic consultant who is closely following the complaints, said that while there has been no long-term, coherent strategy against the speaker, the chief target has always been GOPAC, which has never fully reported the sources of its roughly \$2 million in annual income.

"The goal from the get-go was to get a special counsel into GOPAC's files because they've been flying under radar," Jost said yesterday. "It's a serious business because Democrats are at a competitive disadvantage as long as Gingrich is allowed to operate this huge slush fund off the books."

Bonior, who filed a separate ethics complaint against Gingrich two months ago, seemed to echo that point yesterday, telling reporters that "the real \$64,000 question is who did they [GOPAC] raise their money from and how did he spend it?"

Gingrich recently stepped down

from GOPAC after nine years at the helm, where he helped nurture the generation of Republicans who won control of Congress in November. Gingrich said he thought GOPAC should start disclosing detailed information about its individual and corporate donors, although he never did as general chairman.

Bonior's complaint says that Gingrich, as chairman of GOPAC and architect of its successful candidate training program, illegally used taxpayer funds when he publicized a GOPAC workshop, repeated the group's telephone number and encouraged readers of the Congressional Record to contact the PAC. Bonior said an anonymous tipster recently brought Gingrich's 1990 remarks to his attention.

"It's part of the interlinking of Mr.

Gingrich's empire, the commingling of taxpayers' funds for his own political purposes," Bonior said at a Capitol news conference. "We're here—albeit late—we're here, making the case and the point that this is a pattern of behavior on the part of the speaker, of using taxpayers' funds to benefit himself and his empire."

Tony Blankley, Gingrich's press

secretary, dismissed Bonior as he has in the past, saying: "Once again, you can tell that Newt and the Republicans are legislating seriously because Bonior is making frivolous ethics complaints. . . . The Democratic Party, at least on the Hill, is bankrupt. They have not an idea in their blooming heads."

Blankley said that if GOPAC is indeed a target, the Democrats are stalking it the wrong way. "They're not going to accomplish that by frivolous complaints," he said. "At some point, some of their backbenchers might get concerned that their leadership can't get involved and join the great debate about this country's future."

The Federal Election Commission has sued the PAC over its past refusal to disclose contributors.

Last week, the House Committee on Standards of Official Conduct began an intense round of deliberations into the four pending complaints against Gingrich, including the first one filed last fall that accused Gingrich of violating House rules by using GOPAC and tax-exempt foundations to help set up the college course he used to teach on weekends.

That complaint was filed by former representative Ben Jones (D-Ga.), who was defeated by Gingrich in the fall election and who had employed Jost, the Democratic activist, as a direct-mail fund-raiser.

Subsequent complaints alleged the speaker improperly accepted free time on national cable television, illegally employed a political consultant in his congressional office and touted his college course from the House floor, again in violation of the rules. That most recent complaint was filed by Bonior.

Bonior suggested yesterday that the accumulated weight of the complaints should make inevitable the appointment of a special counsel. "They've had, now, over six months," he said of the ethics committee members. "They should come to a decision and I think the only decision they can make is to have an outside, independent, nonpartisan counsel."

Gingrich and his aides have long maintained that the House ethics committee was fully aware of and gave prior approval to the kind of floor speeches that have sparked the complaints.