

Gingrich Defends Cordial Appearance With Clinton

Speaker Returns to Confrontational Stance

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MANCHESTER, N.H., June 12—A day after his polite encounter with President Clinton, House Speaker Newt Gingrich today returned to a confrontational stance, suggesting that having the two leaders meet face-to-face was a good way of preventing Clinton from lying about Republican proposals.

Ending his four-day New Hampshire tease over his presidential ambitions, Gingrich (R-Ga.) defended himself against complaints from some conservatives that he had been too gentle with Clinton in their hour-long dialogue on Sunday. "The tone was so much nicer that a lot of conservatives misunderstood tone for substance," he said, stressing that the two and their parties had "profound" differences over the size and role of government.

The state's conservative newspaper, the Manchester Union-Leader, complained in an editorial that Gingrich was "giving his best imitation of a shaggy lap dog grateful for the privilege of being in his master's presence." Conservative talk-show host Rush Limbaugh had a broader complaint: that the liberal media accept that Democrats are interested in governing but make conservatives like Gingrich prove they are not extremists with performances like the one he gave Sunday.

Asked about the editorial, Gingrich said, "Conciliation in tone is not the same as compromise in principle," adding that having Clinton acknowledge that Medicare must be reformed "is worth a full day of being pleasant" to the president.

Pointing at the differences over Medicare, Gingrich, in a radio talk-show interview, said Clinton had finally "admitted, admitted" that the GOP proposal to control the program's costs still allows for an increase in spending. Referring to Clinton's statement, Gingrich said a forum where he is on the same plat-

form with Clinton makes it "a lot harder to say something not true when you have the other person sitting next to you."

Asked later if calling the president untruthful was his version of a conciliatory tone, Gingrich said that all he meant by the comment was that "all politicians want to make their points in isolation."

Republicans have proposed reductions in Medicare of up to \$300 billion over seven years but Gingrich Sunday portrayed the proposal as not only a cost-cutting effort but one also aimed at reforming the system to offer seniors more choice, particularly in managed care. Clinton, who is working on a new budget proposal that cuts less than half of that amount, has stated he will support reductions in growth but only as part of broader health care reform.

Through a spate of Manchester appearances today, Gingrich also zeroed in on what he called the "radically different vision of America" held by Democrats and Republicans, arguing that Clinton believes "the government is the source of all goodness" and that the nation's problems can best be addressed by government. Clinton, Gingrich said,

believes in programs such as his national service proposal "because he cannot imagine good things being done by the private sector."

For the most part, though, Gingrich continued reveling in his coup in capturing four days of major attention by visiting this state and teasing about his presidential ambitions, and getting Clinton to invite him to what was apparently a historic meeting.

"In all modesty, we did a fairly good job" putting out a Republican message this week, Gingrich congratulated himself during one appearance.

In a morning appearance on the "Today" show, Gingrich cheerfully agreed he was being "openly manipulative" by not stating an intention not to seek the GOP nomination. Hinting he might run, he said, ensures coverage. "I have to go through a Kabuki dance of personal ambition to get covered," he said.

Gingrich said his visit to the state with the first presidential primary made him less likely to run because he was confronted by numerous voters who argued he should remain in his "historic role" as the first Republican House speaker in more than 40 years.

The "odds lengthened against my becoming a candidate," he said. But he was not absolute. And he added a final shot at Clinton. "People do believe the president is likely to lose next year," Gingrich said, in describing the value of the GOP nomination.