

Gingrich 'Not Convinced' Foster Death Was Suicide

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Speaker Calls Whitewater Hearings Productive

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House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) said yesterday he remains unconvinced that deputy White House counsel Vincent W. Foster Jr. committed suicide two years ago and sharply criticized the way the death was investigated "from the opening minutes of its discovery."

Gingrich said he believed that Whitewater hearings on Capitol Hill have been productive and have helped show the extent to which "there may have been obstruction of justice, there may have been efforts to hide information from the Justice Department."

Then, alluding to Foster's death, he said, "There's something that doesn't fit about this whole case and the way it's been handled. . . . I'm not convinced he didn't. I'm just not convinced he did."

"I just don't accept it," he said of the official explanation of suicide. "I believe there are plausible grounds to wonder what happened and very real grounds to wonder why it was investigated so badly."

Foster's body was found in Fort Marcy Park in Northern Virginia on July 20, 1993. U.S. Park Police concluded Foster shot himself, as did the special prosecutor in the Whitewater case.

Anticipating that the speaker's statement would be controversial, Gingrich press secretary Tony Blankley telephoned White House press secretary Michael McCurry to try to explain it, according to McCurry.

Clearly enjoying the exercise of trying to explain statements by Gingrich—instead of by Clinton—McCurry quoted Blankley as stressing that what the speaker was trying to say was that he had not seen enough evidence to "convince" him that Foster's death was a suicide.

"The speaker has had a very busy schedule," McCurry said. "I don't

continues to exploit Vincent Foster and his family for political gain," said Mark Fabiani, who is handling Whitewater issues for the White House.

Others went still further. Some Democrats sought to make a link between Gingrich's statements and the strong political and financial support he has gotten from conspiracy theorists and those who have heavily promoted the idea that Foster's death may not have been a suicide.

One such supporter, Richard M. Scaife, has made large donations to GOPAC, the political action committee Gingrich controlled for nine years, and is a major contributor to conservative Republican foundations such as the Landmark Legal Foundation, the Free Congress Foundation and National Empowerment Television.

Scaife also has three Pennsylvania-based private foundations that have funded groups that promote conspiracy theories about Foster's death.

In an hour-long breakfast interview with reporters, Gingrich also gave a preview of testimony he will give Thursday before the House ethics committee, which is investigating the propriety of his book deal with HarperCollins, the publishing house owned by media magnate Rupert Murdoch.

Gingrich suggested that he had received numerous clearances for a book deal from the previous ethics committee, which was chaired by a Democrat.

After the November elections that made him speaker, the deal became controversial in part because of the extensive interests Murdoch has pending before Congress.

Gingrich said he has done nothing wrong. "Everybody in the book industry has legislative interests," he said. "I'm not going to go around, firm to firm, in the age of multinationals and conglomerates, and wait for five smart Democrats and three smart reporters to figure out the next problem" with a prospective publisher.

Appearing yesterday before the ethics committee were Gingrich aide Greg Wright, who attended a meeting late last year between the speaker and Murdoch, and Jeff Eisenach, a Gingrich protege who helped come up with the idea for the bestseller, "To Renew America."

think he's had time to watch all the evidence gathered that allows him to say sufficiently one way or another that he's convinced of certain aspects of the matter."

Others in the White House took a tougher stance. "We regret that any elected official would put his weight behind a conspiracy industry that