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PUBLIC FORUM

Some questions for Gingrich's supporters

As regards the allegations against House Speaker Newt Gingrich, who is under fire for passing false information to Congress — unintentionally, of course — about the possible use of tax-exempt money for political purposes:

Let us remember a well-established fact of human nature: When the stakes are high, we can all fall victim to a selective filtering of reality so we can preserve our beliefs and behaviors, or, even better, subdue an enemy.

Gingrich's supporters should ask themselves whether, for example, they would have been so tolerant if the former House speaker and Democrat, Jim Wright, had admitted passing false information to Congress — unintentionally, of course — about an alleged misuse of public funds.

Wright was hounded out of office for different ethical lapses, but somehow, I believe, Gingrich's champions would have been ahead of the pack in their zeal to oust Wright if he had committed Gingrich's sin instead. It is always important to ask how we would behave or feel if the shoe were on the other foot.

— Bill Becker
Woodland Hills



Want to buy the Dodgers?

Anybody want to buy a baseball team?

as submitted

Daily News Public Forum
P.O. Box 4200
Woodland Hills, CA 91365

Text omitted by the
editor is enclosed

in brackets January 6, 1997
"[" , "]"

Dear editor,

As regards the allegations against House Speaker Newt Gingrich, who is under fire for passing false information to Congress (unintentionally, of course) about the possible use of tax-exempt money for political purposes, let us remember a well-established fact of human nature: when the stakes are high, we can all fall victim to a selective filtering of reality so we can preserve our beliefs and behaviors, or, even better, subdue an enemy.

Gingrich supporters should ask themselves whether, for example, they would have been so tolerant if the former House Speaker (and Democrat) Jim Wright had admitted passing false information to Congress (unintentionally, of course) about an alleged misuse of public funds. Wright was hounded out of office for different ethical lapses, but somehow, I believe that Gingrich's champions would have been ahead of the pack in their zeal to oust Mr. Wright if he had committed Gingrich's sin instead. It is always important to ask how we would behave or feel if the shoe were on the other foot.

[In the partisan world of politics, independent counsels and ethics committees protect us from the potentially disastrous effects of relying only on our elected officials' and their constituents' personal standards of evidence for determining the facts about alleged ethical lapses. As a liberal, there is no doubt in my mind that the current Whitewater investigation is a politically-motivated gambit, seen as useful by Republicans to balance the Watergate and Iran-contra debacles. Nevertheless, I am more than willing to let the chips fall where they may. If President and Mrs. Clinton broke the law, let them suffer the consequences.]

In fact, the issue of whether the Republican majority in Congress was made possible by the improper use of tax-exempt money is by no means a trivial one, and we should all be willing to wait patiently until the ethics committee finishes its job. If it exonerates Gingrich, let him be re-elected Speaker. If not, let him suffer censure. It's as simple as that.]

Sincerely,

Bill Becker