

MR. SPEAKER: For me, the Gingrich episode represents much of what is wrong about the American political system today. It is unfortunately a failing which occurs on many levels.

At its core is the behavior of the man twice removed from the Presidency. It is very difficult for anyone who has read the Cole Report to reach any conclusion other than that Mr. Gingrich consistently did not tell the truth, in a desperate attempt to avoid responsibility for the misuse of taxpayer funds for partisan gain.

In turn, Mr. Gingrich's transgressions engendered a series of behaviors from people in both parties and in the press that play to their worst instincts, and that undermine the confidence people have in their government.

Last but not least, the blame resides as well with the House ethics process, a process so open to perversion that it raises questions about its ability to protect individual rights. It has unfortunately become so susceptible to manipulation that the House leadership and committee chair can, and has, unilaterally distorted its most sensitive proceedings, denying the House and the American public the time to reflect..

Over the weekend, I read the Cole Report. I come away from it believing that Mr. Gingrich knew exactly what he was doing, based on his intimate familiarity with the 1989 case involving the American Campaign Academy. In that case, the IRS and a tax court found that the Academy, which was run by Mr. Gingrich's closest personal advisor and which was represented by Mr. Gingrich's lawyer, was ineligible for tax-exempt status because it served private, rather than public interests.

But Mr. Gingrich was not deterred by the lessons of the American Campaign Academy ruling. Far from it. Instead, over a million dollars was diverted knowingly and improperly from charities for political purposes in violation of the law and of House ethical rules. As revealed with great clarity by Mr. Cole, Mr. Gingrich engaged in a deliberate strategy to use money contributed for charitable purposes to fund his own partisan agenda.

And it is impossible to read the Cole Report without also understanding Mr. Gingrich's use of the enhanced power and prestige of the Speakership for personal enrichment. The evidence goes far beyond the salary and perquisites of the Speakership. A telling example is Mr. Gingrich's acceptance of a \$4.3 million book advance, which flowed directly from his new position and the materials from what we now know was a tax-payer sponsored college course. Although Mr. Gingrich was eventually forced to give up the advance, he has collected royalties far in excess of any money involved in the case of former Speaker Jim Wright.

Ultimately, this episode is about the failure to be honest. Nothing speaks more eloquently to that point than Mr. Gingrich's final and belated admission, not to guilt, but only to being naïve. Everyone who reads the Cole Report, and, I submit, anyone who carefully observes Mr. Gingrich's personal behavior during these last few days, knows how hollow this rings. Mr. Gingrich is not naïve. He has devoted a quarter of a century in pursuit of political power for himself and his party. It has been at times brilliant, calculating, and shrewd. But it has never been naive. Mr. Gingrich pushed the envelop, and got caught.