

# Letters cause ethics complaint

WASHINGTON (AP) — A congressional watchdog group accused House Majority Leader Dick Armey on Wednesday of improperly allowing a special-interest group to circulate a letter on congressional stationery.

The Ralph Nader-led Congressional Accountability Project called for an ethics committee investigation.

A spokesman for the House's No. 2 Republican rejected the accusation, calling the complaint "frivolous."

The group's complaint, which it wants a House member to refer to the ethics committee, stems from a May 22 *Washington Post* editorial that criticized Armey for a letter to 82 chief executive officers of some of the nation's largest companies.

In the letter signed April 12, the Texas lawmaker warned that the corporations, through their donations to charitable causes, were "among companies that

support expansion of the welfare state."

The Congressional Accountability Project contends that Armey's letter — which says "Congress of the United States" at the top and notes his majority leader title — violates a House prohibition against allowing outside groups to use House letterhead.

The letter was sent by the Capital Research Center, a conservative group that published a book entitled "Patterns of Corporate Philanthropy." The book, sent to the CEOs along with Armey's letter, contends that corporations support left-leaning charitable causes far more than conservative ones.

"Majority Leader Armey is just one more career politician who can't be trusted to obey the law," said Nader.

Armey's spokesman, Ed Gillespie, said Armey "did not use the official congressional letter-

head and he is allowed to identify himself as the House majority leader because that is what he is."

Asked if the distinction of what constitutes an official letterhead might not be lost on the letter's recipients, Gillespie said: "The House ethics committee will look at this and we are confident the letter is completely within the bounds of the House rules."

Official letterhead or not, House rules also prohibit members from allowing outsiders to use any stationery imprinted with the words "Congress of the United States" or "House of Representatives" — both of which are on Armey's letter.

"It's impossible to dispute [that] this letter conveys the impression it's an official communication," said Gary Ruskin, director of the Congressional Accountability Project.

# Midwest rivers expected to recede

(AP) With the Midwest's rain-choked rivers about to begin receding, attention turned Wednesday to federal officials and how much disaster aid they would make available. Residents and authorities also continued cleanup operations.

In St. Louis, the Mississippi River stood at 40.1 feet, about 10 feet above flood stage. It was expected to begin falling Thursday.

The Missouri River crested in St. Charles County at 33.2 feet, 8.2 feet above flood stage, and was also expected to begin going down Thursday.

"It looks like we may be coming out of the woods," said Petra Haws, emergency director in St. Charles County.

Scattered showers were expected across Missouri through Saturday, but they will not significantly affect river levels, the National Weather Service said.

Across Missouri and Illinois, people continued to clean up after the floods, while in Colorado

authorities had to contend with rock and mud slides triggered by the wet weather.

In Nebraska, there was still danger, particularly in the northeast, where the Elkhorn River was rising.

"There's nothing we can do but wait and see what happens," said Jack Smalley, whose home was less than 2 feet from the water on Wednesday.

In Missouri, state officials waited to hear from Washington whether 14 flood-ravaged counties would be eligible for federal aid, and James Lee Witt, director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, took another look at the region by helicopter.

A decision from President Clinton is not expected for at least a week, Witt said.

Some 30 roads in low-lying areas remain closed in St. Charles County alone, and it could be two weeks before they reopen, Haws said.

# Deaf teen-ager wants to live with interpreter

WILMINGTON, N.C. (AP)

— A deaf teen-ager who says her parents refuse to learn sign language pleaded with a judge Wednesday to let her live permanently with her interpreter.

Her father argued that he could "stomp [his] foot and point" to communicate, or write letters.

Sonya Kinney, 15, said in an interview that the most frustrating moment came two years ago, when she tried to tell her mother she had been abused by her stepfather.

"She didn't understand me. I told her but she didn't understand me," Sonya said in sign language. Instead, she said, she told her interpreter, Joanie Hughes.

Hughes is seeking permanent custody of Sonya, whose parents are divorced. No charges were filed against the stepfather, who died recently.

Sonya began living with her father, Norman Kinney, in January after telling social workers of the abuse. A month later, her father agreed to let her move in with Hughes. Then he changed his mind, and the legal fight began.

Kinney acknowledged in court Wednesday that he didn't learn sign language but said he was able to communicate with his daughter.

"I always done the best I could. I could stomp my foot and point to something. I admit when she was younger I had a hard time communicating with her," Kinney testified. He wrote letters as she

grew older, he said.

If there was a major problem, "I would go to the school and have the interpreter tell me what was bothering her," Kinney said.

Outside court, Sonya threatened to run away if the court makes her live with her father.

"If I have to live with my dad, I'm alone all the time," the girl said as Ms. Hughes, an interpreter for the New Hanover County school system, translated.

During the hearing, a court-hired sign-language interpreter translated everything said in the courtroom for Sonya, as well as her testimony from the witness stand.

Sonya said she asked her mother, Christyne Kinney Estes, "about 20 times" to learn sign language, and "she ignored me." Estes did not attend the hearing.

Kinney's attorney, John Burns, argued that Sonya's skill at sign language showed that her parents were trying to help her by letting her spend so much time with Hughes.

Hughes told District Judge Shelly Holt that Kinney has a history of neglecting his children and is in trouble with the law. Sonya has said she is afraid of her father's drinking.

Kinney says he no longer has a drinking problem. The self-employed painter is accused of stealing from George and Mary Hanson, a couple who hired him to paint their home and who let Kinney live in their basement.

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