

Gingrich takes another term as the House opens

■ **ELECTION:** His speech of acceptance has an apology to Congress and the nation

By David Espo
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In a dramatic opening of the 105th Congress, Newt Gingrich overcame dissension in the GOP ranks Tuesday to become the first Republican re-elected House speaker in 68 years. "I apologize to the House and the country" for past errors, he said.

Gingrich sealed his victory in a tense, hour-long roll call less than three weeks after admitting he violated House rules in the long-

running ethics case against him. His punishment, to be voted on by the full House, remains to be set.

Across the Capitol, the GOP-controlled Senate held a more serene opening day session. Vice President Al Gore administered the oath of office to 15 newly-elected senators as well as veterans who won new terms in November. Retired Majority Leader Bob Dole made a sentimental return to the chamber, escorting freshman Kansas Sen. Sam Brownback to be sworn in.

"The Senate is sort of an island of tranquility in a city that has a

lot of problems," Majority Leader Trent Lott said with a smile.

That was a reference, in part, to the House, where Gingrich's campaign to hold power dominated the run-up to the new Congress.

In private, Gingrich has been quoted as sharply criticizing Democrats for pushing ethics charges against him. In nationally televised remarks after taking the speaker's gavel, he was contrite and conciliatory.

"Let me say to the entire House that two years ago, when I became the first Republican speaker in 40 years, to the degree I was too brash, too self-confident or too

pushy, I apologize.

"To whatever degree, in any way that I brought controversy or inappropriate attention to the House, I apologize. It is my intention to do everything I can to work with every member of this Congress," Gingrich said.

With his wife, Marianne, and his mother watching from a packed visitors' gallery, he returned to the subject a few moments later when he thanked Republicans who had voted for him.

"Some of this difficulty, frankly, I brought on myself. We will deal with that in more detail later. And I apologize to the

House and the country for having done so," he said.

Despite his victory, Gingrich is a diminished presence from two years ago. Then, he had led his party to power for the first time in 40 years on a platform of less government and lower taxes, and he marched the House through the "Contract With America" in 100 hectic days.

Two years of controversy — including government shutdowns — have taken their toll. He is remarkably unpopular in public opinion polls and some of his own rank and file decided not to support his re-election as speaker.

Supreme Court to confront the issue of presidential immunity to civil suits

■ **CLINTON:** Paula Jones' lawsuit has brought to the forefront the concern over a sitting president getting sued

By Karen Gullo
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — After two years of charges, countercharges, legal appeals and private settlement discussions, Paula Jones' lawsuit accusing President Clinton of sexual harassment reaches

the Supreme Court next week.

The justices on Monday will deliberate the question of how much immunity a sitting president deserves from civil suits — an issue that won't address the salacious nature of the allegations.

But on the political front, a White House already in the throes of Whitewater and fund-raising investigations will have to cope with further embarrassment.

"It reinforces the character bag-

gage that Clinton has had to bear," said Stephen Wayne, a Georgetown University professor of government.

The legal battle pits presidential lawyer Robert Bennett, one of Washington's best-known attorneys, against Jones' self-described "country lawyer," Gilbert Davis, a Republican who aspires to be Virginia's attorney general.

The 2 1/2-year-old case has already been getting a fresh public airing. Jones' picture dominates

the cover of Newsweek this week, accompanying an article that recounts Jones' allegation is that Clinton propositioned her at a Little Rock, Ark., hotel suite in 1991 while he was Arkansas governor and she was a state employee.

After three years, in 1994 with Clinton in the White House, she filed a lawsuit seeking \$700,000 in damages.


Clinton denies the encounter ever took place and has said he doesn't recall meeting Jones.

Bennett asserts in legal filings that Clinton should be given immunity in the case while in office.

Davis argues presidents have some spare time and shouldn't get special treatment to avoid facing lawsuits.

The Supreme Court agreed last June to consider the case, tying it up until after the November election.

The court is expected to render a decision in four to five months.



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