

## 104th CONGRESS: 100-DAY COUNTDOWN

## House Republicans postpone abortion floor fight

ASSOCIATED PRESS

House Republican leaders have avoided a nasty internal fight on abortion in the name of party unity.

But they won peace at a price some GOP centrists may find high: by promising pro-life members a full floor debate soon.

"It's not a matter of if, but when," Rep. Christopher H. Smith, New Jersey Republican and chairman of the House Pro-Life Caucus, said after accepting a leadership decision to drop an abortion-related amendment from a major spending-cuts bill.

"The fight on abortion will be

absolutely comprehensive. You name the area, it will be fully debated," Mr. Smith said. "We are not backing off."

The provision in question in the spending-cuts package was proposed by Rep. Ernest Istook Jr., Oklahoma Republican. It would have allowed states to choose whether to provide Medicaid funding for abortions for victims of rape and incest. Current law requires such funding.

"There's no question Congress

before the year is over will make its intent clear," said Rep. John A. Boehner of Ohio, chairman of the House Republican Conference.

House Speaker Newt Gingrich of Georgia decided to pull the Istook amendment after GOP centrists threatened to vote against the \$17 billion spending-cuts package if it contained the abortion provision.

They said Mr. Gingrich had promised not to bring up abortion while the party was trying to push

through its "Contract With America" in the first 100 days of this Congress and that it was unfair to combine the spending cuts with something so controversial.

Mr. Gingrich explained the centrists' objections Wednesday: "Because this bill is such a difficult spending-cut bill, many members felt it was an inappropriate place to raise this issue." He said there is a "clear understanding" the proposal will be brought up again.

Mr. Istook, whose proposal

passed the House Appropriations Committee after bitter debate, was upbeat.

"This is not a defeat for pro-life forces," he said. "We know we will get our day."

Mr. Gingrich had not counted on an ultimatum from the pro-choice forces within his own party when he gave his blessing to Mr. Istook's amendment.

But Tuesday, Rep. James C. Greenwood, Pennsylvania Republican, collected signatures from 19

Republicans for a letter to House Appropriations Committee Chairman Robert L. Livingston, Louisiana Republican, saying they would not vote for a bill containing the Istook amendment.

Mr. Greenwood, who is pro-choice, said he had others who were willing to sign and 10 to 15 more who promised to vote with him. He said he thought the proposal was "mean" and "terrible strategy for Republicans."

Pro-choice supporters claimed victory.

"Score one round to the president," White House spokesman Michael McCurry said.