

Gingrich slams gay school programs

Cites 'recruitment' in counseling guise

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A day after his lesbian sister lobbied Capitol Hill on homosexual rights, House Speaker Newt Gingrich criticized school programs that portray homosexuality favorably, particularly any that use "active homosexuals" to counsel teen-agers.

Speaking yesterday at his daily news conference, Mr. Gingrich said some school programs offered to counter discrimination give homosexuals a forum for promoting their way of life.

"I don't think we want people out with 'Heather Has Two Momies' in first grade explaining that homosexuality is a reasonable alternative in lifestyle," the Georgia Republican said.

The book he mentioned, by Leslea Newman, is a story about lesbian parents. It was second on the American Library Association's 1994 list of books people tried to ban.

Mr. Gingrich's concern was not limited to the primary grades.

"You have had, clearly, examples of what is in effect recruitment in so-called counseling programs," Mr. Gingrich said. "So I'm very cautious about the idea that you want to have active homosexuals in junior high school and high school explaining to young people that they have all these various wonderful options."

Mr. Gingrich's comments came a day after he met with his lesbian half-sister, Candace Gingrich, who had come to the Capitol to lobby.



Candace Gingrich says her half-brother is ill-informed.

The two said they have a strong relationship, but Miss Gingrich suggested he was ill-informed about homosexual-rights issues.

Homosexual-rights activists, who are meeting with lawmakers this week on such issues as AIDS funding and protection against discrimination, said Mr. Gingrich's comments yesterday reflected a caricature of sex education, not the reality.

"It's unfortunate that the speaker would repeat allegations that aren't backed up by facts," said Doug Hattaway of the Human Rights Campaign Fund. "Young gay people face discrimination and violence in schools and some communities have begun modest programs to address those problems. Those local communities should decide how to address these issues, not the federal government."

Mr. Gingrich also rejected the idea of passing a federal law protecting homosexuals from on-the-job discrimination.

Employers should not inquire about the sexual preference of an employee, Mr. Gingrich said. But if they do and fire the employee, he said, there should be no recourse to the federal courts.

"I am not prepared to establish a federal law that allows you to sue your employer if you end up not having a job because of a disagreement that involves your personal behavior," he said. "Does that mean a transvestite should automatically have the right to work as a transvestite? I don't think so."