

Gingrich rules out 1996 bid for presidency

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Speaker Newt Gingrich ruled out a 1996 presidential run Monday, leaving a clearly defined field to fight for the GOP nomination and little doubt the speaker will himself be a campaign issue.

It had long been clear that Gingrich was unlikely to join the presidential race, but not until Monday did he slam shut the door.

He said he would not endorse a can-

didate, but hoped to serve as chairman of the Republican convention next August in San Diego.

Explaining his decision, Gingrich listed the daunting challenge he faces in trying to shepherd a balanced budget through Congress, calling it "one of the most important decisions we've made in domestic government in the last 60 years."

Political calculations also played a part. Iowa's caucuses and New Hamp-

shire's primary are less than three months away, followed by a blizzard of early primaries.

"I didn't see how I could be both speaker of the House and run a campaign of that scale," Gingrich said.

His decision leaves the GOP field with a clear front-runner, Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole. Texas Sen. Phil Gramm, former Tennessee Gov. Lamar Alexander, publisher Steve Forbes and commentator Pat Buchanan are among

those clamoring for an opening or a Dole stumble.

For his part, Dole is working feverishly to create the impression his nomination is all but inevitable. Just Monday, Wisconsin Gov. Tommy Thompson became the 16th of the 30 Republican governors to endorse Dole, and that number could top 20 by year's end.

"I think the Dole campaign has turned the corner," said GOP pollster David Hill.

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