

# Knollenberg talks taxes, Gingrich, GOP and policy

By TIM RICHARD  
STAFF WRITER

"It's a good, strong half-loaf. We all won," said U.S. Rep. Joo Knollenberg, R-Bloomfield Township, of the new income tax law passed by Congress and signed by President Bill Clinton.

Knollenberg, a third-term lawmaker and still a Speaker Newt Gingrich loyalist, has dropped talk of running for governor now that Michelle Engler says her husband will seek a third term. And Knollenberg hasn't made up his mind yet about a 2000 GOP presidential candidate but is closely watching Ohio's U.S. Rep. John Kasich, chair of the budget committee.

The congressman, whose 11th Congressional District includes much of Oakland and northwestern Wayne counties, was interviewed in his Farmington Hills office at the end of the congressional session. Highlights:

**Q. This tax law has been called the Accountant's Full Employment Act. Is that justified?**

**Knollenberg:** Any time you have changes of the magnitude you have here - tax cuts, capital

gains cuts, child tax credits, estate tax relief, educational credits, IRAs with more people striving to take advantage of these - that's going to greatly expand the involvement of filing. There's some truth it will increase some paperwork.

At the same time, it's going to benefit the American people. Anybody concerned about the paperwork ought to be thankful because they'll get one heckuva benefit - from 28 to 20 percent on capital gains; some folks earning less than \$41,000 will see it cut from 28 to 10. It's certainly worth while to take the time to file.

**Q. From a Republican point of view, what policy goals have you accomplished?**

**Knollenberg:** It's the first tax cut in 18 years. We've balanced the budget, and that hasn't been done in 28 years; we've reduced the (annual) deficit to a point the president is even saying it's less than \$40 billion. There's talk of bringing it to zero, even next year. Pile that on top of the fact that we've already cut some 292 programs, some \$63 billion, out of discretionary spending; that's one-third of the budget. The

discretionary part will slow down to 0.5 percent growth a year.

The other thing is the Contract with America, pretty much inspired by Newt Gingrich, but we all contributed - 85 percent is now in force.

I went to Congress in 1993. We had no power. The president rolled out a tax increase, the largest in history. Four years later, the same president is willing to cut taxes, reduce the size of government, slow down the growth.

**Q. On Gingrich:** You were kind of close to Dick Armye, floor leader from Texas. Were you part of or close to the plot to unseat Gingrich?

**Knollenberg:** No on all counts. I've been a supporter of Newt right along. The dissent in number were probably

a hard core of five, expanding to 12 on a given day, so they were a distinct minority.

There probably were some faults in the leadership; they didn't communicate properly; it was a particular fault of the lieutenants, Armye included. They all pledged loyalty and fidelity to Newt in this three-hour conference you may have heard about. It was put behind us.

**Q. There's an impression, right or wrong, Gingrich has done more to give younger guys and newer members - yourself, Pete Hoekstra and (former Rep.) Dick Chrysler - exposure and leadership than speakers in the past. Correct?**

**Knollenberg:** I believe he has. I haven't made a study of previous speakers. But maybe



Knollenberg

to a fault, Newt has brought in more and more people to the leadership; giving them chairmanships of task forces. He's been very open and interested in expanding roles for people.

Trent Wiaceup, Knollenberg's press aide: Putting you on Appropriations in your second term.

**Knollenberg:** Some of the folks he put into the leadership were the ones he had problems with, so I'm sure it's bittersweet.

**Q. My impression of the Contract with America is not just that it was a program, but a lot of these things had never even been voted on.**

**Knollenberg:** I believe (your memory is correct). He talked about congressional accountability (applying the laws of the nation to Congress and its staff).

He himself can't serve more than four terms as speaker. Removing proxy voting. Reduc-

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