

Lawmaker demoted after remarks on Jewish groups

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by Mike Dorning

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Democratic Rep. Jim Moran was forced out of his party's leadership Friday, a week after making public comments suggesting that the political influence of domestic Jewish organizations was driving the United States toward war with Iraq.

The Virginia congressman's comments provoked a furor, because many people interpreted them as reflecting charges of dual loyalty and hidden influence that have been at the heart of anti-Semitism for centuries.

Also, the controversy presented problems for the Democratic Party when the Republican White House is seeking to make inroads with traditionally Democratic-leaning Jewish voters.

On Friday, House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) phoned Moran, a seven-term congressman, and asked him to step down as regional whip for the mid-Atlantic states, a junior leadership position.

"I have taken this action because Congressman Moran's irresponsible remarks were a serious mistake," Pelosi said. "As I said earlier this week, his comments were not only inappropriate, they were offensive and have no place in the Democratic Party."

Moran said he gave up the position "as a way to demonstrate acceptance of responsibility" for his remarks. The parties' whip organizations determine where House members stand before important votes.

Speaking at an anti-war forum in Reston, Va., last week, Moran said, "If it were not for the strong support of the Jewish community for this war with Iraq, we would not be doing this. ... The leaders of the Jewish community are influential enough that they could change the direction

of where this is going, and I think they should."

Moran apologized for his comments Tuesday, saying he raised the issue because he was responding to a questioner who identified herself as Jewish.

Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-Ill.) said Moran's comments have been rippling through House Democratic ranks all week.

"Everyone was kind of gasping in disbelief," Schakowsky said. "When you say something that inflammatory and that anti-Semitic, apologies don't make it."

Moran will retain his seat in Congress, although several prominent Democratic officeholders in his district have said they will consider challenging him if he runs for re-election.

Moran has been controversial because of his financial dealings. In 1998, he accepted a \$447,500 loan from a major credit card issuer before signing on as a lead sponsor for bankruptcy-reform legislation sought by credit-card companies.