

GOP Won't Laud Liddy

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Retreat Follows Democrats' Fax Volley

By Howard Kurtz
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After a barrage of Democratic attack faxes, the Republican Party yesterday shot down a plan to honor G. Gordon Liddy at a fund-raising dinner tonight.

At 4 p.m., a spokesman for the National Republican Senatorial Committee was enthusiastically defending the invitation to the controversial talkmeister. But half an hour later, those comments were declared "inoperative" as Sen. Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.), the committee chairman, abruptly uninvited Liddy.

The Fairfax radio host has been at the center of controversy for repeatedly telling listeners to shoot federal firearms agents—though only in self-defense—in the head or groin. "Head shots, head shots. . . Kill the sons of bitches," he has said.

Liddy was invited in February to speak at a "Salute to Talk Radio" sponsored by the GOP committee for its "Inner Circle" members, who contribute at least \$1,000 a year. More than 300 people are expected to attend the event at the Mayflower Hotel.

"I think it's unseemly to celebrate someone who's advocated taking head shots at law enforcement officials," George Stephanopoulos, a White House senior adviser, said before the invitation was yanked.

In the wake of the Oklahoma City bombing, the Oklahoma Senate has urged stations to take Liddy off the air for encouraging "hate and vio-

lence." A San Bernardino, Calif., station has done so, and at least two other stations have temporarily dropped the program.

Gordon Hensley, spokesman for the GOP committee, said initially: "Any insinuation that somehow this committee is embracing those statements is a complete, 100 percent distortion and demonstrates the desperation of the Democratic Party." He said D'Amato views Liddy's comments "as outrageous and deplorable, but that does not preclude his right to express his views. . . . This

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LIDDY, From C1

committee is a strong supporter of the First Amendment."

That was before the Democrats began burning up the fax lines.

First the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee fired off a press release titled "D'Amato to Honor G. Gordon Liddy." The panel "should be ashamed of itself for paying tribute to someone who promotes hatred and fear-mongering," said Don Foley, the committee's executive director.

Then Don Fowler, chairman of the Democratic National Committee, pronounced himself "shocked" that Republicans would honor "a purveyor of hateful and destructive speech" whose "venomous rhetoric" helps "fan the flames of hatred and encourage violence."

It was time for a tactical retreat. John Heubusch, executive

director of the GOP committee, said in a statement that the invitation was withdrawn because Liddy's comments were "clearly and unequivocally wrong."

Asked why Liddy was being dropped now when he has been making his comments about shooting federal agents for many months, Hensley said only that

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—G. Gordon Liddy

"the statement speaks for itself." He said Sen. Conrad Burns (R), a former Montana broadcaster, would address the dinner instead. Washington radio host Armstrong

Williams was also dropped without explanation.

"It didn't make any sense to me," Williams said. "It's just crazy. . . . It's unfortunate when people run scared."

Asked for comment, Ken Stevens, general manager of Fairfax's WJFK-FM, where Liddy's program is broadcast to 260 stations, said: "Ridiculous!" He said Liddy had no comment yesterday but

would address the controversy on the air today.

Liddy, who served nearly five years in prison for masterminding the Watergate break-in, said last week he bears "no responsibility" if his listeners resort to violence. He has also spoken of using drawings of Bill and Hillary Clinton for rifle practice.

"I don't believe I'm fueling the lunatic fringe," Liddy said.