

The Washington Post

Hastert Turns Back on GOP Unit Misusing His Name

By George Lardner Jr. and Juliet Eilperin - Washington Post Staff Writers
Friday, May 4, 2001; Page A06

House Speaker J. Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.) skipped a Republican campaign committee's conference for business contributors yesterday after the group sent out an unauthorized fax promoting the workshop under his name.

Hastert had been billed as the speaker at a breakfast for contributors to the National Republican Congressional Committee who gathered here for briefings on President Bush's proposed tax cut. White House political director Ken Mehlman spoke instead.

A spokesman for Hastert said that "he just had other things going on," but another aide confirmed that the speaker was unhappy about a fax that the NRCC sent out under his name, inviting donors to meet with "the WHO's WHO in Washington," including "Bush Administration senior officials."

A handwritten notation signed "D.H." at the bottom of the fax asked the donor for thoughts on a proposed tax strategy session and left the impression Hastert had personally sent it.

The unauthorized use of his name, first reported in Roll Call, helped convince the speaker not to take part. "In light of the situation, we didn't believe it was appropriate for him to attend," a Hastert aide said.

"They sent out a fax we never approved," the staffer said. "The speaker continues to raise money for the NRCC and candidates through various events and trips on the road. However, we'll take a close look at their direct mail program and will continue to insist on reviewing and approving any paper that is sent out the door above the speaker's signature."

Critics usually at opposing ends of the political spectrum -- Judicial Watch and Common Cause -- denounced the gathering as an "auctioning of access" to Bush administration officials.

Judicial Watch has filed complaints with the Federal Election Commission, the Justice Department and the House ethics committee charging that the NRCC is violating federal bribery laws by "selling meetings with Bush administration officials for political campaign contributions." Judicial Watch chairman Larry Klayman, often a thorn in the side of the Clinton administration, said yesterday he did not see how Bush White House officials "can claim they're different from Clinton" if they defend the new fundraising efforts.

NRCC general counsel Donald F. McGahn II said in a letter to Klayman that "there is nothing illegal or unethical" about it.