

# Congressman Tries to Explain How He Got Bombing Fax

■ **Message:** Rep. Stockman says note was given to FBI promptly. His aide says it was sent to the NRA without the lawmaker's knowledge.

By JANET HOOK  
TIMES STAFF WRITER

WASHINGTON—One of the eager conservative Republicans who swept into Washington on an anti-government tide last fall has been caught up in the far-reaching fallout surrounding the Oklahoma City bombing.

Freshman Rep. Steve Stockman (R-Tex.) has been thrust into the limelight to explain how he received an anonymous fax about the bombing and his own links to anti-government militia groups.

Stockman, a vehement opponent of gun control who used the issue to unseat formidable House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jack Brooks last fall, staged press conferences in Washington and his home state Monday to explain what he did with a cryptic note his office received around the time of the bombing.

Stockman and his staff denied that they had delayed passing the note—which seemed to convey information about the Oklahoma blast—to the FBI. But they faced troublesome questions about why Stockman's staff also gave the note to the National Rifle Assn. and why Stockman in March wrote to the Justice Department objecting to what he said was an impending federal raid on "citizen militia" groups, apparently akin to the kinds of anti-government groups that seem to figure in the background of at least one suspect in the Oklahoma bombing.

Brooks' defeat last fall was one of the GOP's biggest trophies of the 1994 elections—an emblem of the broader political trends that gave Republicans control of the House and Senate. Brooks, first elected to the House in 1952, was a powerbroker once considered invulnerable back home. But Stockman swept him out of office on the anti-government, anti-incumbency tide that unseated Democrats across the country.

Stockman's campaign—the third time he had run against Brooks—tapped deeply into anti-gun control sentiment in his Southeast Texas district. Stockman drew big political benefits from the fact that Brooks had supported the 1994 crime bill, which included a controversial ban on certain types of assault weapons.

Since coming to Washington, Stockman has championed the anti-gun control cause. He pushed for early consideration of legislation to overturn the assault weapons ban, but was deflected by Republican leaders who wanted to put off such contentious issues until after their big legislative push in the first 100 days.

On March 22, Stockman sent a letter to Atty. Gen. Janet Reno inquiring about a raid against "citizens militias groups" that he had been told was planned for March 25 or 26.

"A paramilitary-style attack against Americans who pose no risk to others, even if violations of criminal law might be imputed to them, would run the risk of an irreparable breach between the federal government and the public, especially if it turned out to be an ill-considered, poorly planned but bloody fiasco like Waco," Stockman wrote, alluding to the 1993 Texas faceoff between the Branch Davidian religious sect and federal officials.

In Washington, Jeff Fisher, Stockman's chief of staff, called it an "oh-by-the-way" letter written to the Justice Department in response to a request by a constituent. But in a separate press conference in Beaumont, Stockman said he wrote the letter at the request of "the NRA and other groups."

Initial reports about Stockman's receipt of information about the Oklahoma bombing had suggested that he received the fax before the bombing, had delayed sending it to the FBI and shared it with the NRA first.

"There has been some confusion in the media over when my office received this fax and when we turned it over to the FBI," Stockman said. "There has been no confusion in my office. We turned it over right away."

The cryptic fax read: "First update. Bldg 7 to 10 floors only. Military people on scene—BATF/FBI. Bomb threat received last week. Perpetrator unknown at this time. Oklahoma."

It appeared that Stockman's office received the fax about an hour before the bomb detonated at 9:04 a.m. CST, or 10:04 a.m. EST, because the time stamped on the fax was 8:59 EST. However, Fisher said, the fax actually arrived an hour later. The fax machine's time stamp was an hour off, he said, because it had not been changed to reflect the onset of daylight saving time.

When the fax first arrived, Fisher said, an aide discarded it because it was so cryptic and not directed to anyone. After they received news of the bombing around 10:30, he said, it was retrieved and sent to the FBI.

Fisher said the office had traced the fax to a woman in Michigan named Libby but said he was uncertain about her last name.

The Christian Science Monitor, based on an interview with a woman who called herself Libby, reported that she had simply passed along a fax that had been sent to her from Oklahoma City. She refused to reveal the origin of the fax.

But later in the day, Mark Koernke, who broadcasts nightly over short-wave radio about the evils of the government, said that he was the one who sent Stockman the fax. Koernke, who lives near Dexter, Mich., told Detroit radio station WWJ that he sent the fax after the bombing. He suggested that possibly the federal government was responsible for the bombing and said he wanted people to rush to the site to see what was going on.

The FBI confirmed that it had received the fax from Stockman's office the day of the bombing, at 11:57 a.m.

Fisher acknowledged that another member of Stockman's staff had sent the memo to the NRA the next day, but said that it was done without his or Stockman's authorization.

The whole episode has showered more publicity on Stockman than the whole rest of his political career combined, said Fisher, who received press inquiries from as far away as London.

"I've never seen anything like it," Fisher said. "His name ID worldwide just went up."

Times staff writer Judy Pasternak contributed to this story.