



## In Ongoing Dance With Trump, GOP Pulls 'National Review' From Debate

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The venerated conservative magazine *National Review* magazine took its criticism of Donald Trump to a new level this week with a collection of essays from 22 prominent conservatives thinkers berating the GOP presidential frontrunner.

But its bold cover and editorial declaring it was "Against Trump" wasn't without consequences — on Thursday evening the publication was removed by the Republican National Committee as the conservative media partner for the Feb. 25 CNN/Telemundo/Salem Radio debate in Houston.

"Debate partners can't have a predisposition towards or against any candidate," RNC chief strategist and communications director Sean Spicer said in a statement.

The decision by the GOP is the latest in a delicate dance with Trump. No matter what some of their top strategists and supporters think about the party's would-be standard-bearer — and despite some of the real estate billionaire's more inflammatory statements, such as calling for a ban on Muslims coming into the U.S. — they've still had to treat him with kid gloves.

And despite signing a loyalty pledge, there remains a fear that Trump would run as a third party candidate if he's not treated fairly, something that would virtually ensure a Democratic win.

The RNC's decision didn't come as a surprise to *National Review* publisher Jack Fowler, writing on their site that it was a "Small price to pay for speaking the truth about The Donald."

The magazine didn't mince words in its criticism of Trump. In an editorial, staff wrote that "Trump is a philosophically unmoored political opportunist who would trash the broad conservative ideological consensus within the GOP in favor of a free-floating populism with strong-man overtones."

Other top conservative commentators also issued broadsides against the Republican, whose commanding lead since last summer has continued to baffle the party's top influencers.

"Not since George Wallace has there been a presidential candidate who made racial and religious scapegoating so central to his campaign," Cato Institute president David Boaz wrote.

"If Donald Trump wins the Republican nomination, there will once again be no opposition to an ever-expanding government. This is a crisis for conservatism," argued former Fox News host and The Blaze founder Glenn Beck, who endorsed Trump's chief rival, Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, this week.

"To the degree we take him at his word — understanding that Trump is a negotiator whose positions are often purposefully deceptive — what he advocates is a rejection of our Madisonian inheritance and an embrace of Barack Obama's authoritarianism," Federalist publisher Ben Domenech said.

"Conservatives have a serious decision. Do we truly believe in our long-held principles and insist that politicians have records demonstrating fealty to them? Or are we willing to throw these principles away because an entertainer who has been a liberal Democrat for decades simply says some of the right things?" wrote Townhall editor Katie Pavlich.

Trump hit back at the criticism of the magazine in his usual manner — a broadside of (grammatically incorrect) tweets, saying the publication's influence has waned.

Many of the same National Review commentators have been speaking about against Trump for months, expressing their skepticism that his change of heart on abortion rights, gay marriage and more is truly genuine.

But that opposition hasn't filtered down to most voters yet. Trump continues to lead national polling and is neck and neck with Cruz, who argues he's the true conservative in the race. He released an ad this week attacking Trump for his support for eminent domain laws that most conservatives oppose. Trump fired back with his first ad against Cruz, who until last week he had avoided attacking. In Trump's spot, he attacks Cruz for an amendment to the Senate's comprehensive immigration reform bill that would have allowed some illegal immigrants to remain in the country. Cruz has said the measure was a "poison pill" meant to kill the legislation. *National Review* is the second media partner to be removed from the final debate ahead of "Super Tuesday." NBC was originally supposed to broadcast and moderate the debate, but after a much-criticized CNBC debate last October, the RNC said it was suspending its partnership with NBC and officially replaced the network with CNN earlier this week.