

Feb 10, 2005 - Rep. Slaughter Calls on Special Prosecutor to Investigate Gannon's Role in Plame CIA

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Reps. Slaughter & Conyers Call on Special Prosecutor and Secret Service to Investigate Growing Gannon Scandal

Washington, DC - Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (NY-28), Ranking Member of the House Committee on Rules, and Rep. John Conyers (MI-14), Ranking Member of the House Judiciary Committee, called on Special Counsel Patrick Fitzgerald to investigate the leaking of a classified Central Intelligence Agency memo containing the identity of undercover agent Valerie Plame to a man at the center of the White House Press Briefing Room scandal, "Jeff Gannon."

Rep. Slaughter, a long-time advocate for media reform and accountability, brought this story into the national spotlight days ago when she wrote President Bush asking for an investigation into the issue.

"This matter is growing more serious by the day. We now know that 'Jeff Gannon' had access to classified CIA documents that contained the identity of undercover CIA operative Valerie Plame. This is more than an issue of media manipulation by the White House... this is now an issue of national security," said Rep. Slaughter. "What is the White House hiding? This man, Mr. Gannon, should never have been admitted into the White House briefing room in the first place. Someone let him in day after day. Someone gave him access to classified CIA documents. Someone must answer for this. It is critical that we uncover the exact nature of the relationship between Gannon and this White House," added Slaughter."

In addition, Reps. Slaughter and Conyers wrote W. Ralph Basham, Director of the Secret Service, calling on his office to provide details on the security clearance of day pass holders in the White House briefing room as well as any and all information they can provide on Mr. Gannon.

"White House Press Secretary Scott McClellan was unable to answer these important questions in yesterday's briefing so we hope the Secret Service will be able to fill in the blanks," said Slaughter. "Since the White House has denied any role or responsibility in this matter I hope the Secret Service can shed some light on their procedures for clearing day pass holders to the White House briefing room," continued Slaughter.

The letters follow:

February 10, 2005

Mr. Patrick J. Fitzgerald

United States Attorney

US Attorney's Office

219 S. Dearborn Street, Suite 5000

Chicago, IL 60656

Dear Mr. Fitzgerald:

We write to ask that you investigate the leak of a classified Central Intelligence Agency memo containing the identity of undercover agent Valerie Plame to James D. Guckert, a member of the White House press corps. It appears that the White House was so focused on smearing the reputation of Ambassador Joseph Wilson, that it knowingly leaked his wife's identity to a Republican activist posing as a journalist.

James D. Guckert, who operated under the false name "Jeff Gannon," and may have engaged in criminal activity, had been attending press events at the White House for up to three years. Mr. Guckert reportedly received an internal and classified CIA memo that revealed the identity of Ambassador Joseph Wilson's wife. Because of the extremely sensitive nature of this leak, and its relation to the investigation you are conducting, we believe that you as special counsel are the

most appropriate person to conduct the inquiry.

Under Department of Justice regulations, a special counsel should investigate when (1) a "criminal investigation of a person or matter is warranted," (2) the investigation "by a United States Attorney Office or litigating Division of the Department of Justice would present a conflict of interest for the Department," and (3) "it would be in the public interest to appoint an outside Special Counsel to assume responsibility for the matter."¹ In the present case all three factors have been met.

As has been long discussed, revealing the identity of an undercover agent violates myriad laws. Whoever in the Administration gave Mr. Guckert the memo risked Ms. Plame's very life and must be punished to the full extent of the law.

There is a clear conflict of interest in the Administration investigating Mr. Guckert's role in this crime. Mr. Guckert and the White House press operation work together closely to forward the President's policies.

First, Mr. Guckert would not be considered a bona fide journalist by his peers in the press corps, as most of his claims to legitimacy have already been discredited. Access to the President and his press corps is highly competitive, and many seasoned journalists have not had the honor of attending the events or enjoying the access Mr. Guckert has. That a person of these dubious qualifications was given such close contact to the President, perhaps in violation of standard security procedures, demonstrates the Administration's affinity for and bias towards Mr. Guckert.

Second, Mr. Guckert's questions clearly reiterated the White House's policy, and simply asked for concurrence. Finally, Mr. Guckert's "articles," published by a news front for GOPUSA, track White House talking points word for word.

Clearly, Mr. Guckert returned the White House's favor by advancing the President's policies with gusto. With such a close relationship between Mr. Guckert and the White House, the conflict of an administration-led investigation is all too apparent.

Finally, the public interest has been thwarted far too long over the leak of Ms. Plame's identity. It has been over a year and a half since Robert Novak published Plame's identity and we are no closer to finding who in the Administration illegally leaked her status as an undercover agent. Having a special counsel immediately follow up this lead is necessary to ensure that those who risk their lives for our country to gather intelligence are fully protected.

We look forward to hearing whether you will be following up on this new information, or if you have, what progress you have made.

Sincerely,

Louise Slaughter

John Conyers, Jr.

Ranking Member,

Ranking Member,

Committee on Rules

Committee on Judiciary

February 10, 2005

W. Ralph Basham, Director

United States Secret Service

950 H Street, NW

Washington, DC 20223

Dear Director Basham:

We write to inquire about the process you employ to clear individuals for attendance at events within a close proximity of the President. We have recently become aware that a Republican activist, with a potential criminal past, gained access to the White House press briefing room and Presidential press conferences and was allowed to work under an assumed name. This appears to contradict the strict standards you have set for protecting the President in the past and have applied to others seeking access to the White House or the President.

It has recently been revealed that James D. Guckert has been repeatedly cleared by your office to attend White House press briefings over the last several years. He was, however, allowed to operate under an assumed name, which we understand to be contrary to your usual policies. That he may be engaged in illegal activity only heightens our concern.

We are concerned that such an individual was allowed within a few feet of the President when the public is routinely disallowed any possible contact with either the President or the White House. We understand that your security policies are developed in conjunction with the White House and want to ascertain your respective roles in this decision as it appears to deviate significantly from heightened security measures you have employed recently.

While we appreciate the extremely difficult task you are assigned to, we are concerned about these discrepancies. For this reason, we ask the following questions:

- What standards do you impose on those who are granted access to the President and the White House Briefing Room? Do you routinely allow guests to use false names?

- Were those standards applied to Mr. Guckert? If not, why, and at whose request?

- This afternoon, the White House Press Secretary denied any responsibility for determining who is granted clearance into the White House Briefing Room. What individual or agency is responsible for requesting that the Secret Service conduct a security clearance for individuals or members of the media who wish to enter the White House Briefing Room?

- What are the security qualifications for granting "permanent" White House press corps credentials and how do they differ from those of a simple day pass?

- When someone is cleared for a daily pass, are they required to be cleared each time they return on subsequent visits to the White House Briefing Room, as in the case of Mr. Guckert, who returned frequently for up to two years?

- How many daily passes are issued for White House briefings and Presidential press conferences at one time? Is there a limit in place for security or other reasons?

- Who has the authority, if at all, to exempt an individual or member of the media from security clearance by the Secret Service in order to gain access to the White House Briefing Room?

- How many times and on what days was Mr. Guckert cleared by the Secret Service into the White House, and at whose request?

Thank you in advance your prompt attention and response to this matter.

Sincerely,

Louise Slaughter

John Conyers, Jr.

Ranking Member,

Ranking Member,

Committee on Rules

Committee on Judiciary