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The Jeff Gannon Controversy - A Primer for the Press or Beginners

Feb. 10, 2005 - An unprecedented coalition of citizen *DailyKos* diarists have recently investigated and uncovered important details regarding Talon News reporter, James "J.D." Guckert, otherwise known as Jeff Gannon. These details, along with other information reported by Media Matters and other blog sites, have led to Mr. Guckert's resignation from his position as Washington Bureau Chief for Talon News yesterday amid a flurry of controversy.

Prompted by a Jan. 26 report by MediaMatters.org regarding Guckert's "softball" questions to White House Press Secretary Scott McClellan and President Bush, members of DailyKos began investigating the matter.

The information uncovered by this investigation was in the public domain, readily available to anyone with internet access. Much of the information was derived from Guckert's own sites which he published himself on the internet, or from comments he himself posted on various sites.

In his Talon News profile, Guckert claimed he had a degree in Education from the "Pennsylvania State University System." His only journalistic "experience" was his attendance at a \$50, two-day seminar from the Leadership Institute Broadcast Journalism School. The Leadership Institute describes its mission as increasing "the number and effectiveness of conservative public policy leaders" and to "place conservative leaders in the public policy process."

Despite his lack of journalistic experience, Guckert used an assumed name and was granted access to the White House briefing room. His application for a press pass to the House and Senate galleries was rejected because Talon News shares ownership with GOPUSA.com and did not meet press pass standards. Yet somehow he was still given a daily press pass to White House briefings for almost two years.

In a press briefing on Feb. 10th, McClellan claimed that Guckert was granted White House access because he "showed that he was representing a news organization that published regularly." However, Talon News came into existence on March 29, 2003. It was granted White House Press Corps access approximately 96 hours later. During that four-day time period, Talon News published a total of nine "stories."

During briefings, Guckert's questions frequently revealed not only his conservative bias, but also a possible coordination with McClellan. Guckert's questions were frequently leading, unabashedly partisan, and at times inflammatory. Moreover, Guckert apparently had unprecedented access, and even claimed at one point to be "entertaining the Prime Minister of Great Britain."

The researchers at DailyKos discovered another issue that suggested close coordination with the administration. According to the Washington Post, Guckert may have had access to a leaked internal CIA memo which revealed the identity of Ambassador Joe Wilson's wife, Valerie Plame, then an undercover CIA operative. In fact, because of his possible tie to the leak, Guckert was subpoenaed to testify in the federal grand jury investigation into the matter.

The Guckert scandal is yet another example of the Bush administration's efforts to "plant" friendly commentators and journalists in the media to advance their political agenda and manipulate the public. In the last month, investigations have revealed that in addition to having an illegitimate conservative "reporter" in its press corps, the Bush administration paid right-wing commentator Armstrong Williams \$240,000 to advocate the No Child Left Behind Act, even though previous to the payments, he was publicly critical of the policy. Williams has since admitted that "there are others" paid by the government to promote its agenda. The Bush administration also paid right-wing commentator Maggie Gallagher, who claims no credentials as a marriage expert, to promote its traditional marriage agenda.

Recently, Representative Louise M. Slaughter (NY-28) and Senator Frank R. Lautenberg (D-NJ) have asked the Bush White House for an explanation into the Guckert scandal.

DailyKos is an online community, with over 40,000 members. The site is one the most popular political websites, with an average 470,000 hits per day. The research was conducted by DailyKos diarists, and the statement is not officially associated with Daily Kos owner Markos Moulitsas.