



White House employee fired for trying to protect president's life

By [Bill Conroy](#),

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Sometimes, the truth is right in front of us, even if it comes in the form of a seemingly misspoken sentence.

During the political storm that erupted in early 2006 over the Bush administration's plans to [turn over port security](#) to a United Arab Emirates-based company, the president was [quoted on Fox News](#) saying the following on March 12 of that year:

"People don't need to worry about security. This deal wouldn't go forward if we were concerned about the security for the United States of America."

Apparently, if we are willing to heed the story of a former West Wing lead mailroom assistant, Laura C. Jones, the president's gaff underscores another truth: that his staff isn't concerned about White House security either.

Rather, the Bush inner circle seems more concerned with silencing individuals who threaten to expose politically embarrassing (and job-threatening) security breaches, even if those lapses pose a threat to the life of the president.

With friends like those, you have to wonder why Bush remains so focused on frightening the American people about foreign boogiemens. Based on Jones' documented experiences inside the White House, it seems the president should be more focused on protecting himself from security threats brought about by the dysfunction of his own staff.

Jones began working at the White House mailroom in 1995 as part the Office of Administration, which is under the [Executive Office of the President](#). In 2003, after receiving a number of awards for her dedicated service over the years, she was promoted to lead mail assistant to the West Wing, and was among a very few people within the Office of Administration who had top security clearance that allowed her access to the president and his staff.

Jones told Narco News that the West Wing mailroom is very close to the [Oval Office](#). In fact, Jones recalled that one day someone from the president's staff complained that the odor of burned micro-waved popcorn in the mailroom was disrupting a meeting in the Oval Office. The mailroom's proximity to the office where the president conducts business is a key fact to keep in mind given what happened in the West Wing mailroom on March 24, 2004.

Less than two months prior to that date, three U.S. Senate office buildings were closed temporarily after highly poisonous [ricin powder](#) was discovered in the mailroom of the office of then [U.S. Sen. Bill Frist](#). As a result of the ricin incident, on March 24, 2004, Jones and her co-workers in the West Wing were still taking the antibiotic Ciprofloxacin as a precaution.

It was in that context, then, that Shane Chambers, special assistant to then White House Chief of Staff Andy Card, brought a package to the West Wing mailroom. Chambers had been handling appointments at the White House that day and Jones says it is likely the package was given to Chambers by someone who had come to visit the president.

However, Jones stresses, to this day she isn't certain where the package came from originally, only that it was clear at the time that the package had not gone through the rigorous off-site security clearance required for all mail delivered to the White House.

“I told him (Chambers) that the package had to be sent to another location to be X-rayed, opened and checked for powder before it comes to us,” Jones says. “... I told him that I could give the package to a driver who could take it to the location where it would be checked.”

But that’s not what happened. Instead, Jones says, her supervisor in the mailroom that day overruled her and allowed the package through, “and [despite the ricin threat] they opened it up right there in the mailroom of the West Wing,” Jones says.

Inside the package, Jones says, were a series of smaller packages, each with a label bearing a name. The names on those labels included President George W. Bush, First Lady Laura Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney and Chief of Staff Andy Card, according to Jones.

“I do not know what was inside the little packages,” Jones says. But she adds that the packages were sent forward to the president and his staff, despite the reckless disregard for their security in this case.

In the wake of the incident, Jones contacted a higher-level manager in her department to express her concern about how the package had been handled due to the threat it posed to the president and his staff.

After that act of internal whistleblowing, however, Jones’ life would never be the same, she claims.

Jones alleges her managers ignored her warning about the security breach and began to retaliate against her by increasing her workload, writing her up on bogus charges

related to her workplace behavior, and eventually transferring her out of the White House, stripping her of her high-level security clearance and subjecting her to harassment by the Secret Service.

Jones filed an Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) discrimination complaint as result of her treatment. That case is still in the [appeal process](#). She also filed a [whistleblower complaint](#) with the government watchdog agency the U.S. Office of Special Counsel (OSC), which declined to act on her complaint.

(The OSC itself is mired in controversy because its director, Scott Bloch, in 2005 allegedly improperly dismissed hundreds of whistleblower cases and re-assigned a dozen OSC personnel without warning to other offices around the country. Bloch is now himself the subject of a retaliation complaint filed by a group that includes current and former OSC employees. For more information, read the recent expose on Bloch in [Mother Jones](#), which also references the [House of Death](#) case that has been the subject of extensive coverage by Narco News.)

Calling Card

Jones' story has even more twists that expose the dysfunction within the White House. After Jones was informed by her manager in mid-July 2004 that she was being transferred from the White House to another mailroom located several blocks from the White House — which included a change in work hours and a

reassignment of her parking spot — she put a call into Andy Card's office.

From Jones' [EEO pleadings](#):

Mr. Card specifically directed [Jones] and three other co-workers during a personal lunch outing shortly after 9/11 that he had an open door policy and expected [Jones] to come directly to him if there were ever any issues that were un-resolvable. He stated that if he could, he would help them.

When [Jones] called Mr. Card, [Ms. Harriet Miers](#) ... the deputy chief staff to Mr. Card [and later Counsel to the President] answered the phone. Ms. Miers immediately recognized [Jones'] voice and inquired of [Jones] if she could assist her with any issues. [Jones] then proceeded to explain to Ms. Miers specifically her EEO concerns and that she had gone through her chain of command but retaliation was only becoming progressively worse and that no one was talking to her about her career demise and severe changes in her work environment.

Ms. Miers told [Jones] that she would advise Mr. Card and further see what she could do to find out about [Jones'] EEO situation. Both parties then ended the phone conversation.

About an hour after her conversation with Miers, Jones received a phone call from the director of Human Resources for the Office of Administration – Executive Office of the President (OA-EOP).

From Jones EEO pleadings:

[The Human Resources director) told the [Jones] that she had “stepped on toes” and that [Jones] had “put employees jobs on the line.” [The director] told [Jones] that not only was she being transferred on Monday, July 19, 2004, [to the mailroom at 1800 G St.] but they were taking away her navy blue badge (allows top security West Wing access) and giving [Jones] a green badge (lesser access and nowhere near the White House). [The director] also stated that [Jones’ manager] could sue [her] for slander for stating that a box came into the West Wing that was not radiated and properly secured.

Jones contends the retaliation continued while she was at the 1800 G St. mailroom. Her desk was put in a corner, she claims, to humiliate her. While at the G Street mailroom, Jones was suspended from work twice, once in August 2004 and again in January 2005, allegedly for “insolent” behavior toward management and for using “insolent language toward ... co-workers,” according to a July 8, 2005, [OA-EOP memo](#) outlining the rationale for her termination from federal employment.

That’s right, Jones was fired after some 16 years of [recognized outstanding performance](#) as a federal employee.

Jones’ EEO representative, Matthew Fogg, who is an executive director with the [Federally Employed Women’s Legal and Education Fund](#), claims the suspensions that led to Jones' firing were based on bogus charges and were part of the pattern of retaliation against her.

Fogg puts it this way:

She tried to protect the president's life, and yet she has been relegated to a zero. She is a hero who has been relegated to a zero.

Jones' EEO pleadings allege that her whistleblowing and eventual firing are directly related:

From the time [Jones] reported the March 24, 2004 [package] incident to the Equal Employment Opportunity director on April 6, 2004, and through July 19, 2004, [when she was reassigned to the G Street mailroom] and beyond, [Jones] experienced a documented career first litany of extreme harassment and hostile working conditions, which included heavy workloads in work assignments, change of work location, change in parking location, loss of computer privileges, loss of high-level security clearance, change of work hours, being prevented from returning to the Old Executive Office Building to gather personal belongings, placed under surveillance by United States Secret Service (USSS) Officers who displayed her photograph in "roll call" and around to other USSS officers....

Fogg also points out that Jones' version of events is given credibility by the fact that an administrative judge with the Office of Administrative Hearings [upheld her claim for unemployment compensation](#) in the wake of her termination from the OA-EOP.

"It validates her story and says there is culpability on the part of the government in her case," Fogg adds.

More of the same

The March 24, 2004, security breach reported by Jones is not an isolated incident. While Jones was working at the G Street mailroom, she again had to deal with another security breach that she reported to her managers — which, Fogg says, also resulted in no action to correct the problem other than retaliation against Jones.

The following is from a Sept. 3, 2004, [email](#) Jones sent to her supervisors in the wake of the G Street incident:

... When I started unloading the car in the mailroom, the phone rang and Paul was telling me that the Pelican case was outside sitting on the sidewalk, and that I had better get it. I asked him what he was talking about and he said that he wasn't kidding. I went outside and there were at least seven guys standing there and said that Paul had just taken it off the truck and set it on the sidewalk and left it there."

Jones told Narco News that the "Pelican" was one of eight or so highly secured briefcases (with combination locks) that come to the White House each day. They contain highly sensitive documents and it is a priority that the briefcases are handled securely and delivered to the appropriate person.

"In this case, someone just set the Pelican by the mailroom door, outside, on the curb," Jones says.

Fogg says the handling of the Pelican briefcase, as well as the March 24, 2004, package incident, go the heart of concerns raised recently by U.S. Rep. Henry Waxman, D-

Calif., who chairs the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform.

Waxman sent a letter to former White House Chief of Staff Andy Card on April 23 of this year outlining those concerns.

From that [letter](#):

Since I first wrote you on March 30, 2007, I have received new information that suggests there may have been a systemic failure to safeguard classified information at the White House during and after your tenure [Card resigned in March 2006] as White House Chief of Staff. Multiple current and former White House security personnel have informed my staff that White House practices have been dangerously inadequate with respect to investigating security violations, taking corrective action following breaches, and physically securing classified information.

... On March 16, 2007, the Oversight Committee held a hearing to examine the disclosure by White House officials of the covert status of CIA officer [Valerie Plame Wilson](#). At this hearing, the current Chief Security Officer at the White House, James Knodell, testified that the White House Security Office (1) did not conduct any internal investigation to identify the source of the leak (2) did not initiate corrective actions to prevent further security breaches, and (3) did not consider administrative sanctions or reprimands for the officials involved.

... Following the hearing, my staff heard from multiple current and former security officials who work or worked

at the White House Security Office. These security officials described a systemic breakdown in security procedures at the White House. The statements of these officials, if true, indicate that the security lapses that characterized the White House response to the leak of Ms. Wilson's identity were not an isolated occurrence, but part of a pattern of disregard for the basic requirements for protecting our national security secrets.

... According to the security officers who spoke with my staff, they were prohibited from investigating multiple White House security breaches that were reported to the White House Security Office by concerned officials, such as Secret Service agents. In fact, they said that the practice within the White House Security Office was not to document or investigate violations or take corrective action.

It would seem that ignoring security procedures for mail to be delivered to the president is a national security threat given that such a practice could place the president's life in danger. Jones' efforts to report the incident on March 24, 2004, and the alleged retaliation brought against her as a result, fits the pattern outlined in Waxman's letter — as does the Pelican briefcase incident.

Narco News contacted Waxman's office for a comment on Jones' case. Karen Auchman, a press spokeswoman for Waxman, said she was not familiar with Jones' case, but promised "to pass it along to the people in the

Congressman’s office who are handling [the White House security] matter ... to see if they can provide a comment.”

Waxman’s office never got back to Narco News.

Narco News also contacted the White House press office for a comment on the Jones case. An individual named “Andy” (who refused to provide his last name) promised to pass along Narco News’ question to someone who could respond. No one from the White House press office has yet called Narco News back to provide a comment.

Jones, to date, is still trying to find another job. She said this whole affair has turned her life upside down.

“I almost lost my house [due to the expense],” she says.

Jones also alleges that one of her co-workers who provided a favorable affidavit in her EEO case has since been fired — after being suspended and followed around by the Secret Service.

Jones’ EEO case might well make its way into federal court in the near future, Fogg says, if the EEO Commission declines to reverse a recent [ruling](#) against her. Jones’ [appeal](#) to the EEOC is still pending — as is Jones’ future.

“I remember telling one federal agent that the package incident put the president’s life on the line,” Jones says.

”He said, ‘What about your life?’ ”

Stay tuned ...

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