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Sent: Friday, April 2, 2010 7:47 PM
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Subject: More on the FT piece

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FYI: Ed Luce of the FT told me Axelrod emailed him that his sources are "wretched." Luce, of course, offered to correct any factual errors and Axelrod did not respond. Very touchy. Sid

http://tpmcafe.talkingpointsmemo.com/2010/04/02/communications_corruption_at_the_white_house/?ref=fpblg

Communications Corruption at the White House

By Steve Clemons - April 2, 2010, 11:33AM

The communications team at the White House has an extremely difficult job -- and I admire how hard Ben Rhodes, Bill Burton, Tommy Vietor, and of course Robert Gibbs and others work to connect the President's policy direction with a communications effort that furthers the Obama agenda.

The role of the White House press corps is to engage this team and work on public's behalf to report not only on what they are fed by the communications team but what they are not.

There are good friendships between White House media and those they cover inside the White House -- but they can't be FRIENDS in the fullest sense. They are supposed to be rivals, wrestling over stories and the truth that is conveyed through the media to American citizens.

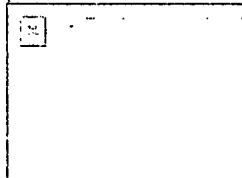
But an unhealthy pattern is developing in this White House -- a trend that may very well have been a part of other presidencies as well -- but what is happening today needs comment.

Some journalists seem to be putting their self interest above their responsibilities to the public as well as their employers. As Howard Kurtz and Glenn Greenwald have both commented, many White House correspondents and other top tier journalists want to write Obama books.

Anything with "Obama" on it is running at a huge premium in the book publication market.

But the kind of books that sell need "inside access" and this is something that the communications team at the White House doles out minimally, and increasingly, only when favors are part of the arrangement.

What I have learned after discussions over the last several days with several journalists who either have regular access to the White House or are part of the White House press corps is that there is a growing sense that access is traded for positive stories -- or perhaps worse, an agreement that things learned will not be reported in the near term.



The White House is working hard to secure deals that yield fluffy, feel good commentary about the Obama White House. One American White House reporter used colorful terms to describe the arrangement. The reporter said, "They want 'blow jobs' first [in the press sense]. Then you have to be on good behavior for a bit or be willing to deal, and then you get access."

"Axe" and "Gibbs" know who needs access to get their books pushed forward.

They know who will pay for play -- and are taking notes on who has been naughty and nice in their reporting.

Edward Luce, Washington Bureau Chief of the *Financial Times*, who has been one of the few to resist the 'you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours' offers from the White House has found himself in a dust-up with the White House for his recent article co-authored with Daniel Dombey, "US Foreign Policy: Waiting on a Sun King".

Luce was given access to one senior official for the piece, but because Luce reported that National Security Adviser Jim Jones may be on his way out and that Obama's national security team lacks a top tier strategic thinker -- other than Obama himself perhaps -- Luce has been pummeled by the White House who think he violated a *quid pro quo* deal to do a fluff story in exchange for access.

Luce reported to me, "The *FT* never does these kind of deals. "

Frankly, Luce's piece provides an accurate snapshot of the Obama-dependent decision making structure in the White House. Most I have spoken to see the Luce article as well-structured, almost conventional view of what is going on inside. Luce paints a positive picture of several of the key players -- including NSC Chief of Staff and Obama confidante Denis McDonough, Deputy National Security Adviser Tom Donilon and others.

One senior Obama administration official -- with excellent inside access -- reported to me that he agreed with virtually everything in the Luce article. The one critique this person shared with me is that Luce "understated Donilon's role and overstated Jim Steinberg's."

Maybe this is the way communications is done, but the process is not healthy.

The White House needs to go back and look at the conflict-of-interest riddled Fannie Mae in which public interest and private gain got stewed together and undermined the interests of American citizens.

This kind of thing can blow up. On the other hand, these trends can easily be turned around.

The White House needs to do its part and provide access based on the merits of high quality, even hard-hitting analysis and reporting, not on seduction.

But the White House Correspondents Association would be smart to consider "best practices" for its members who are simultaneously reporting inside the White House and also dreaming of future best-selling Obama epics.

-- Steve Clemons publishes the popular political blog, The Washington Note. Clemons can be followed on Twitter @SCClemons