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White House Usher Fired Over Calls

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WASHINGTON — A White House staff member fired last week on the instructions of Hillary Rodham Clinton was dismissed because he had kept up communications with his former employers, George and Barbara Bush.

The White House said Friday that Chris Emery, an usher for the past eight years, was known to have spoken with Barbara Bush several times during the past 14 months, sometimes from the ushers' office. Emery confirmed that he had taken calls from the former first lady but said they were solely related to the lap-top computer on which she is writing her memoirs of White House life.

"That may seem harmless, for all intents and purposes," said Neel Lattimore, a spokesman for Hillary Clinton, "but it also shows an amazing lack of discretion.

"We believe the position that he had, as a member of the residence staff, requires the utmost respect for the first family's privacy," Lattimore said. "It's an extremely sensitive position, as you can imagine. This is the president's house and Mrs. Clinton's and Chelsea's."

As to the fact that Emery, 36, apparently was returning calls from Barbara Bush, Lattimore said, "It shouldn't have taken place from the office."

Other White House sources say that some members of the first lady's staff believed Emery communicated more than computer advice. He was suspected of revealing personal details about the Clintons to the Bushes.

Emery said that is not true. He made four calls to Barbara Bush, he says, two from his home and two from the ushers' office, in response to calls from her.

"It never occurred to me that the president and Mrs. Clinton would feel threatened by my providing brief, technical computer support to Mrs. Bush and her staff," Emery said Friday. "I would never discuss the Clinton family matters. I am a professional."

Barbara Bush would not comment, but her assistant, Nancy Huang, confirmed placing two calls to Emery at the White House when the former first lady ran into computer problems. "This is the first we've heard of this," Huang said.

Even though Hillary Clinton's office has known for months about the calls, Emery was not fired until Thursday. Chief Usher Gary Walters told Emery that Hillary Clinton was "not comfortable" with him.

The move added to a perception of chaos in the White House, coming at the same time most of the kitchen staff was removed, counsel Bernard Nussbaum resigned and a half-dozen White House staffers were subpoenaed to appear before a grand jury in connection with the Whitewater investigation.

Emery, who made \$50,000 a year, apparently was mystified by his dismissal. He wrote the Clintons, asking for further explanation.

Lattimore said, "It's the belief of the White House that Chris Emery was given appropriate information about why he was asked to leave."