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## Kentucky Governor Snubs Newspaper after Expose

By Jon Fleischaker and Jeremy Rogers

Kentucky has just finished a long and brutal campaign for governor, dominated by the Republicans' constant refrain to "clean up the mess in Frankfort" (Frankfort is Kentucky's State Capitol). The "mess" referred to by the Republican candidate for governor, Ernie Fletcher, had been exposed by numerous newspaper articles and other media disclosures over the last several years. Many of the articles were the result of superb investigative reporting by the Louisville *Courier-Journal*, the state's largest newspaper.

After his victory on November 4, 2003, governor-

elect Fletcher appointed a transition team, and within two weeks *The Courier-Journal* had the audacity to publish stories about numerous and substantial conflicts of interest that several members of the transition team had. The transition team is populated with lobbyists and businessmen who do business with the state or who are involved with disputes with state agencies.

For example, Fletcher named a businessman as part of the transition team for the labor cabinet despite ongoing enforcement proceedings brought by the labor cabinet against him. Another example is the appointment of a nursing home operator to the transition team for the cabinet which regulates nursing homes.

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While relying heavily in his campaign on news articles regarding conflicts of interest and misuse of governmental power in the prior Democratic administration, Governor-elect Fletcher apparently believes that his new administration should be exempt from such oversight and criticism, and he implemented a new policy directed solely at *The Courier-Journal*. While a small number of changes were made in the transition team after *The Courier-Journal* published its stories about the conflicts of interest, the major change by Fletcher was the introduction of his new, written questions only policy for *The Courier-Journal*. He announced that he and his administration would not respond to any questions from *The Courier-Journal* reporters unless those questions were submitted in writing. Fletcher applies the new written-questions-only policy exclusively to *The Courier-Journal*. Fletcher has not asked other media outlets to submit their questions in writing in order to be addressed. At press conferences, Fletcher responds to questions from other news agencies while continuing to insist that *Courier-Journal* reporters submit all questions in writing.

*The Courier-Journal* has vowed not to change the way it reports on state government and has continued to make ef-

forts to question governor-elect Fletcher, at news conferences and elsewhere, without success as of the date of this column was written. In addition, *The Courier-Journal* has begun to publish a regular "Ask Ernie" section with detailed, written questions to the governor-elect. To date, the governor-elect has responded to one of these questions (about education spending) with a statement, more typical of a non-response in a structured televised debate. More importantly, this entire episode appears to be only the beginning of what we believe will be regular and systematic attacks by the Republican administration on the press and press rights in Kentucky. It ought to be an interesting four (or eight) years.

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