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Aide quits after accusations he impersonated reporter, lawmaker

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AUSTIN — A veteran legislative aide to a Texas state senator has resigned over allegations that he impersonated first a state representative and later a newspaper reporter in politically motivated schemes.

Todd Gallaher resigned Monday after acknowledging he had called an ethics watchdog and identified himself as a reporter, asking about an ethics complaint the watchdog had filed against Republican state Sen. Bob Deuell, Gallaher's employer.

Gallaher was already on leave since February, when he admitted to Deuell that he had used an e-mail address that appeared to belong to a Democratic lawmaker to send out embarrassing, 20-year-old photos of a South Texas sheriff who was up for re-election.

The sheriff's opponent has a connection to Gallaher. The sheriff lost his primary election race and is asking the state to investigate whether Gallaher broke state law.

"It sounds like I've put the senator in a very bad position," Gallaher said. "I'm heartbroken about that."

The phone call to California ethics watchdog Dave Palmer happened Thursday night, Palmer said. Gallaher identified himself as "Dallas Morning News reporter Ed Franks," But Palmer said he found the questions suspicious, saying the call was "a scam from the get-go."

When Palmer tried to call the reporter back Friday using the number on his caller ID, he said, he was redirected to the Texas Capitol switchboard. When he called the newspaper and asked to speak with Ed Franks, he was told there was no such reporter.

Gallaher acknowledged deceiving Palmer.

"I think if I had told him I worked for one of the people he filed a complaint against, he may not have been as open with me," Gallaher said.

Gallaher had been on leave since last month over pictures he admitted sending from an e-mail address that misled recipients into thinking the photos were being sent by state Rep. Juan Garcia.

The e-mail address was repjuangarcia@hotmail.com, and the pictures sent from that address before the Aransas County primary election showed Republican incumbent Sheriff Mark Gilliam in embarrassing situations at a 1989 party: showing his rear, stripping off his shirt and pretending to kiss another man.

Gilliam has asked the attorney general to investigate whether Gallaher used state computers with the intent "of harming or defrauding another," a crime under state law.

"I have conceded my loss; this is not sour grapes," Gilliam said. "This is an allegation of blackmail and of serious criminal acts."

The Attorney General's Office didn't immediately comment on the incident Tuesday.

Deuell, who has apologized for Gallaher's actions, said the staffer told him the e-mail address was not connected to the state representative. The e-mail address was a reference to "Republican Jaun Garcia," a GOP superhero character Gallaher said he created long before Garcia took office, Deuell said.

The real Rep. Juan Garcia asked for evidence that Gallaher had used the superhero character before. Gallaher produced cartoon sketches he said were from the 1990s, Deuell said. In those sketches, the character is named "Jaun," not "Juan." The e-mail address used to send the photos, however, is spelled "Juan."

"Todd made an error in judgment, and I hate it because Todd's judgment is usually very good," Deuell said. "I'm embarrassed. Todd's embarrassed."
