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White House Reporters Furious that a Corpus Christi Newspaper Was First to Learn of Cheney Shooting

Our Top Story: Don't You Dare Ignore Us

The White House press corps had their thin skins on full display yesterday, as they practically ignored Iran's move to enrich uranium, the congressional report on Hurricane Katrina, and every other national and international development. Instead, they spent the first 23 minutes of yesterday's briefing — shown live on CNN and the Fox News Channel — castigating the White House for the grave offense of treating journalists with disrespect.

Network reporters used their broadcasts as forums to punish the White House for the offense of bypassing the press. Since the news of Cheney's shooting broke late Sunday afternoon, ABC, CBS and NBC aired 34 stories on their morning and evening newscasts. While all mentioned Harry Whittington, the man who was shot, reporters made their own indignation a matter of top urgency.

■ **NBC Nightly News** led off their Sunday newscast from Italy with the shooting. Reporter Andrea Mitchell fussed that "the accident occurred yesterday afternoon; the White House only confirmed the incident today, after it was reported by the local newspaper." The next morning on *Today*, Mitchell repeated the same complaint before narrating a summary of the incident, although the program led with the New York City blizzard and the Olympics.

■ **ABC's Good Morning America** led with the news on Monday. After a report from Mike von Fremd in Texas, co-anchor Charles Gibson moved to "the growing political fallout from all this. Why didn't the White House tell everyone when this accident happened? Why did they wait so long, and did that make a bad situation worse?" Reporter Jessica Yellin passed on Internet rumors: "[The] delay has prompted some speculation online and on talk radio that perhaps Mr. Cheney was hoping to cover up the incident."

■ **CBS's The Early Show** pushed the story hard both Monday and Tuesday mornings. On Monday, reporter Kelly Cobiella complained that "the White House said nothing about this for nearly 24 hours, and then only after a local paper broke the story." On Tuesday morning, White

House reporter Bill Plante was still steaming at the Vice President's low regard for reporters: "If it were up to Dick Cheney, he wouldn't tell us if our shirts were on fire."

■ **Monday's CBS Evening News** led with two stories on Cheney. Reporter Jim Axelrod summarized the testy White House briefing: "It fell to White House spokesman Scott McClellan to explain, and he was talking to a group [the White House press corps] that wasn't buying." Axelrod also showed a clip of himself complaining that the initial report came from ranch owner Katharine Armstrong: "Is it

appropriate for a private citizen to be the person who disseminates the information that the Vice President of the United States has shot someone?"

■ **NBC Nightly News** on Monday led with Cheney for a second night in a row, beginning the newscast with their own David Gregory's peevish display at the White House briefing. Gregory used his airtime to insist "tonight, the White House is on the defensive...trying to explain why the

Vice President decided to wait so long before he notified anyone." Anyone? The Secret Service was on the scene, and an ambulance and the sheriff's office were quickly notified. Gregory was miffed that the national press corps was treated as an afterthought.

■ **ABC's World News Tonight** led with Katrina on Monday, but followed with three stories on Cheney. On Tuesday's *Good Morning America*, Charles Gibson acted as if the tardy calls to the press were a major scandal: "Why did it take the White House almost an entire day to fess up?" Reporter Jessica Yellin solemnly described "a major struggle between the White House and the press corps."

Reporters are demanding respect, but their whiny approach has only tarnished their image. — *Rich Noyes*

Questioning the Need for Speed

"The desires of the White House press corps notwithstanding....no one we know has actually enunciated why it is in the public interest to know about such accidents same-day as opposed to next-day." — *ABC News's daily political tip sheet The Note, February 14.*

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