



Tell the Truth! 2004

Media Reality ✓ Check

Expert Documentation of the Latest Liberal Media Bias ☼ Friday, July 16, 2004

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They All Report Dumping Cheney Is "Far-Fetched," But Promote Fable "Privately Advanced" by Dems

Tonight's Big Story: Ridiculous Rumors!

One big Democratic talking point this week is: John Edwards adds punch to the Kerry ticket, while Dick Cheney drags Bush down. The media's aim to please the DNC is so great that it's pushing dump-Cheney rumors which any political pro would see as ridiculous.

The New York Times put rumors right on the front page yesterday. "Hear the Rumor on Cheney? Capital Buzzes, Denials Aside," read the headline. It might be the silliest "rumor" piece on the *Times* front page since 1991, when then-reporter Maureen Dowd put in play Kitty Kelley's wild stories of Nancy Reagan's "long-term affair" with Frank Sinatra.

At TimesWatch.org, MRC's Clay Waters noticed that reporter Elisabeth Bumiller admitted right away the theory is "far-fetched" and "advanced privately by prominent Democrats." She then found "even some Republicans" who think Cheney should be dumped.

Showing the power of the *Times* to put silly rumors into play, *CBS Evening News*, CNN's *NewsNight*, and *NBC Nightly News* each piled on with rumor buzz last night:

CBS anchor John Roberts announced "The summer rumor mill in Washington was buzzing today about Vice President Cheney's political future," and "gossip is so hot it was front-page news in a major newspaper." Reporter Bill Plante quickly discounted any chance Cheney would be dumped, but noted Cheney is the "Democrats' favorite target...So they're happy to make mischief by keeping the rumor alive, but they don't really want him off the ticket."

NBC anchor Brian Williams insisted the "whisper campaign" got "a lot louder" with the *New York Times* story. NBC played a clip from John Kerry on MSNBC's *Imus in the Morning* proclaiming that if Bush dropped Cheney, he'd be "the flip-flopper of all flip-floppers." (He also said

Bush "would be declaring an act of desperation, in a sudden move that goes contrary to everything that he said.") Williams then turned to Tim Russert, who reported that every aide he talked to maintained Cheney is safe. So why did NBC give three minutes to the rumors?

CNN's NewsNight relayed the rumors in a chat with *Newsweek* writer Richard Wolffe. Substitute host Wolf

Blitzer asked for comment on this "strange story" in the *Times*. Wolffe said "I can't believe it's summer already and we're running that kind of thing. But, you know, this is what people are talking about." He added his gut tells him there's "no chance on earth" it will happen.

So why push that kind of rumor? On June 22, after Pentagon second-

banana Paul Wolfowitz suggested Baghdad-based reporters trafficked in rumors, *NewsNight* host Aaron Brown huffed: "We don't publish rumors."

Newsweek fueled the hype contrast between Edwards and Cheney on this week's cover, where "Sunshine Boy" Edwards was contrasted with a cover blurb for "Behind the 'Dump Cheney' Talk." But inside, there is no "dump Cheney" article anywhere in the table of contents.

Instead, in the very last paragraph of the cover story by Wolffe and Howard Fineman, they reported: "White House insiders insist Bush would never dump Cheney, whom they plan to use in laser-guided fashion to bring out the GOP vote." Then they went begging for the heave-ho, noting their own poll shows Bush numbers would improve if Bush ran with more liberal Colin Powell or John McCain.

All three networks forwarded the rumors in stories again this morning. Each aired footage of David Letterman's Top Ten list last night on reasons for dumping Cheney.

— Tim Graham

This boomlet is about as silly and partisan as if the media decided to advance stories that Republicans "privately" say they hear Kerry will step aside for Hillary Clinton at the convention next week.

To schedule an interview with an MRC spokesman, please contact Katie Wright at (703) 683-5004