

ONCE A PREDICTABLE TOOL, ALWAYS A PREDICTABLE TOOL

✘ Poor Bob Novak. Usually when people use him for political ends, he's able to maintain the fiction that the leaks he gets are true.

But not so his "scoop" that McCain was going to announce his Veep choice this week:

I got a suggestion from a very senior McCain aide late yesterday afternoon that he was going to announce it this week, that they didn't want it to come out the way it was going to come out, and they suggested that I put it out. I then called another senior person, who said, "I can't talk about that but wouldn't this be a terrific week to announce it, that is, with Obama getting the headlines? So I just put something on the Internet that the McCain camp—sources close to the McCain campaign suggested he might, he might name it this week, but didn't disclose the name. I, I since have been told by certain people that this was a dodge, they were trying to get a bit of publicity to rain on Mc—on Obama's campaign. That's pretty reprehensible, if it's true, but we'll find out in a few days whether, uh, what I was, suggested was true or was a scam.

Curiously, Novak doesn't seem all that pissed at being set up as a tool. Given that he was quick to admit Karl Rove and Richard Armitage as his sources for the CIA leak case—though not, remember, Scooter Libby—that sort of suggests Novak's not that surprised or pissed this tip turned out to be false. Otherwise Novak would name the senior McCain aides.

Then again, I can't help but remember the central role that the Off the Record Club played in the leak of Valerie Wilson's name. There was Ken Duberstein, the guy who set up Richard Armitage to leak to Novak. He's McCain's senior political aide. The founder of the Off the Record Club, Richard Hohlt, is the guy who faxed Novak's column to Rove in advance, so he would know that Valerie was good and outed so Rove could start prepping the secondary "Wilson's wife is Fair Game" campaign. I don't think Hohlt has a significant role in McCain's campaign—though he is "known as the person you go to to try to get stuff in Novak's column." Another key Off the Record Club member sure **does** have a key role in McCain's campaign, though: Charlie Black, McCain's ethically-impaired Chief Strategist. Black was pushing the Administration line on the leak throughout the investigation and trial.

Now these guys wouldn't have reason to believe they could call up Novak and give him just any story and he'd print it, would they? They wouldn't think that Bob Novak, with all his years of experience, would take an obviously politically motivated suggestion, call up another source who kind of sort of confirms the first suggestion, and publish it, would they?

I don't know—but I guess I understand why Novak's not outing his sources here.