

MCCAIN CAMPAIGN WHINES THAT NYT PAID HEED TO THEIR LETTER

There's something funny about the McCain campaign's complaints about the NYT's front page piece on Cindy today. They released a letter that John Dowd sent to the NYT on October 1. He writes:

I write to appeal to your sense of fairness, balance and decency in deciding whether to publish another story about her. I do this well knowing your paper's obvious bias for Barack Obama and your obvious hostility to John McCain. I ask you to put your biases and agendas aside.

[snip]

I am advised that you assigned two of your top investigative reporters who have spent an extensive amount of time in Arizona and around the country investigating Cindy's life including her charity, her addiction and her marriage to Senator McCain. None of these subjects are news.

I am also advised that your reporters are speaking to Tom Gosinski and her cousin Jamie Clark, neither of whom are reliable or credible sources. Mr. Gosinski has been publicly exposed as a liar and a blackmailer on the subject of Cindy McCain. Jamie Clark has very serious drug and stability issues and has failed in a number of attempts to blackmail Cindy. She is simply not credible.

[two long paragraphs on Gosinski]

Any further attempts to harrass or injure her based on the information from

Gosinski and Clark will be met with an appropriate response. While she may be in the public eye, she is not public property nor the property of the press to abuse and defame.

[snip]

I ask you to let Cindy McCain carry on in her usual understated, selfless and dignified way. The fabrications and lies of blackmailers are not fit to print in any newspaper but particularly not the New York Times.

In short, this letter is primarily a thinly disguised (and, IM[NAL]O, legally suspect) warning against repeating the stories of Gosinski and Clark. Note, for example, that Dowd's letter was written more than two weeks after the WaPo published a story heavily reliant on Gosinski as a source, which Dowd has apparently not responded to with threats of "an appropriate response." Nevertheless, Dowd wrote Bill Keller and tried to scare Keller away from reporting on Gosinski.

So, 18 days after Dowd wrote his letter, the NYT wrote their piece. Look closely at it. See what's not in it?

Any reference to Gosinski or Clark. In fact, the totality of the discussion of Cindy's addiction is,

Mrs. McCain busied herself with the American Voluntary Medical Team, a charity she founded to supply medical equipment and expertise to some of the neediest places on earth, like Micronesia, Vietnam and Kuwait in the weeks after the Persian Gulf war.

[snip]

In 1994, Mrs. McCain dissolved the charity after admitting that she had been addicted to painkillers for years and had stolen prescription drugs from

it. She had used the drugs, first given for back pain, to numb herself during the Keating Five investigation, she confessed to Newsweek magazine. "The newspaper articles didn't hurt as much, and I didn't hurt as much," she wrote in an essay. "The pills made me feel euphoric and free."

In other words, Dowd's letter apparently achieved its intended objective—to dissuade the NYT from relying on two particular sources.

And look at the sources the NYT does rely on: "a friend," "[Cindy] has said," "friends say," "a former Arizona congressman who knows the couple [commenting Cindy's willingness to do anything for the campaign]," "those close to Mrs. McCain," "some of Mr. McCain's Washington friends," "fellow mothers at their children's schools," "Diana Dunn, who socialized with the couple," "Lisa Boepple, a former chief of staff," "the friend from back home," "Peggy Rubach, a former aide," "Wes Gullet, a former aide," "G. Darrell Olson, a local jeweler," "Jill Hazelbaker," "friends." Plus a number of direct quotes from Cindy that appeared in other outlets. While there are a few sources who may not be friendly (I'm not sure whether McCain will be buying Cindy's baubles from Darrell Olson this Christmas, for example), the sources for this story are by and large people close to the McCains and many of them portray Cindy as a very selfless person.

Yet still the McCain campaign is attacking the NYT for the story.

The McCain campaign pushed back with unprecedented ferocity, with an 11:47 p.m. "Statement on New York Times trash report on Mrs. McCain," by McCain-Palin spokesman Michael Goldfarb: "Today the New York Times launched yet another in a series of vicious attacks on Senator John McCain, this time targeting not the candidate, but his wife Cindy. Under the

guise of a 'profile' piece, the New York Times fails to cover any new ground or provide any discernible value to the reader other than to portray Mrs. McCain in the worst possible light. ... It is a black mark on the record of a paper that was once widely respected, but is now little more than a propaganda organ for the Democratic party. The New York Times has accused John McCain of running a dishonorable campaign, but today it is plain to see where the real dishonor lies."

This is the same "propaganda organ" that Gov. Palin cited when (selectively but approvingly) quoting from a front-page article on William Ayers.

McCain aides also released what the campaign claims is a Facebook message sent by Times political correspondent Jodi Kantor on Sept. 29 to "a 16 year-old schoolmate of the McCains' daughter, Bridget": "I saw on facebook that you went to Xavier, and if you don't mind, I'd love to ask you some advice about a story. I'm a reporter at the New York Times, writing a profile of Cindy McCain, and we are trying to get a sense of what she is like as a mother. So I'm reaching out to fellow parents at her kids' schools. My understanding is that some of her older kids went to Brophy/Xavier, but I'm trying to figure out what school her 16 year old daughter Bridget attends-- and a few people said it was PCDS. Do you know if that's right? Again, we're not really reporting on the kids, just seeking some fellow parents who can talk about what Mrs. McCain is like. Also, if you know anyone else who I should talk to-- basically anyone who has encountered Mrs. McCain and might be able to share impressions-- that would be great. Thanks so much for any help you can give me." [my

emphasis]

Now, I agree the story isn't terribly flattering. With regards to Cindy, it calls her on some apparent false claims made by and about her—though it never accuses her or the campaign of lying. Otherwise, it just makes her sound lonely and sad—but no lonelier than she appears standing on stage at rallies.

The real damage, I think, is how the story reflects on John McCain, whose mother-in-law used to call the local jeweler to arrange gifts from McCain to Cindy because he apparently "didn't have time" to buy them himself. The story portrays McCain as someone totally unworthy of the devotion Cindy gives him. Frankly, I do think that's useful news to tell voters.

But what I don't get is why, if the McCain campaign wants to claim the NYT ambushed them with an attack piece, they at the same time provide evidence that the NYT backed off the specific topics the McCains wanted them to back off of.