

# MEET THE PRESS STILL LETS GUESTS “CONTROL THE MESSAGE”

✘ Cathie Martin’s testimony of how she strategized a response to Joe Wilson’s July 6, 2003 op-ed was one of the most visibly discomfiting moments of the Scooter Libby trial for those in the media room. After all, Martin was revealing how easily the DC press allowed itself to be manipulated by those in power. Along with describing which reporters they were dealing with and how reporters tended to be more compliant when you told them they were getting an exclusive, Martin explained that the White House controlled the message when Cheney went on *Meet the Press*.

Fitzgerald: Focusing on the language in the black where it says options, can you run down the four options and describe what they refer to in these notes and what you discussed with Mr. Libby?

Martin: Sure. First note M.T.P., which is Meet The Press, dash VP. So this was my discussion about possibly putting the Vice President on Meet The Press that Sunday to give a fuller discussion of the whole picture.

Fitzgerald: On the right you have another reference to M.T.P. Can you describe what that is?

Martin: I think I walked, this is me walking through the pros and cons of putting the Vice President on Meet The Press. And I wrote underneath pros, best. This is our best format, and he’s our best person on Meet The Press. Two, we control the message a little bit more. It was good for our – for us to be able to tell our story. [my emphasis]

TPMM has been wading through the latest document dump of Mark Sanford's office's emails released by the *Charleston Post and Courier*. And they've discovered that David Gregory has continued the *Meet the Press* approach to letting guests control the message.

But Gregory's emails, in particular, make clear just what a get Sanford was seen as, and how far the networks were willing to go in promising a safe landing place for the governor.

Gregory's first email to Sawyer was sent at 12:24 p.m. on Wednesday June 24 – that is, after Sanford had **admitted to *The State*** that he had actually been in Argentina, but before the famed stream-of-consciousness press conference where he admitted to an affair. Gregory wrote:

Hey Joel ...

Left you a message. Wanted you to hear directly from me that I want to have the Gov on Sunday on Meet The Press. I think it's exactly the right forum to answer the questions about his trip as well as giving him a platform to discuss the economy/stimulus and the future of the party. You know he will get a fair shake from me and coming on MTP puts all of this to rest.

Let's talk when you can.

Gregory left two different phone numbers.

*After* the press conference, Sawyer replied:

David –

Thank you very much for taking the time to personally reach out

to us. For the time being, we're just going to let what the governor said today stand on its own. If we do some interviews in the future, I'll let you know as soon as possible.

Gregory followed up quickly: "You aren't doing anything at all this week...no other intvus anywhere?" Sawyer replied that they weren't.

Gregory gave it one last shot:

Look, you guys have a lot of pitches .. I get it and I know this is a tough situation ... Let me just say this is the place to have a wider conversation with some context about not just the personal but also the future for him and the party ... This situation only exacerbates the issue of how the GOP recovers when another national leader suffers a setback like this. So coming on Meet The Press allows you to frame the conversation how you really want to...and then move on. You can see (sic) you have done your interview and then move on. Consider it. [my empahsis]

Sawyer did not respond.

Jeebus. At least Russert was allowing the Vice President to walk all over him. Gregory, apparently, allows small state Governors reeling from the exposure of their moral hypocrisy to do the same.