

WILL ISSA'S FIRED SPOKESPERSON EXPOSE HOW POLITICO "WINS THE MORNING"?

When news broke yesterday that Darrell Issa had fired his spokesperson, Kurt Bardella, for sharing emails with NYT reporter Mark Leibovich, I suggested,

I suspect Issa just fired his spokesperson because Issa cares more about staying in the good graces of Politico than NYT. #WinTheMorning

It was John Harris' complaint that his reporters' emails had been forwarded, after all, that pressured Issa to launch the investigation in the first place.

Yet, given the ferocity of this report on Bardella's firing—with even Republicans predicting lasting damage to Issa's work as Chair of the Oversight Committee—the pissing match between the NYT and Politico seems to be ongoing.

Some Republicans worry about the damage the affair could cause Issa's work on the committee.

"Yes it could," said one Republican staffer who has long known Bardella, when asked if this could affect the committee's work. "Issa actually has a job to do. He needs the press and the public to trust him to be able to do that job effectively. He needs to hire someone the press trusts and can work with. If they don't trust him, and in turn can't reach the public and do his job effectively, well."

Speaker John Boehner did not get

directly involved in the situation, but his staff did contact Issa's office on Monday night after the story broke.

"When he got here, Issa had an ego as big as California," said another GOP lawmaker, speaking on condition of anonymity. "Then he got better for a while. Now, his ego has returned with a vengeance."

For some reason, Politico is still pissed at Issa, even though he moved quickly to fire Bardella.

Ryan Lizza might have some answers as to what that reason might be. He reveals that Bardella was very open within the office—including Issa's Chief of Staff—that he was sharing this information.

"Do the other folks in the office know?" I asked.

"Yeah," Bardella said, and he gave me an example of the type of stuff he shares: "Here's this inquiry I got from a reporter. Here's what I said to my staff about it, here's the story, here's the e-mail I just got from so-and-so, another reporter who's upset that I gave his story to [someone else]."

But the most important aspect of what Bardella might be sharing with the NYT, Lizza says, is the background to a Bardella quote he included in his profile on Issa's publicity seeking.

[R]eporters e-mail me saying, "Hey, I'm writing this story on this thing. Do you think you guys might want to investigate it? If so, if you get some documents, can you give them to me?" I'm, like, "You guys are going to write that we're the ones wanting to do all the

investigating, but you guys are literally the ones trying to egg us on to do that!”

To me that last quote was one of the most important things Bardella told me. The rest of it—that offices clash over how to leak info and that bookers and reporters are competitive—is interesting but relatively well known, and not very relevant to a piece about Darrell Issa. But that Bardella accused reporters of offering to collaborate with Issa as he launches what will inevitably be partisan investigations of the Obama Administration seemed jaw-dropping.

Lizza suggests (though he doesn't voice this explicitly) that Bardella may have shared evidence of this kind of collaboration between Politico and Issa's staff with Leibovich.

So go back to this widely cited article on the massive investigations Issa purportedly wanted to do, and look at Mike Allen's pitching of it in the video.

Issa won't have a shortage of targets. He's been hammering for better tracking of the stimulus and has a growing list of other investigative targets, including the housing meltdown and the bank bailout.

[snip]

Issa also is looking to dig into procurement and government contracting, and he seems sure to return to the Countrywide VIP program – which has subpoenaed records en route to the Capitol. He's also got inquiries into Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac's role in the financial collapse. And with earmarks all but gone from the Capitol, Issa will turn his fire toward the White House and the far larger sums of cash controlled

by the executive branch at a time of huge deficits.

“We really want to study presidential earmarks and the grant-making process: How do we take all this discretionary money and see what is necessary,” Issa said. “The debate on how to shrink the federal government is at the core of our problem of government not doing its job.”

And consider the possibility that all these investigations Jake Sherman (one of the bylined reporters of the story) and Allen “reported” Issa wanted to do were actually investigations that Politico was pushing Issa to do. (Allen’s and Sherman’s emails were the ones that John Harris complained about.) That is, consider the possibility—and this is just speculation, mind you—that all these investigations were suggested by Politico?

If Leibovich’s book were to show that Issa’s investigations were the product of collaboration with Politico, it would not just doom Issa’s hopes of being Obama’s nemesis, but it would expose Politico as the Republican operation it is.

Update: John Harris and Jake Sherman’s names fixed. And more coffee consumed.