



Musing about my column with Beaufort's own Gary Geboy, phenomenal photographer and artist and, it turns out, a reader of "Standpoint" this past weekend, he wondered if I knew that Barack Obama has surpassed George W. Bush in yet another of the endless, sorry measurements of presidential performance: Bush went 214 days between full press conferences; Obama has managed to make it 278.

Of course, the wunderkind has balanced this deliberate absence from press scrutiny for nearly a year with endless speeches, sound bites and fluff interviews all controlled/managed by his staff, the most recent and near best of which was his over-the-top, over-thirty-minute diatribe about how he "wouldn't rest" until the Gulf oil spill was cleaned up and all those responsible duly fingered and prosecuted. This, it seemed, was the Obama way of ensuring he would not be blamed for the oil spill in the way his supporters had so happily blamed Bush for Hurricane Katrina.

This is part of the insidiousness of what I have earlier dubbed the most manipulative White House on record and here's my point: Just as they used brilliant communications strategies and expertise to get this President elected on a fresh breeze of "change" we could believe in and an (unkept) promise to move to the center, they have deftly side-stepped the media (even the right wing-maligned "mainstream media") in what appears to be a strategic decision to control as much of the message as they can without the risk of the transparent, overt, intelligent challenge that arises when good journalists do their jobs well at Presidential press conferences.

It's understandable, of course. Would you want to be in front of the press defending the ramming through of a Healthcare bill that your Party's members of Congress had not read, that 58% of the electorate wants repealed and the ultimate cost of which the Congressional Budget Office now suggests could be as much as three times what it originally posited? Of course not. Much easier to run off to a friendly town hall meeting and produce high def beauty shots of happy physicians and taxpayers thrilled to the bone about the new plan.

There is a massive difference between encouraging and obtaining media coverage, of which there is plenty, telling us what the President and key Senators, Representatives, Cabinet

Secretaries and Administration officials have said or done, and the unfettered access of a “free press” to the elected representatives of the people and to their paid executives so that the essential, constitutional reason for that free press’ existence can always be ensured.

As a former Canadian I have remarked to so many American friends and relatives that there is a mistrust of government in the USA that is not paralleled in my old home to the North. “We’re taught it,” most answer, and I guess that’s a good thing. In fact, here’s what James Madison had to say about it all way back in 1799:

*“Some degree of abuse is inseparable from the proper use of everything; and in no instance is this more true, than in that of the press. It has accordingly been decided by the practice of the states, that it is better to leave a few of its noxious branches to their luxuriant growth, than by pruning them away, to injure the vigour of those yielding the proper fruits. And can the wisdom of this policy be doubted by any who reflect, that to the press alone, chequered as it is with abuses, the world is indebted for all the triumphs which have been gained by reason and humanity, over error and oppression; who reflect, that to the same beneficent source, the United States owe much of the lights which conducted them to the rank of a free and independent nation; and which have improved their political system into a shape so auspicious to their happiness.”*

Wouldn’t it be nice if someone reminded Barack Obama, Eric Holder, Nancy Pelosi, Harry Reid and, most of all, that absolute master of doublespeak evasion of the press, Press Secretary Robert Gibbs, as well as the lazy louts in the media who just find it easier to pontificate on panels than to go to work and seek the truth (there always is one if you dig deeply enough) that we are within our rights and sound in our ideal of expecting more?

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