



CHANGE OF SUBJECT

Eric Zorn

“Into the crystal ball
Tell us what you think is going to happen
Election Day at chicagotribune.com”

Irony in abundance

John McCain and his backers are furious that the Los Angeles Times is keeping its word to a confidential source.

That source provided the paper with the videotape of a 2003 banquet where then-state Sen. Barack Obama gave a speech honoring Rashid Khalidi, then a Palestinian scholar who was leaving to take a job at Columbia University in New York, now the right wing's new boogey-man in Obama's past. The paper got the video on the condition that it not be released.

The account from the Times, one of our sister papers, doesn't explain why the source demanded the tape not be released. Perhaps the angle from which the video was shot would have identified him in some way to those who were in attendance, and he didn't want to reveal his cooperation with the media.

Or perhaps he worried that if partisan operatives got hold of the raw video they'd cherry-pick quotes, throw ominous music behind grainy images and use it to inflame rather than enlighten on the subject of Obama's relationship to Khalidi.

Perhaps the source knew that the mendacious character as-

sassins who've been attacking Obama care nothing for context and look to maximize the inundo content in any incident or scrap of information they can find.

But even if the source hadn't put any conditions on the use of his video, I'd like to think that the Times would have declined on principle to turn over its source material to ill-motivated political hacks.

The first irony here is that these repellent truth-twisters are accusing the newspaper of being unethical when, in fact, keeping one's promises is a hallmark of ethical behavior.

The second irony is that under McCain's leadership, the International Republican Institute gave hundreds of thousands of dollars in grants to Khalidi's Center for Palestine Research and Studies.

The third irony is that Khalidi is actually a moderate who has spoken out against violence in the Middle East.

And the final irony is that the same bunch that is howling about openness and disclosure and the public's right to know prior to an election is the same bunch that still has yet to produce Sarah Palin for a simple, ordinary news conference. Hypocrites? You betcha.

Three reasons I give Gov. Rod Blagojevich almost no credit for granting 26 pardons and commutations last week:

1. He's so afraid of appearing soft on crime that he didn't call a news conference or even announce what he'd done on his official Web site. The news broke only after the Tribune's Azam Ahmed got a tip from a source and followed up.
2. He's been dragging his feet dispensing justice. For example, DNA evidence cleared Marlon Pendleton of a rape conviction in 2006, and he had a hearing in front of the Illinois Prisoner Review Board for what should have been a pro forma pardon in the spring of 2007. But the governor didn't stir himself to act until last week.

3. There are still at least 1,800 petitions on Blagojevich's desk awaiting action, according to Jorge Montes, chairman of the Prisoner Review Board. This obscene backlog was the reason the Illinois General Assembly passed a law in September, over Blagojevich's veto, allowing potential exonerates to bypass the governor's office and apply to the courts for relief.

One reason I do give Blagojevich credit: One of the names

GOV CON

For about 11 months, I've been writing about the idea that intel readers would like to see a newspaper do. They would like to see a newspaper do. They would like to see a newspaper do. They would like to see a newspaper do.

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Gov. Blagojevich kept quiet on pardons. KUNI TAKAHASHI/TRIBUNE

Gov. Blagojevich kept quiet on pardons. KUNI TAKAHASHI/TRIBUNE on his list (as Montell Johnson, 42, a prisoner who was diagnosed with chronic progressive multiple sclerosis in 2001 and is now mostly paralyzed, unable to speak and in need of constant medical attention. He was not getting the care he needed behind bars and was obviously no threat to anyone.

His supporters, including the mother of the victim in the 1994 murder for which he's been serving a 40-year sentence, have long argued for Johnson's innocence.